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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US prepares for GI cuts in Afghanistan

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration is preparing to withdraw thousands of troops from Afghanistan in exchange for concessions from the Taliban, including a cease-fire and a renunciation of al-Qaida, as part of an initial deal to end the nearly 18-year-old war, U.S. officials say.

The agreement, which would require the Taliban to begin negotiating a larger peace deal directly with the Afghan government, could cut the number of American troops in the country from roughly 14,000 to between 8,000 and 9,000, the officials said. That number would be nearly the same as when Donald Trump took office.

The plan has taken shape after months of negotiations between the Taliban and Zalmay Khalilzad, an Afghan-born American diplomat who was appointed by the Trump administration last year to jump-start

talks. Officials said an agreement could be finalized ahead of the Afghan presidential election in September, though they cautioned that Taliban leaders could delay and that significant challenges remain.

The proposal is likely to be viewed skeptically by some U.S. and Afghan officials who question the Taliban's honesty and wonder how the United States can verify whether Taliban leaders are following through. But if approved, it would be one of the most significant steps toward ending the war, a goal that increasingly has bipartisan support.

"I would say that they are 80 or 90% of the way there," said one official, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss details of the emerging deal. "But there is still a long way to go on that last 10 or 20%."

A Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, declined to comment about the likelihood of an

initial agreement. In a brief telephone interview Thursday, he said he did not know when talks would resume.

Khalilzad said in a tweet Wednesday that he plans to resume his next round of talks with the Taliban in Qatar soon and that if the group does its part, an agreement will be finalized.

Additional cuts to U.S. forces would be negotiated as part of discussions involving the Taliban and the Afghan government, U.S. officials said.

Army Gen. Austin "Scott" Miller, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, is open to the proposal, two defense officials said, because he believes it would protect U.S. interests by maintaining a counterterrorism force that can strike Islamic State and al-Qaida. Miller, who took command in Kabul last September, previously has said that political negotiations are "absolutely" a key to ending the war.

A spokesman for Miller, Army Col. Sonny Leggett, declined to comment.

U.S. officials acknowledged there are legitimate concerns that the Taliban might not break with al-Qaida, as Washington has demanded, or stand up to ISIS. Still, officials may be content with a partial troop withdrawal that opens the door to additional negotiations and keeps the counterterrorism mission alive as the status quo becomes politically untenable.

The Taliban has refused to talk with the Afghan government, which it calls a puppet regime, until it reaches a deal with the U.S. on its troops.

A Pentagon spokesman, Cmdr. Sean Robertson, said the Defense Department has not been ordered to withdraw forces from Afghanistan — a point that other officials describing the potential deal also stressed.

'We have a problem': Top SEAL orders ethics review

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
AND CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy's top SEAL wrote in a message to the Naval Special Warfare Command that he has ordered an ethics review of the elite force, telling them that "we have a problem" within the SEALs, which have been plagued by allegations of crimes and other misconduct.

"Some of our subordinate formations have failed to maintain good order and discipline and as a result and for good reason, our [Naval Special Warfare] culture is being questioned," Rear Adm. Collin Green, the

commander of Naval Special Warfare Command, wrote in a letter to his force dated July 25. "I don't know yet if we have a culture problem, I do know that we have a good order and discipline problem that must be addressed immediately."

Green gave commanders throughout his force until Wednesday to report all outstanding problems within their units to him and provide recommendations on how to fix the issues within the ranks. He also ordered his entire command to read the first two chapters of former SEAL Dick Couch's book, "A Tactical Ethic," which addresses problems in the

SEAL community during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Problems in the SEALs ranks have ranged in recent years from allegations of war crimes committed against detained enemies and civilians and drug use to complaints of sexual assault, child pornography and molestation. One SEAL, Senior Chief Petty Officer Adam Matthews, a former member of the Naval Special Warfare Development Group, or SEAL Team 6, was convicted this year in the 2017 strangling death of Green Beret Staff Sgt. Logan Melgar in Mali. Another member of the SEALs, Senior Chief Petty Officer Tony DeDolph, faces

charges, including murder, in that case.

