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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Russia sends large naval force to Med

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Russia is sending its largest naval task force into the eastern Mediterranean Sea since the country launched its military campaign in Syria three years ago, Russian media said Tuesday.

Izvestia, a major Russian newspaper, reported that the naval force includes 10 surface ships and two submarines, with more vessels on the way. Among the ships en route to the Mediterranean are the Black Sea Fleet's frigates Admiral Grigorovich and Admiral Essen, armed with Kailbr long-range cruise missiles.

The deployment comes as Moscow accuses militants opposed to Syria's President Bashar Assad of planning to stage a false flag chemical weapons attack against civilians. Russian defense officials say such an attack could be used as a pretext by the U.S. for launching its own strikes against the Syrian regime's forces.

Russia has also accused the U.S. of building up its naval forces in the Mediterranean in preparation for retaliatory strikes, a charge the Pentagon has denied.

"What I can tell you is that Russian reports of a U.S. military buildup in the eastern Med are nothing more than propaganda," Pentagon spokesman Eric Pahon told reporters Monday. "It's not true. That does not mean, however, that we are unprepared to respond should the president direct such an action."

In April, the U.S., U.K. and France bombed three government sites in Syria, targeting suspected chemical weapons facilities.

Mattis says US could resume large-scale S. Korea exercises

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military could proceed with long-planned, large-scale training alongside South Korean troops next year after such exercises were suspended this summer as a good-faith gesture in the negotiations with North Korea over its nuclear weapons, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Tuesday.

"We have no plans at this time to suspend any more exercises," Mattis told reporters during a rare public news conference at the Pentagon alongside Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "We will work very closely ... with Secretary of State [Mike Pompeo.] What he needs done, we will certainly do to reinforce his effort, but at this time there's no discussion about further [exercise] suspensions."

The Pentagon halted major military exercises on the Korean Peninsula on President Donald Trump's orders following his June summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Trump derided the exercises, held with the South Koreans for decades, as "very expensive" and "provocative" to the North Koreans.

The Pentagon announced later that the cancellation of Ulchi Freedom Guardian, a command-and-control operation involving tens of thousands of troops and held annually since 1976, would save the Defense Department about \$14 million.

Mattis emphasized a decision about joint exercises

with the South Koreans had not been made and the Pentagon would make a decision in consultation with the State Department, depending on how the negotiations develop with North Korea to end its nuclear program.

But Mattis' statement Tuesday comes as the United States

'We have no plans at this time to suspend any more exercises.'

Jim Mattis
secretary of defense

plans to visit Pyongyang this week for continued discussions with Kim's re-gime. Trump announced Friday via Twitter that he was canceling the secretary of state's trip because of insufficient "progress with respect to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

Late Monday, The Washington Post reported a top North Korean official had sent a secret letter to Trump indicating the planned talks were unlikely to produce results. The newspaper, citing two unnamed senior administration officials, described the letter as belligerent in tone.

The next large-scale exercises on the schedule are the annual Key Resolve and Foal Eagle, massive simultaneous joint U.S.-South Korean defensive operations typically held in February. The exercises were postponed last year until

April after the completion of the Winter Olympics and Paralympics in South Korea. North Korea has long described the exercises as "provocative," claiming they were yearly rehearsals to invade the North.

Pentagon officials, following Mattis' news conference, said only three joint U.S.-South Korea military exercises — Ulchi Freedom Guardian and two Korean Marine Exchange Program operations — had been suspended officially. The Exchange Program exercises test integration of American and South Korean aviation and ground forces, including live-fire combat exercise, according to a Pentagon description.

Despite the halt in large, joint operations, the roughly 28,500 American troops in South Korea have continued to train, said Marine Lt. Col. Chris Logan, a Pentagon spokesman.

Mattis declined to characterize the ongoing denuclearization negotiations, referring questions about the process to the State Department.

He said holding joint exercises with the South Koreans should not be viewed as a provocation to the North Koreans, but he said he was not prepared to make a decision about the operations.

"I don't have a crystal ball right now," Mattis said. "Let's see how the negotiations go. Even answering a question in that manner could influence the negotiations. Let's let the negotiations, let the diplomats go forward. We all know the gravity of the issue they are dealing with."

French forces kill leader of group tied to Niger ambush

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

French warplanes and commandos struck a terrorist camp in Mali, killing the leader of a group that claimed responsibility for the deadly 2017 ambush on U.S. troops in Niger.

Mohamed Ag Almouner — a top leader of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara — was found dead after an airstrike Sunday night by two Mirage jet fighters, the French army said Monday. The strike was followed by a raid by a French-led unit that seized the area. The soldiers on the scene found Ag Almouner dead along with his guard, the French military said in a statement.

Two civilians — a woman and a teenager — were also killed in the attack, the French military said. A militant and two civilians were treated for assault-related injuries.

“The French criteria for opening fire are particularly strict and aim at avoiding civilian casualties,” the statement said. “The proven presence of civilians near the target would have led to the cancellation of the mission. An investigation is underway to determine how civilians were hit during this strike.”

In October, four U.S. soldiers were killed while on patrol near Niger’s border with Mali, a region that is home to a mix of militant groups.

