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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US strategy in Afghanistan is tested

Associated Press

A year after the Trump administration introduced its strategy for Afghanistan, the Taliban are asserting themselves on the battlefield even as U.S. officials talk up hopes for peace. That's raising questions about the viability of the American game plan for ending a war that began when some of the current U.S. troops were in diapers.

A Taliban assault on Ghazni, a key city linking areas of Taliban influence barely 75 miles from Kabul, has killed about 100 Afghan security forces and 20 civilians since Friday, the Afghan Defense Ministry said. That has demonstrated the militants' ability to attack, if not hold, a strategic center on the nation's main highway and highlighted the vulnerability of Afghan security forces.

In a reminder that U.S. troops and their families are paying a heavy price, even with Afghan forces in the lead combat role, the Pentagon announced Monday that a 36-year-old soldier, Staff Sgt. Reymund Rarogal Transfiguracion, of Waikoloa, Hawaii, died Sunday of wounds sustained on a combat patrol in Helmand province.

Against that turbulent backdrop, some wonder whether President Donald Trump can resist pulling the plug on a war in which the U.S. is still spending \$4 billion-plus a year just to keep Afghan forces afloat. He said when he introduced his strategy on Aug. 21, 2017, that his instinct was to with-

draw entirely.

Fighting across the country has intensified in recent weeks despite a fleeting outbreak of peace earlier in the summer. The Taliban and the Afghan government called separate, briefly overlapping, national cease-fires in June, and the administration has made its own contact with the Taliban in hopes of nudging them into talks with Kabul.

The strategy revisits an approach that was tried, and failed, under President Barack Obama: increasing military pressure to push the Taliban into peace negotiations with the Afghan government. Signs point to Trump pressing ahead; he is about to send a new Army general, Scott Miller, to take charge of the U.S.-led coalition in Kabul.

David Sedney, who has worked on Afghan issues as a civilian, including multiple years in Kabul and at the Pentagon, since the war began in October 2001, said he believes the chances for peace are the best they've been.

"That doesn't mean they're great," he said in an interview. "It just means they're better."

Among the meaningful factors at play, Sedney said, is Trump's announcement a year ago that the U.S. would no longer set time limits on its military support for Afghanistan. This introduced an element of uncertainty for the Taliban, he said. On the other hand, the current U.S. push to draw Taliban leaders into peace negotiations

with Kabul must succeed soon, he said, or risk following the failed path of previous efforts.

Trump also gave the U.S. military more leeway to attack the Taliban, and a few thousand additional U.S. troops were sent to Afghanistan this year as part of an effort to improve the effectiveness of training and advising Afghan ground forces while also developing a small Afghan air force. The battlefield results have been mixed, however, as the Taliban have managed to preserve their influence in numerous districts.

Early in 2018 the U.S. military declared Afghanistan to be its top combat priority, supplanting the fight against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Key U.S. warplanes, including A-10 ground attack aircraft, were switched to Afghanistan, and the Pentagon introduced a newly formed outfit called a Security Force Assistance Brigade of U.S. soldiers assigned to help Afghan forces closer to the battlefield.

With Ghazni under threat, the U.S. has dispatched military advisers to assist the Afghan forces in retaking the besieged city, and has launched airstrikes.

Seth Jones, a longtime watcher of Afghanistan and director of the Transnational Threats Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said it was unlikely the Taliban will be able to hold populated areas of Ghazni for long. The militants have lacked sufficient popular support and military power to hold population centers.

Pentagon IDs Special Forces soldier killed in Afghanistan

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

A Special Forces soldier who died Sunday in Afghanistan from wounds he sustained from an improvised explosive device was identified Monday by the Defense Department.

Staff Sgt. Reymund Rarogal Transfiguracion, 36, from Waikoloa, Hawaii, had been wounded Aug. 7 by an IED that detonated near him while on patrol in Helmand province, the Army said.

He was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. He had deployed in March to Afghanistan in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

His death is being investigated, the Army said.

Transfiguracion was born in Sarrat Ilocos Norte, Philippines, on May 20, 1982, according to the Army. He enlisted as a motor transport operator in the Hawaii National Guard in 2001 and had deployed in sup-

port of Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2005 to 2006.

He joined active-duty service in 2008 and deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Enduring Freedom from 2008 to 2009.

Following his 2009 deployment, Transfiguracion was stationed at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, where he deployed to the Philippines for six months in support of Joint Special Operations Task Force — Philippines from 2010 to 2011.

Following training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., he received

his first assignment as a horizontal construction engineer at Fort Polk, La., the Army said. At that point, he was selected to complete Special Forces training at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Transfiguracion was then assigned to 1st Special Forces Group at McChord as an engineer sergeant.

He was posthumously promoted to sergeant first class and awarded the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart and the Meritorious Service Medal.

Act restricts efforts to reduce US troop numbers in S. Korea

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — The 2019 defense policy legislation signed by President Donald Trump restricts efforts to reduce U.S. troop numbers in South Korea, reflecting concern that the administration might move to do so.

The \$717 billion bill prevents the Pentagon from cutting the number of servicemembers deployed to the South below 22,000 unless the defense secretary has certified that it's in the "national security interest" and that the secretary has "appropriately consulted" with regional allies.

Trump signed the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act, which sets the parameters for appropriations committees to consider

in allocating defense funds, on Monday.