Green cautioned that continued headline-grabbing problems within the SEALs could cause irreparable damage to the public's image of the elite force as moral and disciplined warriors.

The letter came immediately following reports of a Navy SEAL team being suddenly sent home late last month to San Diego from Iraq over accusations of drinking alcohol during an Independence Day celebration, in which an alleged sexual assault on a female servicemember working with the team occurred.

Despite North's launches, US, S. Korea to proceed with scheduled exercises

BY KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea fired what appeared to be two short-range ballistic missiles into the sea off its eastern coast Friday for the third time in just over a week, South Korean officials said.

The series of launches happened after the North warned the South against taking part in joint military exercises with the United States, which are reportedly to begin next week.

The communist state is also frustrated over stalled nuclear talks and is likely seeking leverage as Washington tries to restart them, experts said.

The missiles, which were fired from Yonghung at 2:59 a.m. and 3:23 a.m., flew nearly 140 miles at an altitude of about 15 miles, according to the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

President Donald Trump continued to play down the testing activity.

"I think it's very much under control," he told reporters at the White House on Thursday. "I have no problem. We'll see what happens, but these are short-range missiles. They are very standard."

The latest flurry of activity began July 25 when the North launched two short-range ballistic missiles into the sea, calling them a "solemn warning" to Seoul as it gears up for the

mainly computer simulated drills.

U.S. officials said the joint training would be held as planned but did not provide a date.

The Yonhap News Agency on Friday quoted military sources as saying the command post exercise would begin on Monday. The allies will also hold joint sessions for about 10 days aimed at testing South Korea's capabilities with an eye toward the transfer of wartime operational control, which is currently held by the United States, Yonhap said.

North Korea conducted another launch on Wednesday, saying it was a test of a newly developed "large-caliber multiple launch guided rocket system."

Friday's launch took place in a different area than the others. Experts have said the North is developing weapons that are mobile and can be harder to detect than those launched from a fixed site.

South Korea's presidential office said an initial assessment with the U.S. military showed the projectiles fired Thursday were probably the same new type of short-range ballistic missile the North has tested previously. But it stressed further analysis was needed because of the North's different description of the launch on Wednesday.

NATO supports US move to end nuke treaty with Russia

BY SLOBODAN LEKIC
Stars and Stripes

NATO will respond "in a measured and responsible way" to security challenges posed by Russia's new cruise missiles, the alliance said Friday following the demise of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty, a cornerstone of European security for the past three decades.

The landmark arms control treaty, which banned a category of nuclear weapons, ended Friday following a six-month withdrawal period.

The INF's end and U.S. criticism of the larger New START treaty, which expires in 2021, leave uncertainty over what limits, if any, will be left on the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals after decades of accords.

The Trump administration announced in February that the U.S. would leave the INF because Russia has violated it by fielding a new ground cruise missile, the SSC-8, which has a range that can quickly reach most of Western Europe.

A statement Friday by the North Atlantic Council, NATO's top policy body, said the allies strongly supported Washing-

ton's move.

"Russia today remains in violation of the INF treaty, despite years of U.S. and Allied engagement, including a final opportunity over six months to honor its treaty obligations," the statement said. "A situation whereby the United States fully abides by the Treaty, and Russia does not, is not sustainable."

Moscow denies the missile falls outside the limitations of the treaty signed by President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987, which prohibits the two countries from possessing missiles with ranges of 300 to 3,400 miles.

The 29-member NATO alliance has rejected Russia's claims.

"We regret that Russia has showed no willingness ... to comply with its international obligations," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Friday. Russia's new intermediate-range weapons "can reach European cities within minutes, they are mobile, hard to detect and they also reduce the threshold of any potential use of nuclear weapons in armed conflict."

Senate confirms Gilday as chief of naval operations

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Senate confirmed Vice Adm. Michael Gilday to be the next chief of naval operations in a voice vote Thursday, a few hours after the Senate Armed Services Committee approved his nomination.

The confirmation comes one day after his confirmation hearing as the Senate prepares to leave for its August recess.

Now that Gilday is confirmed to the Navy's most senior military leadership position, he also will be promoted to admiral. The position also makes him a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Gilday has been serving

as the director of the Joint Staff since March.