Sunday’s mission was part of Operation Barkhane, France’s counterterrorism campaign covering several African nations. French forces there

include about 3,000 ground troops, 20 helicopters and a half-dozen jet fighters.

U.S. Africa Command said Tuesday that it was aware of the French mission report but could not elaborate.

“That said, I can tell that U.S. Africa Command routinely works with our French partners in the Sahel region, who provide a bulk of the force with more than 4,000 military forces,” said Maj. Karl Wiest, an AFRICOM spokesman.

U.S. support to French counterterrorism operations includes information sharing, aerial refueling and other logistics support.

“We remain committed to assisting the French-led operations to degrade violent extremist organizations and to build the defense capacity of ... Mali and its neighbors,” Wiest said.

A Pentagon investigation into the ambush that killed four soldiers found systemic failures in planning and training that put the soldiers at risk. Still, the investigation determined that the U.S. unit, along with Nigerien counterparts, fought bravely to fend off the six-hour attack. The soldiers killed in the ambush — Staff Sgt. Dustin Wright, Sgt. La David Johnson, Sgt. 1st Class Jeremiah Johnson and Staff Sgt. Bryan Black — are being considered for valor medals. The Green Beret captain who led the troops — and came under criticism in the Pentagon probe for part of the mission planning — is being considered for the Silver Star, The New York Times reported.

Pompeo says US will stay in Persian Gulf

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military will continue to operate in the Persian Gulf, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said, rejecting a claim by a top Iranian commander that his ships were in full control of the strategic waterway and that American warships have no place in the region.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran does not control the Strait of Hormuz. The Strait is an international waterway,” Pompeo said in a Twitter post late Monday. “The United States will continue to work with our partners to ensure freedom of navigation and free flow of commerce in international waterways.”

Pompeo’s statement came in response to an assertion by the Revolutionary Guard’s naval commander that Iran would control and supervise ships that move in and out of the gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, the world’s key oil choke point.

“All the carriers and military and non-military ships will be controlled and there is full supervision over the Persian Gulf, Gen. Alireza Tangsiri told the Tasnim news agency on Monday. “Our presence in the region is physical and constant and night and day.”

Tangsiri added that “there is no need for the presence of aliens like the U.S. and the countries whose home is not in here.”

In recent weeks, tensions have ratcheted up between Washington and Tehran as new American sanctions take effect in the wake of the Trump administration’s decision to end the nuclear deal with Iran.

A new round of sanctions was recently put into place, and a second set will take effect on Nov. 4 targeting Iran’s energy sector and the central bank. Iranian leaders have threatened to shut down the Strait of Hormuz if the sanctions prevent the country from exporting crude oil.

Iran insists it has the military capability to block the strait, through which more than 18 million barrels of oil move each day, according to the U.S. government. Any shutdown of the waterway, which links the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, could lead to a sharp increase in global energy costs.

Earlier this month, Iran assembled warships in the area for exercises to showcase its ability to control the strait.

It would not be the first time Iran has attempted to block the waterway. In the 1980s, Iran and Iraq engaged in a “tanker war” in the Persian Gulf that quickly dragged in the U.S. Navy.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has said that any move to block the Strait of Hormuz again would face an “international response to reopen the shipping lanes with whatever that took.”

USMC dependent drowns while swimming off Okinawa

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Marine Corps on Okinawa is investigating the drowning death of a III Marine Expeditionary Force dependent who died over the weekend off the island’s northeastern coast.

The incident was first reported by a Camp Schwab security official at about 12:20 p.m. Sunday, said Nakagusuku Coast Guard official Yasuhisa Watanabe. Two swimmers in the waters off Henoko were pulled out to sea by high waves in the direction of Nagashima island, the

security official said.

One of the swimmers survived the incident; however, a male in his 20s was found at about 1 p.m. facedown near uninhabited Nagashima, Watanabe said.

As of Tuesday afternoon, Marine and Japanese Coast Guard officials had not released the

name of the man pending next-of-kin notification. The incident remains under investigation, Marine officials said.

Nago City was under a high sea warning with 7-foot waves at the time of the drowning, Watanabe said.

‘A true titan’ McCain, champion of the US military, leaves a void on the national, international stages

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

As a plane carrying a congressional delegation arrived in Iraq in August 2003, the aircraft was forced to make a corkscrew landing to avoid surface-to-air missiles.

The lawmakers led by Sen. John McCain quickly realized the situation there might not be “mission accomplished.”

Forced to travel only in armored vehicles during their 36-hour visit to Baghdad, and their movement confined mostly to the protected Green Zone, their doubt grew. As the lawmakers listened to a presentation from U.S. officials, they were jolted by the thud of an explosion. A mile away, at the U.N. headquarters compound, a suicide bomber killed 22 people, including the chief of U.N. operations in Iraq.

Later, a British colonel in Basra confirmed a sobering truth to McCain: The tide was turning against U.S.-led forces in the face of deteriorating resources.

That colonel’s words belied the “mission accomplished” banner hung behind former President George W. Bush a few months earlier on the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln. For years to come, it would fuel McCain’s urgent concerns, as he met with strategists and Pentagon officials and held congressional hearings.

In 2007, McCain’s support for a troop surge in Iraq finally became a reality.