North Korea's nuclear program "poses a critical national security threat not only to the United States, but to the security and stability of the entire Indo-Pacific region," the bill said.

"The presence of United States Forces on the Korean Peninsula should remain strong and enduring," it added.

Trump has long indicated he'd like to withdraw troops from South Korea to save money, although he insisted the issue would not be part of nuclear negotiations with the North.

"I want to get our soldiers out," Trump said after his June 12 summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. "I want to bring our soldiers back home," he told reporters in Singapore, adding that at the

moment "that's not part of the equation."

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and other lawmakers on both sides of the political aisle criticized the idea, arguing it would play into the hands of North Korea and its ally China, which object to the U.S. presence.

The president also announced he was suspending joint war games with South Korea to facilitate diplomatic efforts aimed at persuading the North to give up its nuclear weapons.

The United States, which has been allied with the South since the two countries fought together in the 1950-53 Korean War, currently maintains some 28,500 servicemembers on the peninsula.

Trump expressed reservations about the restriction, among other similar measures, in a statement.

Military kids to get sexual assault legal protections

Associated Press

The Defense Department must improve the way it responds to child-on-child sexual assault at military bases in the U.S. and abroad as part of a sweeping new law President Donald Trump signed Monday.

While the Pentagon began addressing sexual assault in the ranks a decade ago, an Associated Press investigation revealed that similar reports involving military kids got lost in a dead zone of justice. Child offenders were rarely held accountable — even when they confessed — and victims often received no counseling or other help.

Under the new law, more than 70,000 students in Pentagon-run schools now receive the same legal protections as their U.S. public school counterparts. The schools also must overhaul their system for tracking and addressing assault allegations.

And, for the first time, a case must be reviewed by a central authority regardless of where on base an assault is reported. That review, by the Family Advocacy Program, the military's social services provider, must recommend "treatment, counseling or other appropriate interventions."

The AP found that some child-on-child sexual assault reports were buried, while those that were investigated faced numerous barriers to justice within the Pentagon and Justice Department.

Counselors would turn away victims, for example, because military regulations said help was available only if the alleged offender was an adult or caretaker.

Offender rehabilitation or punishment was rare. Instead, go-to solutions included kicking alleged offenders into the civilian world or transferring their families to another installation.

China blasts US policy on Taiwan

Associated Press

BEIJING — China on Tuesday blasted a U.S. military spending bill that calls for development of plans to help self-ruled Taiwan improve its defenses and warned of possible damage to cooperation in other areas.

The provision in the 2019 military budget authorization "is full of cold war thinking" and "interferes in China's internal affairs," said a Ministry of Defense statement. It said the measure "ruins the atmosphere" for military cooperation.

Beijing claims Taiwan, which split with the mainland in 1949, as part of its territory and has threatened to invade.

Washington has no official relations with the island's democratically elected government but is obliged by U.S. law to see that it has the means

necessary to defend itself.

Taiwan is "the most important and sensitive core issue in Chinese-U.S. relations," said the Defense Ministry statement. "We firmly oppose any official exchanges and military contacts between any country and Taiwan."

A separate Foreign Ministry statement called on Washington to "avoid damaging Chinese-U.S. relations and cooperation in important areas." It gave no details, but the two governments are working together on efforts to persuade North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to give up nuclear weapons development.

Beijing has stepped up efforts to isolate Taiwan internationally. It has ordered airlines, retailers and publishers to refer to the island as part of China on websites and in books and maps. It is lobbying the few countries that still recognize Taipei as a

sovereign government to switch ties to Beijing.

The criticism adds to a series of U.S.-Chinese conflicts over tariffs, Beijing's claims to the South China Sea and other irritants that have soured relations between governments of the world's two biggest economies.

American lawmakers said the legislation signed Monday by President Donald Trump responds to concern about Beijing's growing military strength and confrontational stance toward its neighbors and the ruling Communist Party's effort to spread propaganda abroad.

The measure expands the jurisdiction of a U.S. government security panel to screen foreign investments. That was proposed in response to concern Chinese corporate acquisitions might help Beijing obtain sensitive technologies and information.

Judge sets bail for 5 adults arrested at NM compound

Associated Press

TAOS, N.M. — A state judge on Monday cleared the way for five defendants who were arrested on child abuse charges at a remote New Mexico compound to be released pending trial despite authorities' suspicions that the group was training children to use firearms for an anti-government mission.

Judge Sarah Backus set a \$20,000 bond for each defendant and ordered that the two men and three women wear ankle monitors, have weekly contact with their attorneys, not consume alcohol and have no firearms.

Police raided the property — a squalid makeshift living compound near the Colorado state line — more than a week ago in response to a report of children living in filth, hunger and dangers including a leaky propane tank. Five adults were arrested and 11 children were placed in state custody.

Prosecutors presented evidence that Siraj Ibn Wahhaj provided some of the children with firearms training, including tactical skills such as “speed loading” guns and firing while in motion. Aside from guns and ammunition, authorities say they found books on being effective in combat and building untraceable assault-style rifles.

Defense attorneys argued that prosecutors were unfairly painting their clients as armed militants as the rifles and handguns found on the property are common guns that can be bought at retail stores and their clients made no aggressive efforts to defend their compound as authorities closed in to serve search warrants earlier this month.