During his confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Wednesday, Gilday was questioned about reported incidents of misconduct by Navy SEALs as well as problems with the new USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier.

About the Navy SEAL incidents, Gilday said they are being investigated and he would deal with the root causes behind them and hold people accountable.

"If there is a problem with the culture of the community, [it will be] addressed very quickly and very firmly," he said.

Navy pilot in Calif. crash declared dead

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The pilot of an F/A-18E Super Hornet was killed Wednesday when the fighter jet crashed into a ravine wall in California's Death Valley during a routine training flight, Navy officials said Thursday as they called off an effort to recover the pilot's missing body.

"The Navy has confirmed that the pilot of the F/A-18E Super Hornet that crashed July 31st died in the crash," said Lt. Cmdr. Lydia Bock, a spokeswoman for the Navy's Strike Fighter Wing Pacific.

The crash occurred in a Death Valley National Park gorge known as Rainbow Canyon but commonly known as Star Wars Canyon, where witnesses said the jet crashed nose first into that canyon wall at high speed. The pilot was assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron 151 based at California's Naval Air Station Lemoore, Bock said.

The pilot's name was expected to be released about 24 hours after family notification, per Pentagon policy. The pilot's family was notified earlier Thursday of the death declaration, an official said on the condition of anonymity.

"The Navy mourns the loss of one of our own, and our hearts go out to the family and friends affected by this tragedy," Bock said in a statement.

Photographs at the scene of the wreck showed the single-seat fighter jet to be a complete loss after the crash at about 10 a.m. local time. The Canyon is a popular spot for tourists and photographers to watch military planes weave through desert ravines at high speed.

National Park officials said seven people in the area were injured during the crash. Park spokesman Patrick Taylor told NPR that those injuries were minor.

Navy seeks justice system review after SEAL acquittal

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The Navy dismissed charges Thursday against an officer accused of covering up war crimes by a SEAL later acquitted of murder, and ordered a review of the service's justice system.

The action by the chief of naval operations in the case of Lt. Jacob Portier is the latest blow to military prosecutors and comes a month after a jury cleared Special Operations Chief Edward Gallagher of murder and attempted murder charges. Portier, the leader of Gallagher's platoon, faced charges of dereliction of duty, destruction of evidence and conduct unbecoming an officer for holding Gallagher's re-enlistment ceremony next to the corpse of a teen Islamic State militant the SEAL was accused of stabbing to death after treating the boy's wounds.

Adm. John Richardson dismissed the case because it was "in the best interest of justice and the Navy," according to a statement.

Defense attorney Jeremiah J. Sullivan III said Portier was relieved to get the news and is still "proud to wear the uniform" and would happily return to combat.

Gallagher was convicted of a single charge of posing for photos with the 17-year-old militant's corpse. He was sentenced to the maximum penalty of four months but will serve no jail time because he was confined longer while awaiting trial.

Richardson intervened a day after President Donald Trump ordered the secretary of the Navy on Wednesday to strip prosecutors of medals they were awarded for their handling of the case despite the fact Gallagher was acquitted on

the most serious charges.

Eugene Fidell, who teaches military justice at Yale Law School and served as a lawyer in the U.S. Coast Guard, said he has never seen anything like this. He said there should be a court of inquiry — the highest level of investigative body under the military justice system — and that the proceedings should be made public.

"We're entitled to more of an explanation as to why the case against Lt. Portier is being ditched," he said. "Are they saying the entire investigation, the entire set of facts have been corrupted beyond repair? That doesn't follow."

Sullivan, a former Navy prosecutor and military judge, said events of the last two days were a scathing indictment against military prosecutors and he wouldn't be surprised if resignations follow.

Marine charged in death at DC barracks

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A Marine guard at the Marine Barracks Washington faces multiple charges including murder for shooting a fellow guard while on duty New Year's Day, according to the Marine Corps.

Lance Cpl. Andrew M. Johnson is accused of pointing a pistol at the head of Lance Cpl. Riley S. Kuznia, 20, and "pulling the trigger in jest," according to a charge sheet released Thursday by the Marine Corps.