“He would speak to everyone from commanding officers to privates, and you could see that not only did everyone feel like they could be straight with him but they had to be straight with him,” said Richard Fontaine, McCain’s national security adviser in the mid to late 2000s. “And that really informed the way he thought about the wars.”

It was classic McCain.

The Arizona Republican and chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee developed a global network of contacts in his 30-plus years in Congress and unmatched influence compared to many people in the upper

echelons of U.S. leadership.

In his time on Capitol Hill, McCain became a self-appointed protector and watchdog of the U.S. military and a leading expert on national security issues. As a lawmaker, he battled against military funding deficiencies and wasteful spending, took Pentagon leaders to task over a wide array of concerns, helped shape servicemembers’ roles in conflicts around the world and set new standards for the treatment of war detainees.

“Senator McCain loved to spend time with those actually on the ground, at small-unit level, as well as with senior commanders and diplomats and host nation leaders,” retired Army Gen. David Petraeus said. “And he repeatedly sought to get out to see situations ‘outside the wire’ for himself — such as in the spring of 2007 when he went on a patrol through Baghdad’s largest open-air market and talked to market shop owners, Iraqi citizens, Iraqi and U.S. soldiers, etc.”

Fontaine said he was especially taken by McCain’s interactions with servicemembers of all ranks as they traveled to war zones around the world and how those conversations informed the way the senator thought about the wars. Sometimes, top leaders would say everything was going great, but servicemembers in the lower ranks would share a more realistic view, Fontaine noticed.

That insight was a prerequisite for getting military strategies right, he said.

In that light, the 2007 “surge” was a definitive move that helped stabilize security in Iraq. It also was an example of a series of moments when McCain took the less popular stand, bucking the majority and doing what he thought was right for the military, said Petraeus, who led U.S. forces in Iraq at the time of the surge.

That was apparent as McCain maintained support for the surge during his 2008 campaign for president, Petraeus noted.

“Who can forget him explaining his steadfast support for the surge in Iraq while campaigning for president and

saying, ‘I would rather lose an election than lose a war,’” said Petraeus, chairman of the KKR Global Institute, a research subsidiary of New York global investment firm Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. “And who has done more to ensure that our military units and our men and women in uniform have had the resources, weapons systems, individual kit, enabling capabilities ... and funding for readiness needed to be prepared for whatever has been required of them? His actions and example will long be held out as the gold standard of congressional service to, and oversight of, our military services and the Defense Department.”

Eight days after his inauguration, President Donald Trump’s tense phone call with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull was already triggering a diplomatic crisis between the U.S. and one of its oldest allies.

Trump told Turnbull that a refugee plan inherited from former President Barack Obama’s administration was a “stupid deal.”

McCain quickly reached out to Joe Hockey, the Australian ambassador to the United States, to make clear that Trump did not speak for all Americans.

“Australia is one of America’s oldest friends and staunchest allies,” McCain said in a statement, pointing to a critical alliance from World War I to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. “We are united by ties of family and friendship, mutual interests and common values, and shared sacrifice in wartime.”

McCain’s call to Hockey was picked up by dozens of news reports and appeared to defuse a tense episode with a key ally.

“It let people in Australia know that we have three branches of government and people who are invested,” said Fontaine, president of the Washington think tank Center for New American Security. “Is there another senator who could have done all that? Who would have that kind of effect? It’s a testament” to McCain’s impact.

But less than six months after the Australian incident, McCain was diagnosed with brain

cancer, threatening a void in Congress that transcended his position as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Fontaine said he was reminded of such a void at a recent event in Arizona for the McCain Institute for International Leadership.

“I was talking to some folks who have been around him for a long time and I couldn’t think of another senator who has had this impact on policy in the last 30 years,” he said.

Petraeus agrees.

“Senator McCain has been a true titan — enormously knowledgeable, a Naval Academy graduate from a family of distinguished naval officers, one with considerable personal experience and moral authority from his own time in uniform, followed by decades on the Armed Services Committee and tireless pursuit of firsthand observation through extensive travel to see our forces in combat and wherever else they are overseas,” he said. “There truly is no one with remotely the same combination of experience, expertise, firsthand knowledge, hard-edged assessments and extensive relationships around the world.”

Todd Harrison, senior fellow and director of defense budget analysis for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank, said McCain’s leadership will be missed on Capitol Hill, particularly with the National Defense Authorization Act — the annual defense policy plan also known as the NDAA.

“I think Senator McCain has been a really powerful champion in the Senate for defense issues,” Harrison said during a December discussion with reporters. “And I think there’s several recent years that I think he singlehandedly forced the leadership in the Senate to move ahead on the NDAA when it might not have otherwise been a priority for the leadership. ... It’s not clear that there’s anyone else in the Senate that will fill that role, that will be that champion to make sure that defense bills get pushed through.”

Gunman 'clearly targeted other gamers'

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — A California man who played video games to earn money for college and a West Virginian whose esports winnings helped support his young family were slain at a Florida tournament where a gunman specifically targeted fellow gamers, authorities said Monday.

David Katz, 24, of Baltimore fatally shot himself after killing the two men and wounding 10 others Sunday inside a pizzeria and bar that were hosting a "Madden NFL 19" tournament. Katz was among about 130 gamers attending the competition at a mall in Jacksonville, Fla.

Court records in Maryland reviewed by The Associated Press show Katz had previously been hospitalized for mental illness.