“There was no gunbattle; there was no resistance,” said Tom Clark, the attorney representing Wahhaj.

Clark said his client had permits to carry his weapons and no criminal record — accusing prosecutors of holding adults at the compound to an unusual standard because of their race and Muslim faith.

“They are black and they are Muslim,” Clark said. “If these were white people of Christian faith who owned guns, it’s not a big deal. ... But they look different and they worship different than the rest of us.”

Prosecutors denied any discriminatory treatment based on religious background or race and warned that the defendants came to New Mexico with their children on a violent and dangerous mission.

“This was not a camping trip and this was not a simple homestead of the kind that many people do in New Mexico,” said Deputy District Attorney Timothy Hasson.

Despite the release terms, Wahhaj is likely to remain in jail pending a warrant for his arrest in Georgia on accusations he abducted his son Abdul-ghani from the boy’s mother in December and fled to New Mexico.

Trump ups Omarosa feud

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump escalated his messy clash with former aide Omarosa Manigault Newman on Tuesday, referring to the longtime colleague, who had been the top black in his White House, as “that dog!”

Trump tweeted a barrage of insults Tuesday morning as Manigault Newman continued promoting her White House tell-all and releasing secret audio recordings. Her book paints a damning picture of Trump, including her claim that he used racial slurs on the set of his reality show “The Apprentice.”

“When you give a crazed, crying lowlife a break, and give her a job at the White House, I guess it just didn’t work out,” Trump said. “Good work by General Kelly for quickly firing that dog!” John Kelly is White House chief of staff.

While Trump trades in insults on a near daily basis, deeming Manigault Newman a “dog” was a stunning move in a row that touched on several sensitive issues in Trump’s White House, including a lack of racial diversity among senior officials, security concerns — Manigault Newman taped her firing in the White House Situation Room — and extraordinary measures such as nondisclosure agreements to keep ex-employees quiet.

Trump has also pushed back against

Manigault Newman’s claim that she had heard an audiotape of him using the N-word. He tweeted that he had received a call from the producer of “The Apprentice” assuring him “there are NO TAPES of the Apprentice where I used such a terrible and disgusting word as attributed by Wacky and Deranged Omarosa.”

Trump insisted, “I don’t have that word in my vocabulary, and never have.” He said Manigault Newman had called him “a true Champion of Civil Rights” until she was fired.

Manigault Newman, the former White House liaison to black voters, writes in her new memoir that she’d heard such tapes existed. She said Sunday that she had listened to one after the book closed.

On CBS Tuesday, Manigault Newman released another audio recording that she said showed campaign workers discussing an alleged recording of Trump using the racial slur. The White House and the campaign did not immediately respond to questions.

One of the people allegedly featured on the tape is Katrina Pierson, an adviser to Trump’s re-election campaign who served as a spokeswoman for his 2016 campaign. Pierson has said she never heard Trump use this type of language and said on Fox that the only person she heard talking about a tape was Manigault Newman.

Manafort defense calls no witnesses

Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Paul Manafort’s defense rested its case Tuesday without calling any witnesses in the former Trump campaign chairman’s tax evasion and fraud trial. Manafort himself chose not to testify.

The decision by Manafort’s lawyer, Kevin Downing, not to call witnesses clears the way for the jury to hear closing arguments in the trial, now in its third week.

Manafort is accused of hiding millions of dollars in income he received advising Ukrainian politicians. The defense has tried to blame Manafort’s financial mistakes on his former assistant, Richard Gates. Defense attorneys have called Gates a liar, philanderer and embezzler as they’ve sought to undermine his testimony. Closing arguments in the case are scheduled for Wednesday morning.

Asked by Judge T.S. Ellis III whether he wished to testify in his defense, Manafort responded, “No, sir.” The decision came after a more than two-hour hearing that was closed from the public.

The judge has not given any explana-

tion for the sealed proceeding, only noting that a transcript of it would become public after Manafort’s case concludes.

Manafort’s decision not to testify and not to call witnesses came after Ellis rejected a defense motion that the case be dismissed on grounds the government failed to meet its burden of proof. Manafort’s lawyers asked the judge to toss out all charges, but they focused on four bank-fraud charges.

The government says Manafort hid at least \$16 million in income from the IRS between 2010 and 2014 by disguising the money he earned advising politicians in Ukraine as loans and hiding it in foreign banks. Then, after his money in Ukraine dried up, they allege he defrauded banks by lying about his income on loan applications and concealing other financial information, such as mortgages.

Manafort’s lawyers argued that there is no way that one of the banks, Federal Savings Bank, could have been defrauded because its chairman, Stephen Calk, knew full well that Manafort’s finances were in disarray but approved the loan to Manafort anyway.

Cars plummet as bridge collapses in Italy

Associated Press

MILAN — A bridge on a main highway linking Italy with France collapsed Tuesday in the Italian port city of Genoa during a sudden, violent storm, sending vehicles plunging nearly 150 feet into a heap of rubble. The city's mayor said at least 25 people were killed, although some people were found alive in the debris.

A huge section of the Morandi Bridge fell at midday over an industrial zone, sending tons of twisted steel and concrete onto warehouses below.

The head of Italy's civil protection agency, Angelo Borrelli, said 30 to 35 cars and three heavy trucks were on the 260-foot section of the bridge that collapsed.