Johnson was charged June 14 with dereliction of duty, murder by an inherently dangerous act, involuntary manslaughter and negligent homicide.

The investigation is still open and more charges could be filed, according to a statement from the Marine Barracks on

Thursday.

"A complete and thorough investigation was conducted following this tragic incident," Col. Donald Tomich, commander of Marine Barracks Washington, said in the statement.

On New Year's Eve, Johnson removed his pistol from its holster, put a bullet in the chamber and then stated, "Oh, you're going to a party," according to the charge sheet.

By pointing the pistol at Kuznia and pulling the trigger, the charge sheet states Johnson "knew that death or great bodily harm was a probable consequence of this inherently dangerous act."

Johnson also was accused of being derelict in his duties by failing to follow firearm handling procedures on Nov. 25 when he removed "his pistol from the holster while danc-

ing." He is also accused of using his personal cellphone while on guard duty between November and the day of Kuznia's death.

Johnson is not being held in pretrial confinement, Jeff Houston, a spokesman with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, wrote Thursday in an email.

He is scheduled to appear at an Article 32 preliminary hearing Aug. 22 at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., according to the Marine Barracks statement. An Article 32 hearing is convened in the military to determine whether there is enough evidence to proceed with charges and could lead to a court-martial.

Marine Barracks Washington, D.C., is about a half-mile from the Washington Navy Yard and home to the Marine Corps Commandant.

Trump promises 10% tariffs on Chinese goods

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump intensified pressure Thursday on China to reach a trade deal by saying he will impose 10% tariffs Sept. 1 on the remaining \$300 billion in Chinese imports he hasn't already taxed.

The move immediately sent stock prices sinking.

The president has already imposed 25% tariffs on \$250 billion in Chinese products, and Beijing has retaliated by taxing \$110 billion in U.S. goods.

U.S. consumers will likely feel the pain

if Trump proceeds with the new tariffs. Trump's earlier tariffs had been designed to minimize the impact on ordinary Americans by focusing on industrial goods. But the new tariffs will hit a vast range of consumer products from cellphones to silk scarves.

The president's announcement via Twitter came as a surprise, in part because the White House on Wednesday had said Beijing confirmed that it planned to increase its purchases of American farm products. That word came just as U.S. and Chinese negotiators were ending a 12th round of trade talks in Shanghai, which the White

House called "constructive."

Though the negotiations concluded without any sign of a deal, they are scheduled to resume next month in Washington.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, which had been up nearly 300 points earlier in the day, was down nearly 200 points after Trump's tweets announcing the new tariffs. The Dow closed for the day down 280 points — more than 1%.

Trump has long said he was preparing to tax the \$300 billion in additional Chinese tariffs. But he had suspended the threat after meeting with President Xi Jinping in Osaka, Japan, in June.

Trump rips into Dems at Ohio rally, avoids race

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — President Donald Trump used a revved-up rally Thursday in Cincinnati to tear into the Democrats he has been elevating as his new political foils, attacking four liberal congresswomen of color and their party's urban leaders, while also training fire on those he could be facing in 2020.

But the president mostly avoided the racial controversy that has dominated recent weeks as he basked in front of the raucous crowd for nearly 90 minutes, unleashing broadside after broadside on his political foes. Trump, who had faced widespread criticism for not doing more to stop the chants of "Send her back" about Somali-born Rep. Ilhan Omar at a rally last month,

seemed to want to avoid further furor, saying he would prefer his supporters avoid the chant. He largely stuck to a greatest hits performance.

"The Democrat party is now being led by four left-wing extremists who reject everything that we hold dear," Trump said of Omar and her fellow House Democrats Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, of New York; Rashida Tlaib, of Michigan; and Ayanna Pressley, of Massachusetts.

But the fleeting mention did not lead to further chants. Nor did an extended attack on Democratic leaders of urban areas, which Trump has laced into in recent days as part of his incendiary broadsides against Rep. Elijah Cummings and the majority-black city of Baltimore.

"No one has paid a higher price for the

far-left destructive agenda than Americans living in our nation's inner cities," Trump said, drawing cheers from the mostly white crowd in the packed arena on the banks of the Ohio River. "We send billions and billions and billions for years and years and it's stolen money, and it's wasted money."