Katz carried two handguns, including one equipped with a laser sight, into the tournament venue but fired only one of them, Jack-

sonville Sheriff Mike Williams told a news conference Monday. He said surveillance video revealed Katz was the only shooter, but his motive remains unknown.

"The suspect clearly targeted other gamers who were in the back room" of the pizzeria, Williams said. "The suspect walked past patrons who were in other parts of the business and focused his attention on the gamers."

Investigators determined Katz bought both guns in Baltimore within the past month. But Williams said there's no indication he planned the shooting before Sunday.

In a statement Monday evening EA Sports CEO Andrew Wilson said he is canceling the remaining qualifier events to focus on safety. "We have made a decision to cancel our three remaining Madden Classic qualifier events while we run a comprehensive review of safety proto-

cols for competitors and spectators."

The sheriff had previously said nine people were wounded by gunfire but told reporters Monday the total was 10. All of them, he said, were expected to recover.

The sheriff's office identified the dead as Elijah Clayton, 22, of Woodland Hills, Calif., and Taylor Robertson, 28, of Giles, W.Va.

Clayton's parents and other relatives gathered outside police headquarters Monday in Jacksonville to give a brief statement. A cousin, Brandi Pettijohn, said the family was "devastated by yet another senseless act of gun violence." She said Clayton was a good, peaceful man who never had a fistfight.

Robertson, who used the gamer tag "Spotmeplzzz," won the Madden Classic tournament in 2016. Fellow gamers described Robertson as a family man dedicated to his wife and children.

Calif. homeowners struggle after wildfire

Associated Press

SANTA ROSA, Calif. — Construction crews have already put up the frame on Cheri Sharp's new house, but she still questions whether rebuilding was the right choice after California's most destructive wildfire took her old home in wine country nearly a year ago.

She's had to dip into retirement savings to cover a \$300,000 shortfall in her homeowner's insurance coverage.

"We just kind of thought we were taken care of," Sharp, 54, said about her insurance policy. "If I had to do it over again, I'd probably change my mind and move."

The wind-whipped wildfire that tore through Northern California in October 2017, killing 22 people and destroying more

than 5,500 structures, left many people in Sharp's position: underinsured and having to scramble for money to build a new home on their property.

Santa Rosa was the hardest-hit city, with entire neighborhoods burned to ashes. But as of late August, only nine of nearly 2,700 single-family homes lost here had been rebuilt, according to figures from the city's permitting office. Another 520 or so were under construction.

Many homeowners say they are locked in negotiations with insurance companies for additional money to cover the cost of building a home at the edge of the San Francisco Bay Area, where a technology boom has sent home prices skyrocketing. That, coupled with competition among neighbors for construction crews and materials, has left

many homeowners hundreds of thousands of dollars in the red.

For Santa Rosa native Alex Apons, 34, the insurance shortfall on his home in the tidy Coffey Park neighborhood was \$200,000. He and his wife wanted to stay because they had a baby on the way and both have deep family roots in the area. They used every insurance dollar they received to pay off the mortgage of their 4-year-old home that burned. There was nothing left for a down payment on construction.

"We had to drain our bank account," said Apons, now father to a 5-month-old boy, Etienne. "After everything is built, we're looking at a monthly payment on that loan that's \$1,000 more than what our mortgage was before."

UN experts detail possible war crimes in Yemen

Associated Press

GENEVA — Three experts working for the U.N.'s top human rights body say the governments of Yemen, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia may have been responsible for war crimes including rape, torture, disappearances and "deprivation of the right to life" during 3½ years of escalated fighting against rebels in Yemen.

In their first report for the Human Rights Council, the experts also point to possible crimes by rebel Shiite militia in Yemen,

who have been fighting the Saudi-led coalition and Yemen's government in a civil war since March 2015. The experts have also chronicled the damages from coalition airstrikes, the single most lethal force in the fighting, over the last year.

They urged the international community to "refrain from providing arms that could be used in the conflict"—an apparent reference to countries including the United States and Britain that help arm the Saudi-led coalition, as well as Iran, which the coalition has accused of arming the Houthis.

The experts visited some but not all parts of Yemen as they compiled the report.

"(We have) reasonable grounds to believe that the governments of Yemen, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia are responsible for human rights violations," the report said. It cited violations including unlawful "deprivation of the right to life," arbitrary detention, rape, torture, enforced disappearances and child recruitment.

Saudi, Emirati and Yemen officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment Tuesday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Crew unearths wood coffins, lone bone

MN DULUTH — A St. Louis County public works crew doing exploratory archaeological digging in Duluth unearthed several wooden coffins, but authorities said they contain no remains.

The excavation work was done to check for human remains in advance of a road project next to a cemetery that served as a burial site for about 5,000 people who died at the former St. Louis County Poor Farm between 1891 and 1947.

One bone was found outside of the coffins. Authorities suspect it's from a grave relocation project in the 1960s.

Blindfolded, visually impaired teams play

NH MANCHESTER — A minor league baseball team from New Hampshire took the field blindfolded to give players and fans an appreciation of what life's like for people who are blind or have limited sight.