Hundreds of firefighters and emergency officials were searching for survivors in the

rubble with heavy equipment. Firefighters said at least two people were pulled alive from vehicles and taken by helicopter to a hospital.

There was confusion over the exact death toll, which kept rising during the day.

Genoa Mayor Marco Bucci told Sky TG24 that the number of dead was above 25 people and that 11 injured were pulled from the rubble. Two other officials earlier put the death toll at 22 with 13 injured but said it was expected to rise.

Borrelli told a news conference in Rome that all the victims appeared to all have been in vehicles that fell from the bridge.

The disaster occurred on a highway that connects Italy to France, and northern cities like Milan to the beaches of Liguria.

The collapse also came on the eve of a major Italian summer holiday on Wednes-

day called Ferragosto, which marks the religious feast of the Assumption of Mary. It's the high point of the Italian summer holiday season, when most cities and business are closed and Italians head to the beaches or the mountains. That means traffic could have been heavier than usual on the Genoa highway.

The Morandi Bridge is a main thoroughfare connecting the A10 highway that goes toward France and the A7 highway that continues north toward Milan. Inaugurated in 1967, it is just over a kilometer long.

Borrelli said highway engineers were checking other parts of the bridge and that some areas were being evacuated as a precaution. He said they were still trying to figure out the reason for the collapse.

Transportation Minister Danilo Toninelli called the collapse "an enormous tragedy."

UK police treat Parliament crash as terrorism

Associated Press

LONDON — A car plowed into pedestrians and cyclists near the Houses of Parliament in London during the morning rush hour Tuesday, injuring three people in what police suspect is the latest in a string of attacks in the British capital that used vehicles as weapons.

A rooftop camera recorded the car driving past Parliament and suddenly veering sharply to the left, striking cyclists waiting at a set of lights before crossing the road and crashing into a barrier outside Parliament. Armed police surrounded the car within seconds, pulling a man from the vehicle.

Police said the driver, a man in his late 20s, was arrested on suspicion of terrorism offenses. He was alone and no weapons were found in the car.

"Given that this appears to be a deliberate act, the method and this being an iconic site, we are treating it as a terrorist incident," Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, of the Metropolitan Police, told reporters outside Scotland Yard.

Police flooded the area after the incident was reported at 7:37 a.m., cordoning off streets surrounding the heart of Britain's government. The nearby Westminster subway station was closed, and police asked people to stay away from the area, which is filled with government offices and tourist attractions including Westminster Abbey.

Most of the cordons were lifted by midafternoon, apart from a stretch of road right outside Parliament, where forensics officers in blue coveralls collected evidence from the crashed Ford Fiesta.

The suspect was not cooperating with police, and officers were working to confirm his identity, said Basu, who oversees U.K. counterterrorism policing. No other suspects have been identified and police believe there is no further threat to Londoners, he said.

Basu said "we don't believe this individual was known" to police or Britain's intelligence services.

Eyewitnesses said the silver car was traveling at high speed when it hit pedestrians and cyclists, then crashed into a barrier designed to protect Parliament from vehicle attack. Two people were taken to local hospitals and another was treated at the scene. One woman remained hospitalized Tuesday afternoon, but her injuries aren't believed to be life-threatening, authorities said.

Turkish president calls for boycott of US electronics

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey's president appeared to escalate a dispute with the United States that has helped foment a Turkish currency crisis, claiming Tuesday that his country will boycott U.S.-made electronic goods. Behind the scenes, however, diplomats resumed contact to ease tensions.

Addressing a conference of his ruling party faithful in the capital, Recep Tayyip Erdogan added fuel to the spat with the U.S., even as local business groups called on his government to settle the dispute

through talks.

Investors seemed to look through the fiery rhetoric, pushing the lira off record lows on confirmation that Turkish and U.S. government officials met on Monday.

"We will implement a boycott against America's electronic goods," Erdogan told the conference. He suggested Turks would buy local or Korean phones instead of U.S.-made iPhones, though it was unclear how he intended to enforce the boycott.

The move is seen as retaliation for the United States' decision to sanction two Turkish ministers over the detention of

an American pastor on terrorism-related charges, and to double tariffs on Turkish steel and aluminum imports.

Behind the scenes, diplomatic dialogue appears to have resumed. Turkey's state-run news agency and U.S. officials say U.S. National Security adviser John Bolton met with the Turkish ambassador to Washington on Monday.

That helped ease the turmoil in financial markets, with the Turkish lira stabilizing near record lows. It was up 5 percent Tuesday, at about 6.55 per dollar, having fallen 42 percent so far this year.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man making donation leaves wedding ring

MA GLOUCESTER — Massachusetts firefighters said a man who donated to their muscular dystrophy drive accidentally dropped his wedding ring into their boot.

The Gloucester Daily Times reported that firefighter Lukas McRobb was collecting donations in the city Friday when he found the plain gold wedding band.

Lt. Kevin Gargan said the person met them at the fire station later that day, telling them “I have a funny story ...” before explaining he was the one who made the accidental donation.

Headstones toppled at historic cemetery

IN MORRISTOWN — Police said vandals damaged 22 headstones at a historic central Indiana cemetery.

A caretaker discovered the damage at the Davis-Bennet Cemetery in Morristown on Sunday.