With the eyes of the political world shifting from two days of Democratic debates to see if Trump would stoke racial anger, the president largely delivered his standard stump speech. But Trump, the most avid cable news viewer in the history of the office, could not resist delivering his review of the Detroit debates.

"That's was long, long television," Trump said. "The Democrats spent more time attacking Barack Obama than they did attacking me, practically."

USS Boxer says Iran interaction was mostly expected

BY JOSHUA KARSTEN

Stars and Stripes

MANAMA, Bahrain — The drone-downing USS Boxer is ready to counter "anything that's thrown at us" by Iran should it encounter any new threats, the ship's executive officer said prior to departing Bahrain on Friday following a scheduled weeklong port visit.

The San Diego-based amphibious assault ship pulled out of Bahrain's Khalifa bin Salman port mid-morning on Friday with about 3,000 personnel embarked.

A day earlier, the ship was a hive of activity as sailors and Marines loaded stores, turned wrenches and painted the flight deck in preparation for getting back underway in the Persian Gulf.

Boxer made headlines last month when it

downed at least one drone during its transit through the Strait of Hormuz.

President Donald Trump claimed the drone was Iranian and said it was destroyed after coming within about 1,000 yards of the vessel.

Tehran has disputed Washington's account of the incident, insisting that all of its drones in the region landed back at their bases that day.

Boxer executive officer Capt. Dale Heinken told Stars and Stripes that interactions with Iran on the inbound transit through the Strait were "normal patterns of life."

"We expected to see what we saw, and for the most part, it was exactly as we thought it would be," Heinken said.

Heinken declined to talk about the downing of the drone on July 18, but said that his

crew trains for contingencies when transiting close to Iranian shores.

As for the outbound transit, "I think we're ready to counter anything that's thrown at us," Heinken said. "With that being said ... I don't expect anything out of the normal or any of the normal pattern of life that we've seen in the Arabian Gulf."

Interactions with Iranian ships or aircraft in the Strait of Hormuz are considered routine, he said. "We'd probably come out and want to see them as well if they were operating close to our homeland."

The 96-mile-long Strait of Hormuz is bounded to the north by Iran and to the south by Oman and the United Arab Emirates. Around a fifth of the world's oil last year passed through the strategic shipping route, which is only 21 miles wide at its narrowest point.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

\$144 found in donated clothes dryer is returned

NE FREMONT — A volunteer trying to figure out why a donated clothes dryer didn't work took it apart and found \$144.

The money was found Saturday at Habitat for Humanity's HomeStore in Fremont.

The Fremont Tribune reported that volunteer Jerry Getzfrid pulled off the front of the dryer to see what was wrong with it. He found the bills and coins lying under the drum amid other dusty items that had accumulated from years of use.

The money was returned to the person who'd donated the dryer, and Getzfrid later ordered a part he needed to fix it.

Town closes park after killer bees attack

NM DEXTER — A park in a southeastern New Mexico town has been closed after a swarm of killer bees attacked two people.

Dexter Fire and Rescue Chief Justin Powell told the Roswell Daily Record two internet service provider workers were stung over 100 times Tuesday in Dexter.

Powell said the workers were repairing equipment on top of an unused water tower at the park when they were attacked.

He said the bees chased the workers, who climbed from the tower and ran away screaming.

Powell said two police officers, three firefighters and emergency medical personnel who responded also were stung.

Firefighters later doused foam onto a bee's nest in the park.

Officials say the town will let the bees calm down and seek a bee expert to remove them.

Man drives stolen bulldozer into porch

OH AKRON — Police said an Ohio man accused of stealing a bulldozer and driving it into the porch of a house after an argument with the home's resident has been arrested on charges including theft and criminal damaging.

Akron police said Randy Schiffbauer, of Akron, is accused of taking the bulldozer from a nearby construction site July 5 and driving to the house and into the enclosed porch. Authorities say a parked vehicle and a chain-link fence also were hit by the bulldozer.

Police said the bulldozer was gone when they arrived. It was later found abandoned.