Members of the front office of the New Hampshire Fisher Cats lost 14-7 to a team from Future In Sight on Sunday in Manchester. Future In Sight is an organization that supports blind and visually impaired people. The exhibition game of Beep Baseball featured balls that send signals to alert players as they hit.

1955 Chevrolet fire rescue truck for sale

IL BATAVIA — A suburban Chicago fire department's sale offer could make someone a regular on the area's summer parade circuit.

The Batavia Fire Department has a 1955 Chevrolet 3800

panel truck up for sale. The department's first rescue vehicle has just 23,000 miles.

And as the (Arlington Heights) Daily Herald reported, it runs.

Fire Chief Randy Diecke said his review of a classic automobile website shows they fetch \$5,000 or more.

Then-Fire Chief Frank "Bud" Richter suggested buying the vehicle in 1954 in his "Smoke Signals" newspaper column. He said it would be useful in hauling resuscitators and rescue equipment to emergencies.

Historic mining tunnel to be opened to public

WY CASPER — A 300-foot mining tunnel in central Wyoming that was abandoned soon after its construction in 1868 is being opened to the public.

The Casper Star-Tribune reported that the horizontal tunnel carved into rock on a hillside at South Pass City State Historic Site will open for tours Sept. 1.

Superintendent Joe Ellis said the tunnel was constructed largely by hand, with workers using picks, shovels and gun powder to excavate about three feet of tunnel a day.

It was abandoned when no gold was found and left undisturbed for 150 years.

Bee swarm attacks, stings several hikers

CT ANSONIA — A medical rescue crew used all-terrain vehicles to reach several hikers who were attacked and stung by a swarm of bees in the Connecticut woods.

Ansonia Rescue and Medical Services said one person stung while hiking in the Ansonia Nature Center on Thursday experienced anaphylactic shock.

That person was located "several miles into the woods, suffering a severe reaction with airway compromised."

Rescue officials say that person's allergic reaction was controlled at the scene.

Store worker accused in \$35K theft case

ND MINOT — A Minot woman was accused of stealing \$35,000 in merchandise from the Victoria's Secret store where she worked.

Authorities allege Pru Bray, 19, took the items out of the store in bags or wore them under her clothing. She then allegedly sold them at rummage sales, gave them as gifts or returned them for cash.

The Minot Daily News reported Bray also is accused of making fraudulent transactions with a customer's credit card.

She faces a felony theft of property charge that carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

1st ordained black minister honored

VT RUTLAND — A historical marker commemorating the life and work of the first ordained black minister in the United States will be dedicated next month in Vermont.

Rev. Lemuel Haynes was pastor for Rutland's West Parish Congregational Church in West Rutland for 30 years from 1788 to 1818. Haynes had served in the Revolutionary War. He also served as a pastor in Massachusetts and Connecticut before coming to Vermont.

The West Rutland Historical Society said a public dedication ceremony for the historical marker is planned for Sept. 8.

Damaged headstones repaired at cemetery

IN MORRISTOWN — A central Indiana company finished repairing nearly two dozen headstones that vandals damaged in a cemetery dating to the early 1800s.

The 22 headstones toppled, broken or otherwise damaged at the Davis-Bennet Cemetery in Morristown included one belonging to a Revolutionary War veteran and his wife.

Four juveniles allegedly damaged the headstones, causing nearly \$10,000 in damage to the markers at the cemetery 25 miles southeast of Indianapolis.

Greenfield Granite Co. was hired to repair the headstones and its workers recently finished repairing and cleaning the markers at the cemetery.

Cops: Boy with autism crashes ambulance

RI COVENTRY — Police say a boy with autism took an ambulance from a Rhode Island fire station and crashed it, leaving three with minor injuries.

The Coventry Police Department said officers were called to Route 117 on Thursday night and found the boy unsettled and walking on the road near his mother's car.

Officers said the boy and his mother agreed to visit a nearby fire station so he could be evaluated.

At the station, the boy ran into a parked ambulance, locked the door and took off across Route 117, where he went off the road and crashed.

From wire reports

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Army tries to maintain success

Associated Press

WEST POINT, N.Y. — Army coach Jeff Monken has reached a crossroads of sorts — he has built the Black Knights into a winner, and now he wants to keep the success going at a high level.

Not so easy at West Point, where sustained football excellence has been a tall task.

These Black Knights are ready for that challenge as Monken prepares for his fifth season.

“We’re trying to avoid complacency,” senior safety James Gibson said. “We’ve had two good years, but nobody cares about that, so we shouldn’t, either. We’ve got to keep building off that success by doing the things we did to get there so we can stay there.”

“We don’t want to say, ‘Oh, we were 10-3 last year, we should win every game.’ No. We have to go work.”

Army beat rival Navy for the second straight time last season to place those embarrassing 14

straight losses to the Midshipmen further in the rearview mirror. The Black Knights also defeated Air Force (a 21-0 shutout that ended a 306-game scoring streak by the Falcons), won their second straight bowl game, and took home the Commander in Chief’s Trophy as top dog among the three service academies for the first time since 1996. The upset win over San Diego State in the Armed Forces Bowl gave the Black Knights 10 victories for only the second time in academy history.

That’s a big haul.

Not big enough.

“I’m not satisfied. We only won 10 and we played 13 games,” Monken said. “It was a fun year and I’m really proud of our team and the accomplishments. Hopefully, our guys are hungry and feel like they’ve got something to prove and play for and are not satisfied with having won 10 games. We’re going to try to be a better football team.”