Police said headstones were pushed over, broken or damaged by impact. WTHR-TV reported it's the second time in a year the cemetery has been vandalized.

Football coach is shot after stopping fight

TN NASHVILLE — Police in Tennessee said a youth football coach was shot and wounded after breaking up a fight involving his players and an opposing team.

Nashville police said in a statement the coach, 42, is recovering from two bullet wounds to his right leg. They said he was shot Saturday night at Antioch High School during an alterca-

tion with a man who supported the other team.

Police said the man was angry about the way the coach intervened in the fight and asked the coach to meet him under the bleachers. The coach said the man then pulled out a pistol and started shooting.

Authorities said the man fled in a vehicle. The shooter's photo was taken by a surveillance camera, and detectives are trying to confirm his identity.

Man rescuing parrot is pulled from mud

IL BELLEVILLE — Firefighters had to rescue a southwestern Illinois man from deep mud after he became stuck while trying to reach his pet parrot.

Belleville firefighters were called Sunday afternoon to the city's Bicentennial Park after a visitor heard the man calling for help.

Fire Chief Tom Pour told the Belleville News-Democrat that the mud from the lake being dredged was like quicksand. The man was in mud up to his waist when crews arrived, and firefighters had to extend ladders across the mud to help him out as the parrot remained perched on his shoulders.

The man was not injured.

Church pastor hit by lightning after service

AL JASPER — Lightning struck a pastor in Alabama following a church service.

WBMA-TV reported that Walker County dispatchers sent the Argo Area Volunteer Fire Department to the Argo Church of God on Sunday afternoon. Firefighters discovered Pastor Ricky Adams had been hit by an indirect lightning strike.

The pastor said he went to lock the church's front door and was holding it when the lightning struck nearby and shocked him.

Fire Chief Terry Pickett said the pastor was alert and talking when first responders arrived. He said Adams didn't need to be transported to a hospital.

Bungee passengers get stuck 100 feet up

MO BRANSON — Authorities said two passengers on a bungee ride in the tourist town of Branson had to be rescued after becoming stuck 100 feet in the air.

The Springfield News-Leader reported that Branson Frontier Adventures manager Carson Wright said a cable on the “Ejection Seat” ride got hung up and caused the ride to be suspended in midair. Wright said the malfunction “wasn't really a safety issue” but the ride did have to be lowered manually in order to rescue the passengers.

The rescue operation required a crane and took two hours.

11 children, 6 adults hurt in 3-vehicle crash

OH CLEVELAND — Authorities in Cleveland said 17 people, including 11 children, were injured in a crash involving three vehicles.

The crash happened Sunday afternoon. Cleveland police said several people were ejected from vehicles.

Officials said all the children were taken to Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital and MetroHealth in stable condition.

A 33-year-old woman was taken to University Hospitals in critical condition. The other injured adults were taken to area hospitals.

Man dies after car hit by intoxicated drivers

NY EAST GREENBUSH — New York State Police said a man died after his car was hit by two intoxicated drivers traveling in opposite directions on an Albany-area highway.

The vehicle was struck and went across a median on Interstate 90 in East Greenbush about 1 p.m. on Saturday. Then it was hit by a westbound vehicle.

The victim's name hasn't been released.

Troopers said the eastbound driver, August Rice, 23, of Rexford, and the westbound driver, Rex Tucker-Moss, 41, of Poughquag, both face charges including vehicular manslaughter.

Police also said Tucker-Moss is charged with aggravated DWI because he had two children, ages 10 and 7, in his car.

Veteran seeks owner of lost Army ring

TX ABILENE — A U.S. Army ring was found at a West Texas landfill and a veteran is trying to track down the owner.

KTXS-TV reported Tristan Allen said a relative discovered the ring at a landfill in Abilene.

Allen, who also served in the Army, posted photos of the ring on his Facebook page and said a name is engraved inside. The owner must provide that information to get the jewelry.

The ring says “United States Army” on the top, “Victory” on one side and “Spartans” on the other.

Allen believes a boat wheel under the “Victory” means a motor transport operator.

From wire reports

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and Military News

Colts' main goal is to keep Luck upright

Associated Press

WESTFIELD, Ind. — The Indianapolis Colts invested heavily in Andrew Luck's protection plan during the offseason.

Now it's time to see the payoff.

After general manager Chris Ballard added two potential starting offensive linemen in free agency and picked two more in the draft, the Colts believe they've finally solved their most glaring need — keeping Luck upright and healthy.

"When Chris and I sat down in the beginning and said, how are we building this team, we are building it from the inside-out. That all starts with the offensive line," coach Frank Reich said. "You win and lose games up front on both sides of the ball."

Indy learned its lesson the hard way.

Luck endured more than 400 hits from 2012-16, the highest total among NFL quarterbacks. He's been sacked 156 times in 71 career appearances, an average of 2.2 a game. When Luck missed last season recovering from shoulder surgery, the Colts allowed a league-high 52 sacks.

All those shots eventually took their toll.

Since Luck's 57-game starting streak ended in Week 4 of the 2015 season, the top overall pick in the 2012 draft has appeared in only 19 of the Colts' last 45 games. Not surprisingly, they've missed the playoffs each of the last three years.

So with Luck finally back from surgery on a partially torn labrum in his throwing shoulder, Ballard made a calculated gamble for another re-vamped line.

"I think being part of — I don't want to say a rebuild because it is not really a rebuild of the offensive line — but kind of a mentality shift of an offensive line. I have been part of that at a lot of stops and that is something I pride myself in," new right guard Matt Slauson said.

The Colts have tried everything to solve this tricky puzzle.

Then-general manager Ryan Grigson wrote a note to himself, "Protect 12," to remind him of the Colts' greatest need.

He used two of the Colts' top three picks in the next draft on interior linemen. Both are now out of the league.

In 2014, Grigson used his top

pick, a second-rounder, on versatile lineman Jack Mewhort and a seventh-rounder on tackle Ulrick John. Mewhort's career was derailed by knee injuries and he unexpectedly retired on Aug. 1 and John is with New England.

After taking Denzelle Good in the seventh round in 2015, Grigson added four more linemen in 2016 — center Ryan Kelly in the first round, Le'Raven Clark in the third, Joe Haeg in the fifth and Austin Blythe in the seventh. Kelly quickly asserted himself as the starter, Good and Clark are among those battling to start at right tackle. Blythe is with the Los Angeles Rams.

The Colts did even worse in free agency. Grigson signed Mike McGlynn, Samson Satele, Gosder Cherilus, Donald Thomas and Todd Herremans — none lasting more than two seasons in Indy.

This year, Ballard went all in.

He signed Slauson and Austin Howard, then selected guard Quenton Nelson with the No. 6 overall pick and Braden Smith early in the second round. All four could start this year, and the addition of Nelson has made

the Colts' line bigger, nastier and perhaps better than ever.

The first test for this re-vamped line came Thursday night in Seattle. In two series, Luck was hit twice — once on a short run, the other on a sack off the left edge against Haeg, who filled in for injured starting left tackle Anthony Castonzo. Luck bounced up both times and later chalked up the sack to a miscommunication.

"I was tired, I was exhausted. I think emotionally I was worn out, and honestly it was probably the re-eye home after the game," Luck said Monday. "But I felt physically OK."

The Colts have three more preseason games and two joint practices later this week with the Ravens to get in sync before their Sept. 9 opener against Cincinnati.

They're convinced this latest line dance will finally work.

"It always comes down to the room," Kelly said Monday. "If you don't have a room that's together and you have individual players on that offensive line, I don't care how good you are, how talented you are, it doesn't matter."

Giants' Barkley sits out practice with strained leg

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — The New York Giants had a hold-your-breath moment with rookie running back Saquon Barkley during practice Monday. It turned out to be only a minor scare.

The No. 2 overall draft pick caught a swing pass out of the backfield from fellow rookie Kyle Lauletta and was injured either stretching to make the catch or running down the sideline after the catch.

Barkley seemed to be favoring a leg as he walked back up the field. He eventually put his hands on his knees and then went to the turf and lay on his back while head trainer Ronnie Barnes examined him.

An ice pack was put on his left leg. However, it had been removed before he left the field after the roughly 70-minute practice, which was moved indoors because of rain.

"Saquon has a mild strain, and we'll be smart with him as we move along here," coach Pat Shurmur said later in the afternoon.

Barkley suited up but was held out of Tuesday's practice at the Detroit Lions' training facility.

Barkley had the perfect start to his Giants' career in the 20-10 preseason loss to the Cleveland Browns on Thursday night. He took a handoff from Eli Manning on the first play from scrimmage and scampered 39

yards. The former Penn State running back finished with five carries for 43 yards.

The Giants will practice for three days against the Detroit Lions in Allen Park, Mich., starting on Tuesday.

Given Barkley's injury, it's uncertain how much work he will get or whether he will play in the preseason game on Friday night.

"We want our guys to be smart, we want our guys to compete, be smart, we want to stay off the ground, we want to eliminate all that chatter and just keep it encouraging," Shurmur said. "That's part of being a pro is being able to practice not only with your team, but with other teams. I understand

competitive spirit. Those are two teams and that's their experience. We're going to try to guard against it."

One thing neither Shurmur nor Lions coach Matt Patricia wants is a melee like the one the Jets and Redskins had Sunday.

"I think it's important that you need to learn how to compete and compete at a very high level," Shurmur said, "but I think it's always important to keep your composure."

Notes: Receiver Sterling Shepard's wife gave birth to their first child on Friday, a girl, Cali Clay Shepard. "I wasn't going to go to Detroit for the first few days," Shepard said. "But she came out a little bit early for us."

Redskins release veteran CB Scandrick

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — The Washington Redskins made a surprise move three weeks into training camp by releasing veteran cornerback Orlando Scandrick.

Scandrick signed a two-year deal with Washington in March after being cut by the Dallas Cowboys and had been practicing with the first-team defense. Coach Jay Gruden on Tuesday said the play of second-year cornerback Fabian Moreau, sixth-round pick Greg Stroman, undrafted free agents Danny Johnson and Ranthony Texada and supplemental draft pick Adonis Alexander played into the decision.

“It had nothing to do with his play,” Gruden said. “It was more the rookies’ emergence, really. We drafted Stroman, we got Adonis in the supplemental (draft) and then nobody could really predict Danny and Texada the way they’ve played. And we want to give Orlando ample time to get on another team.”