Other things to know about the Army Black Knights:

Quarterback quandary: Monken’s biggest chore this summer was figuring out who would take over at quarterback for Ahmad Bradshaw, who set a school record with 1,746 yards rushing in his final year. Monken said Tuesday that Kelvin Hopkins Jr. will start on Friday night at Duke.

Hopkins had 40 yards rushing and 76 passing in seven games as a sophomore but has never played an entire game, and neither has senior Luke Langdon or sophomore Cam Thomas.

Turnover kings: Army led the nation in rushing last year with 4,710 yards, averaging 6 yards a carry and 362.3 yards a game, and scored 50 TDs on the ground as its option attack excelled. The Black Knights held the ball for an average of nearly 35 minutes and lost only four fumbles in 785 rushing plays, an impressive display of ball security that will be difficult to match.

Air Force relies on Worthman

Associated Press

AIR FORCE ACADEMY, Colo. — This much senior quarterback Arion Worthman knows: He’s leaner, faster and ready to lead Air Force’s triple-option offense.

And this much Worthman doesn’t really know: his muddy backfield situation.

The Falcons have a plethora of tailbacks and fullbacks vying for playing time behind Worthman as Air Force tries to rebound from a 5-7 campaign.

“It’s a good thing, because we do have a lot of depth,” Worthman said. “At the same time, we still need guys to step up and say, ‘I’m going to take this spot.’ We need more guys to make plays more often, more consistently.”

“Consistency is what we’re looking for.”

Worthman was the team’s leading rusher in 2017 with 821 yards and 13 TDs. He’s trimmer this season (210 pounds, 8 percent body fat) and speedier (runs in the 4.4-second neighborhood for the 40).

Other than that, the offense remains wide open. The tailback spot could be a platoon of Nolan Eriksen, Joseph Saucier, Malik Miller or Kadin Remsburg. The fullback responsibilities — a vital position in the Falcons’ option attack — might fall to Parker Wilson, Cole Fagan or Taven Birdow. Receiver Ronald Cleveland will figure heavily in their plans as well. After all, he averaged 9.5 yards per carry last season.

Already, Worthman can see a difference.

“Last year, a lot of guys were unsure of themselves. We didn’t have many returning starters so people were like: ‘Can I? Am I? Will I?’” said Worthman, who was a baseball player in high school and is considering trying out for the Falcons on the diamond in the spring. “This year, you look in their eyes and it’s like: ‘I am. You will. We will.’ You really see that in the guys’ eyes and the way they carry themselves on the field.”

Navy turns over keys to offense to Perry

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Navy is handing the keys to its triple-option offense to Malcolm Perry.

He was the starting slotback for eight games last season before coach Ken Niumatalolo switched him to quarterback to spark a struggling offense. The 5-foot-9, 185-pound speedster did just that, rushing for 282 yards and four touchdowns against SMU.

That, along with a 250-yard rushing effort against Army and Navy’s 49-7 win over Virginia in the Military Bowl, was enough to convince Niumatalolo to make the move permanent.

“Malcolm is the most dynamic runner we’ve had during my time here,” said Niumatalolo, who has spent 21 years in Annapolis. “We have to put the ball in the hands of our best player.”

Perry is a threat to go all the

way every time he touches the ball and playing quarterback merely increases those game-breaking opportunities. Perry rushed for 646 yards and seven touchdowns in three starts at quarterback, along with 536 yards and four touchdowns as a slotback.

Blessed with an impressive combination of speed, quickness and elusiveness, Perry broke four touchdown runs of 65 yards or more last season. His 92-yard scoring scamper versus SMU and 91-yard touchdown run against Air Force rank as the second- and third-longest runs in school history.

Perry and the Midshipmen intend to put up plenty of mileage this season, most of it off the football field.

Navy will log an estimated 26,496 miles to play five road and two neutral-site contests, second-most of any program in the Football Bowl Subdivi-

sion. Only Hawaii will travel farther.

The Midshipmen open the season with a 9,706-mile trek to Honolulu for a game against Hawaii. The Midshipmen are taking a direct commercial flight that is expected to last over 10 hours.

Some other things to know about the 2018 Navy football team:

Passing fancy: While Perry is a proven threat as a runner, his passing ability remains in question. He completed 1 of 2 pass attempts last season and did not look very comfortable setting up in the pocket. Most times that Perry dropped back, he wound up tucking the ball and running.

Offensive coordinator Ivan Jasper, who has been tutoring the quarterbacks at Navy for 17 years, made Perry’s improvement as a passer the top priority.

Giants ink Beckham to 5-year extension

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Odell Beckham Jr. of the New York Giants is now the NFL's highest-paid wide receiver.

The Giants on Monday announced they have signed Beckham to a five-year contract extension that will keep the three-time Pro Bowler with the franchise for another six seasons.

"We got him until he's 108," general manager Dave Gettleman quipped. "I never worried whether or not we would get it done. I'm pleased, because the litmus test for a contract is that neither side is ticked off before the ink can dry, and neither side should be ticked off. It's a very fair deal."

The signing comes less than two weeks before the season opener against Jacksonville on Sept. 9 at MetLife Stadium.

While terms were not disclosed, the deal with the 25-

year-old, 2014 first-rounder is worth about \$95 million with \$65 million guaranteed.

Beckham's \$19 million average salary would top the \$17 million earned by Antonio Brown of the Pittsburgh Steelers. His \$95 million deal also tops the \$82.5 million deal receiver Mike Evans has with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Beckham, who missed most of last season with a broken left ankle, was scheduled to make \$8.4 million in the final year of his rookie contract.

Beckham had said early in training camp that he was taking a risk practicing without a new contract. It paid off.

"Honestly, I don't even know how to explain it," Beckham said in a statement. "I don't know if it's a relief, I don't know — it's a combination of everything. You've worked all your life to get to this point and it's finally here."

Beckham felt getting a new

deal would be just a matter of time.

"I knew that it would get done, it just was a matter of when and I'm just so happy that it is finally done now," he said.

In his first four seasons, Beckham has caught 313 passes for 4,424 yards and 38 touchdowns.

Beckham has not played in any of the Giants' three preseason games as new coach Pat Shurmur has taken a very cautious approach with the catalyst to his offense coming off his first major professional injury.

It is unlikely that he will play in the preseason finale on Thursday against the New England Patriots, so his first game action since being hurt on Oct. 8 will be against the Jaguars at home on Sept. 9.

A lot has been written about Beckham's contract situation since the end of last season. There were reports the Giants

were involved in trade talks with the Rams and many wondered whether co-owners John Mara and Steve Tisch wanted to spend a lot of money on a player who also created some disturbing news off the field.

Beckham annoyed many by going to Florida for a boat outing with teammates before a playoff game after the 2016 regular season. He then played poorly in a one-sided loss to the Packers.

His reputation took another hit when a video was posted with him in a room where a hand-rolled cigarette was visible. A woman next to him had unidentified white powder on a nearby table.

During this past offseason, Beckham seemed to mature. He worked hard to overcome his injury, stayed out of trouble and developed a good relationship with Shurmur. He also said all the right things when asked about getting a new contract.

Rams starters remain healthy thanks to McVay's plan

Associated Press

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. — Los Angeles Rams coach Sean McVay has been more cautious than most of his peers in how he has used his starters during the preseason.

The starting offense, save for right guard Jamon Brown, will not play at all in the four exhibition games. The starting defense, save for outside linebacker Samson Ebukam, made a brief appearance in the third preseason game Saturday.

Whether that approach will cause problems once the season starts remains to be seen. It's worked out in at least one respect, as McVay said Monday the Rams are on track to be healthy for their season opener at Oakland on Sept. 10. And players have been happy with McVay's caution, with running back Todd Gurley saying he was living "everyone's dream" by not playing in the preseason.

McVay seemingly felt so comfortable about the strength of his team that he made an unprompted reference to defensive tackle Aaron Donald's ongoing holdout.

"We're right on track with guys like (linebacker) Mark Barron that we have talked about. Everybody else we anticipate that we're kind of projecting as a starter is ready to go. Obviously, the big question is will 99 (Donald) be a part of that thing or not? But we're in a good place right now. Certainly we've got a lot of work to do in the meantime," McVay said.

The Rams, who are seeking to defend their first NFC West title since 2003, will continue to hold out starters and key reserves for their preseason finale at New Orleans on Thursday.

McVay put defensive lineman Dominique Easley and outside linebacker Matt Longacre in that group. Easley did not play last season because of a torn ACL in his right knee,

and Longacre missed most of training camp because of a biceps injury after undergoing back surgery last season.

Both Easley and Longacre are expected to play major roles this season with the Rams still unsettled on the edge opposite Ekubam in their 3-4 defense. McVay was glad to see both get on the field against Houston because it was a milestone in their recoveries.

"It was good for both those players to get some snaps, and now we'll implement a program that we feel like is going to be sustainable throughout the course of the season, but we won't expect to see them this week," McVay said.

Tight end Gerald Everett, who sustained the most notable injury of training camp when he hurt his shoulder, is in line to play against the Raiders. McVay said Everett is running routes again, and the second-year South Alabama product was able to maintain his condi-

tioning despite being in a sling for several weeks.

The only lingering question in terms of health is the status of outside linebacker Ogbornia Okoronkwo. McVay said the fifth-round pick from Oklahoma is likely to start the season on the physically-unable-to-perform list after sustaining a foot injury during offseason workouts that required surgery. Starting the season with that designation would prevent Okoronkwo from practicing or playing for the first six weeks.

Without major injury concerns, McVay has been able to focus on how to construct the 53-man roster and the 46-man game day roster. Putting together contingency plans in case of injury during the regular season is also a priority for McVay, whether that comes from the composition of the practice squad or from identifying players that could return as free agents.

Spurs' Ginobili retires after 16 seasons

Associated Press

Manu Ginobili has played his final game, and with that a new era awaits the San Antonio Spurs.

Ginobili announced his decision to retire Monday, the 41-year-old wrapping up what he called a "fabulous journey" in which he helped the Spurs win four NBA championships in 16 seasons with the club.

The smooth, left-handed guard from Argentina came to San Antonio in 2002, forming what quickly became a powerful "Big 3" alongside Tim Duncan and Tony Parker. Now, they've all moved on: Duncan retired two years ago, Parker left San Antonio earlier this summer as a free agent to sign with the Charlotte Hornets, and Ginobili has worn Spurs colors for the last time as well.