More than anything, it seemed

like Scandrick wasn’t a good fit in the Redskins’ secondary. They signed him after sending cornerback Kendall Fuller to Kansas City as part of the trade for quarterback Alex Smith but before adding Stroman, Alexander, Johnson and Texada.

Moreau, a 2017 third-round pick, moves into the nickel cornerback spot behind 2015 All-Pro Josh Norman and Quinton Dunbar, a converted receiver the team is high on. Gruden hopes releasing Scandrick will get Moreau more snaps in practice and preseason games to prepare him for a bigger role.

“He’s a strong, physical kid and can run,” Gruden said. “When somebody else is here and Fabian’s not taking reps, it’s not doing anybody any good. So we have to see Fabian. Fabian’s got to go through it, learn it, make his mistakes.”

“We’ve got to get them corrected so when we play Arizona, we have a great confidence Fabian knows what to do and how to communicate and the leverages and techniques we want him to play.”

The Sports Capitol reported there was an organizational split on Scandrick’s attitude that contributed to his release. The 31-year-old brought a big personality with him to Washington, and his play slipping amid an impressive showing by younger cornerbacks made him expendable.

“I was surprised,” Norman said. “That wasn’t something that I thought was going to happen. Then again, you can’t be surprised what happens in this league.”

Add in his injury history — Scandrick played just 11 games last season and 12 in 2016 — and the Redskins opted to move on early before even seeing him in a second preseason game.

Gruden said the team could sign another cornerback to fill Scandrick’s spot on the 90-man roster, but indicated adding a high-profile veteran isn’t in the plans.

“We’re going to go with what we have right now,” Gruden said. “Right now we like what we have.”

Johnson in particular has

stood out in camp and the preseason opener at New England, going from earning a look as a rookie minicamp tryout to a strong bet to make the team. Gruden said the coaching staff likes the Southern University product’s competitive nature and playmaking ability.

“He’s been solid all the way around,” Gruden said. “He’s a good tackler. He’s done a great job. Everything we’ve asked him to do, he’s done and a very competitive kid.”

Releasing Scandrick is also an endorsement of Dunbar, who has spent his entire NFL career adjusting from wide receiver to cornerback. Dunbar is expected to start alongside Norman.

“I definitely feel like they’re putting a lot of faith in me, but I have faith in myself,” Dunbar said.

“The body of work that I’ve done over the last three years from me switching from wide receiver to cornerback, that was every bit of me just buying into the process and the grind.”

Indians’ Martin battles bacterial infection

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Cleveland Indians outfielder Leonys Martin is recovering from a bacterial infection that team president Chris Antonetti described as “life-threatening.”

Martin is in stable condition at the Cleveland Clinic. Antonetti provided an update on Martin’s status when he addressed the team prior to Monday’s series opener against the Reds.

Doctors determined Martin had a bacterial infection that entered his bloodstream and created toxins that damaged his internal organs, compromising their function.

“It was very serious,” Antonetti said. “Thankfully, he’s made a lot of progress in the last 24 to 36 hours and he has regained a lot of the organ function. He’s in a good path right now and we’re hopeful he’ll make a full recovery. But he has a long way to go.”

Martin played in Tuesday’s game against the Twins, and then felt sick in the middle

of the night. When he continued to feel sick the following morning, Martin was transported to the Cleveland Clinic and his condition quickly worsened.

“It progressed rapidly,” Antonetti said. “It was life-threatening.”

Martin, who was placed on the 10-day disabled list on Thursday, is batting .333 with two homers and four RBIs in six games since he was acquired from Detroit at the trade deadline. He is hitting .255 with 11 homers and 33 RBIs overall in 84 games.

Outfielder Greg Allen was recalled from Triple-A Columbus to replace Martin. The Indians have been dealing with injuries to outfielders all season and hoped adding Martin would provide stability.

Cleveland could bring in another outfielder before the Aug. 31 trade deadline for players who have cleared waivers.

“We’ll continue to spend the month of August looking for opportunities to improve our team,” Antonetti said last week. “What impact Martin’s condition or illness

has on that, we’re not yet sure.”

Antonetti expects outfielder Lonnie Chisenhall, who has played in only 29 games because of calf injuries, to return this season. Outfielder Tyler Naquin had surgery on his right hip on Aug. 3 and could be back before the season ends.

Antonetti stressed that Martin’s infection is not communicable and that doctors haven’t defined the specific type of bacteria or how it entered Martin’s system.

Antonetti would not speculate on whether Martin will play again this year. Martin’s wife, father, and brother are now with him at the Cleveland Clinic, according to Antonetti.

“I really haven’t thought about baseball yet,” Antonetti said. “Leonys continues to get treatment and we’re optimistic he’ll have a full recovery. He is able to communicate. He was able to get up and sit in a chair for a few hours yesterday. He’s in a much better spot than he was a couple of days ago.”

Acuna leads off both games of DH with HR

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Perfect games? Unassisted triple plays? They're not even as rare as what Ronald Acuna Jr. pulled off Monday night.

His legend growing with each game, the 20-year-old rookie hit leadoff homers in both games of a doubleheader to lead the first-place Atlanta Braves to a sweep of the Miami Marlins.

Acuna appeared to be only the fourth player in baseball history to accomplish the feat, and certainly the youngest.

Two others, Rickey Henderson and Harry Hooper, are in the Hall of Fame.

By comparison, there have been 23 perfect games and 15 unassisted triple plays.

"It's pretty special," said Braves star Freddie Freeman, who also homered in Game 2. "He's some kind of hot right now. What he's doing at the plate, you just don't see it very

often."

Acuna hit an opposite-field drive into the Braves' bullpen in the opener, powering Atlanta to a 9-1 victory. Haitian-American Touki Toussaint pitched six strong innings to claim the win in his major league debut.

It was more of the same from Acuna in the nightcap. He sent a towering shot into the seats in left-center, sparking the Braves to a 6-1 win behind another strong outing on the mound from Mike Foltynewicz.

Over the course of about nine hours, Acuna went 5-for-8 with two homers, five RBIs, five runs, two walks and a stolen base.

"I just found out," he said through a translator when asked if he knew about his unique double. "I give thanks to God for the opportunity to make history in my own sense."

The Elias Sports Bureau said Baltimore's Brady Anderson was the last to hit a pair of lead-

off homers in one day against the Chicago White Sox on Aug. 21, 1999.

Before that, it was accomplished by Oakland's Henderson against the Cleveland Indians on July 5, 1993. Hooper did it more than a century ago, playing for the Boston Red during a pair of games at the Washington Senators on May 20, 1913.

"Freddie and I were just kind of standing there smiling at each other like, 'Again?'" Braves manager Brian Snitker said. "It's been fun to watch."

The Braves stretched their lead in the NL East to a full game over idle Philadelphia.

It was a totally forgettable day and night for the hapless Marlins, who struggled in all phases of the game. Poor hitting. Shaky pitching. Shoddy baserunning. Sloppy defense.

Acuna has flourished since moving into the leadoff role for the Braves. He has 17 hom-

ers this season — four of them leading off games.

Foltynewicz (10-7) matched his career high for wins and even chipped in with an RBI single — only his third hit of the season. He went eight innings, allowing five hits and the lone Miami run.

Merandy Gonzalez (2-1) took the loss after being called up from Double-A Jacksonville for his first big league start.

Freeman connected on his 19th homer of season. He's piled up big numbers against the Marlins, hitting .434 with seven homers and 15 RBIs in 13 meetings.

Looking cool as can be on a sweltering summer afternoon in Atlanta, Toussaint took full advantage of his temporary promotion to serve as the team's 26th player in the opening game. He surrendered just two hits and limited the damage from his only serious jam to a single run.

MLB roundup

DeGrom, Mets outduel Severino, Yanks in Subway Series

Associated Press

NEW YORK — For Jacob deGrom and the New York Mets, there's still one prize left in play.

No, not a playoff spot. Those plans were wiped out long ago during a disappointing season.

Rather, the NL Cy Young Award for their ace.

DeGrom kept pumping up his resume, striking out 12 while the Mets backed him in a big way, hitting five home runs to beat Luis Severino and the New York Yankees 8-5 Monday night.

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't think about it," deGrom said.

A victim of poor run support most of the season, deGrom (7-7) threw 6²/₃ innings and left with a major league-best 1.81 ERA. He allowed two earned runs and exited with a 7-3 lead.

The importance of wins and

losses has been diminished over the years in the Cy Young race, with voters often focusing on more advanced numbers. Even so, it felt good for deGrom to at least reach the .500 mark.

"I really haven't paid that much attention to my record," he said. "I obviously know what it is."

DeGrom fanned Austin Romine with his 113th and final pitch, and drew loud cheers from the many Mets fans in attendance.

"It was nice walking off the field and hearing that," he said.

DeGrom has gone 21 consecutive starts allowing no more than three runs — Dwight Gooden's 24-game string in 1985 is the team record.

"That's tremendous. It takes that to get to the level he's at, which I feel is he's the best pitcher in the league," Mets

manager Mickey Callaway said. "He doesn't beat himself."

Cardinals 7, Nationals 6: Paul DeJong handed Washington its second straight walk-off loss, capping a back-and-forth finish with a game-ending solo homer in the ninth inning for host St. Louis.

Athletics 7, Mariners 6: Jed Lowrie drove in four runs to back Sean Manaea, and host Oakland held off a late Seattle rally in a matchup of AL West contenders.

Giants 5, Dodgers 2: Pinch-hitter Nick Hundley delivered a two-run single in the ninth inning to give San Francisco its first lead, and the Giants handed host Los Angeles' bullpen its fourth consecutive loss.

Indians 10, Reds 3: Jose Ramirez connected for his 35th homer and Yandy Diaz hit a tie-breaking double in Cleveland's seven-run sixth inning against

host Cincinnati.

Rangers 5, Diamondbacks 3: Bartolo Colon won his first start since setting the record for victories by a Latin American pitcher, going five innings to help host Texas beat Arizona.

Angels 6, Padres 3 (10): Kole Calhoun hit a tiebreaking double in the 10th inning and Justin Upton added a two-run homer to cap a four-run rally that carried Los Angeles past host San Diego.

Royals 3, Blue Jays 1: Ryan O'Hearn homered and drove in a career-high three runs, Brad Keller threw seven strong innings and host Kansas City beat Toronto to spoil Sean Reid-Foley's major league debut.

Tigers 9, White Sox 5: Nicholas Castellanos had a career-high five hits, including a go-ahead homer in the seventh inning, and drove in five runs as host Detroit beat Chicago.