"Today, with a wide range of

feelings, I'm announcing my retirement from basketball," Ginobili wrote on Twitter in making the announcement. "IMMENSE GRATITUDE to everyone (family, friends, teammates, coaches, staff, fans) involved in my life in the last 23 years. It's been a fabulous journey. Way beyond my wildest dreams."

The image Ginobili chose to accompany that tweet: a photo of him walking off the floor, away from the camera, with four fingers aloft — signifying his four titles.

"An NBA champion and All-Star, Manu Ginobili is also a pioneer who helped globalize the NBA," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said. "He is one of basketball's greatest ambassadors who believes in the power of sports to change lives. And for 16 years, we were fortunate to watch a legend compete at

the highest level. Thank you, Manu, for a career that inspired millions of people around the world."

Ginobili's pro career lasted 23 seasons in all, starting with stints in Italy and Argentina. His drawing power was massive even in his final season, and it was common for him to spend plenty of time before road games posing for photos and signing autographs — often international fans proudly displaying an Argentine flag.

"A role model for all of us that love this wonderful sport," Spurs forward Pau Gasol said.

Duncan, Parker, Ginobili and Kawhi Leonard were the backbone of San Antonio's drive to its most recent NBA championship in 2014, and this will be the first time that Gregg Popovich begins a season as the Spurs' head coach with none of those players on the roster. Leon-

ard was traded to the Toronto Raptors for DeMar DeRozan earlier this summer, the end of a relationship in San Antonio that had apparently gone too sour to save.

Leonard's departure meant Ginobili would have been the last significant player tied to the Spurs' title years. But in the end, retirement was his call.

Getting enshrined in the Basketball Hall of Fame would seem like a certainty for Ginobili, especially when adding his accomplishments outside of the NBA. He led Argentina to the 2004 Olympic gold medal, with a victory over the U.S. in the semifinals.

The No. 57 pick in the 1999 draft, Ginobili averaged 13.3 points and 3.8 assists in 1,057 regular-season games. He was a two-time All-Star and was the league's Sixth Man of the Year for the 2007-08 season.

MLB roundup

Bregman, White propel Astros to sixth straight win

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Alex Bregman and Tyler White homered and drove in four runs apiece as Houston rallied to beat Oakland in the opener of their AL West showdown.

It was the sixth straight win for the first-place Astros, who moved 2½ games ahead of the Athletics.

George Springer and Jose Altuve each drove in a run during a five-run third inning that erased an early 4-0 deficit. This was the first game with Springer, Altuve and Carlos Correa in the lineup together since June 25. Springer, who pinch-hit Sunday, missed the previous five games with a quadriceps injury.

"When we're healthy, we're the best team in baseball," said third baseman Bregman, who tied a career high with four hits.

The A's jumped on starter

Gerrit Cole (12-5) for four runs behind a two-run homer by Marcus Semien in the second and a two-run run shot by Matt Chapman in the third.

Cole allowed four hits and struck out eight to move ahead of teammate Justin Verlander (229) and into first place in the AL with 234 strikeouts.

Orioles 7, Blue Jays 0: Kendrys Morales had his home run streak snapped at seven games by host Baltimore, which ended an eight-game skid by defeating Toronto.

Striving to tie the major league record of homering in eight straight games, Morales went 0-for-3 with a walk and did not hit the ball out of the infield.

Cubs 7, Mets 4: Jon Lester pitched six innings, drove in two runs with a timely single off Noah Syndergaard and made two nice plays in the field to help host Chicago beat New York for its sixth consecutive

victory.

Anthony Rizzo homered and Daniel Murphy reached three more times from the leadoff spot as the NL-leading Cubs moved a season-high 24 games over .500. Murphy is batting .407 (11-for-27) in six games since he was acquired in a trade with Washington.

Nationals 5, Phillies 3: Stephen Strasburg threw six effective innings, Matt Wieters hit a solo homer and visiting Washington defeated Philadelphia.

The Phillies fell 3½ games behind first-place Atlanta in the NL East after losing the opener for the seventh straight series. They're 6-12 since Aug. 8 and have dropped five games in the standings during that span.

White Sox 6, Yankees 2: Carlos Rodon pitched two-hit ball for seven innings, Yoan Moncada doubled in two runs and surging Chicago beat host New York for its fourth straight win.

The White Sox have won 10 of 13 and clinched their first winning month this season by improving to 15-10 in August.

Giants 2, Diamondbacks 0: Chris Stratton threw a career-high eight innings to outpitch Patrick Corbin, and Steven Duggar hit an early two-run homer as host San Francisco blanked Arizona.

The Diamondbacks remained a game up in the NL West over Colorado when the Rockies lost to the Angels.

Angels 10, Rockies 7: Mike Trout and Shohei Ohtani homered, Eric Young Jr. drove in the go-ahead run during a five-run eighth inning and host Los Angeles blew a three-run lead before rallying past Colorado to snap a six-game skid.

After DJ LeMahieu's first career grand slam put the Rockies up 7-5 in the eighth, the struggling Angels improbably mounted a five-run surge in the bottom of the inning.