Schiffbauer, 22, was charged last week.

Police: Newborn found on porch 'doing OK'

PA UPPER DARBY — Police said an "hours-old" newborn baby girl found on a porch near Philadelphia was unharmed and the parents are being sought.

Upper Darby police said the infant was found abandoned at about 1 p.m. Tuesday. The child was taken to Delaware County Hospital and reported "doing OK." Police were asking for help locating her parents.

Terrell Phillips told WPVI-TV that the baby was wrapped in a little white blanket on the porch. He said he picked her up and saw that the newborn "still had the umbilical cord."

Police noted that under the Newborn Protection Act (Safe Haven), a child may be left in the care of a hospital or police officer without criminal liability, as long as the child is no older than 28 days and is unharmed.

Trucker arrested after refusing to pay toll

WV FAYETTEVILLE — West Virginia authorities said a tractor-trailer driver was arrested following a police chase after he refused to pay a toll and drove off.

A state police statement said Maurice Loyd, 37, of Alabama refused to pay a toll on Interstate 77 on Tuesday. The total toll amount and reason for Loyd's refusal are unclear.

The police statement said a trooper was sent to the scene and spoke with Loyd, who had exited his vehicle for the conversation but then hopped back inside it and drove off.

He fled with police in pursuit for nearly 20 miles and was arrested on charges including obstructing, fleeing in a motor vehicle and fingerprint refusal.

University shows off new super computer

VT SOUTH BURLINGTON — The University of Vermont has upgraded its super computer, and it's now 200 times faster.

The South Burlington computer dubbed "DeepGreen" can achieve the speed of what's known as a petaflop — equal to one thousand million million computations per second — or the equivalent of 20,000 laptop computers working in tandem.

Using a \$1 million grant from the National Science Foundation, the upgrade was completed over the winter and spring.

Associate physics professor Adrian Del Maestro said the extra processing speed will enable faculty to take on new research projects they could not explore prior to the upgrade.

The university's Vice President for Research Richard Galbraith said the additional processing power is "absolutely essential for our faculty to

stay at the cutting edge of their disciplines."

Customer shoots man she thought was robber

NE LINCOLN — Police said a customer shot a man suspected of trying to rob a convenience store in Lincoln.

The shooting occurred around 1:40 a.m. Thursday. Police say it's not yet certain whether the man had a weapon. He was identified after he went to a hospital for treatment of a gunshot wound to his left arm. There was a warrant out for his arrest. Police haven't released his or the customer's name.

Police Chief Jeff Bliemeister said the 38-year-old woman had a permit to carry a concealed handgun. Investigators are reviewing security video and talking to the store clerk about what occurred.

Police officer stole, then spent fake bills

SC KINGSTREE — Authorities say a police officer in South Carolina stole two counterfeit \$100 bills from an evidence room and spent them at a local store.

The State Law Enforcement Division said Kingstree Police officer Sallica Williams, 46, was charged Monday with misconduct in office.

An arrest warrant said Williams took the fake cash from the department's evidence room and was seen in uniform at two Dollar General stores in Kingstree spending the money.

Kingstree Police Chief Andre Williams said he called SLED to investigate after the evidence disappeared and suspended the officer without pay. The chief said he fired Williams after her arrest.

From wire reports

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Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Safety Reed made impossible possible

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Combining instinct and tireless film study with an unyielding urge to be a difference maker, Ed Reed established himself as one of the greatest safeties in NFL history.

What he did with a football after plucking it from the air set him apart from anyone who ever played the game.

Reed made 64 interceptions over a stellar 12-year career. He owns an NFL-record 1,590 yards in interception returns, including the two longest run-backs: 107 yards against the Eagles in 2008 and 106 yards versus the Browns in 2004. Reed considered every pass thrown in his direction to be his property. And when he got ahold of it, his lone objective was to take it to the house.

“My philosophy was simple. I was trying to score when I got the football in my hand. There was no question about that,” Reed said. “When I caught the interception, I knew there weren’t too many defenders on (the opposing) offense.”

Selected to the Pro Bowl nine times and voted NFL Defensive Player of the Year in 2004,

Reed will become the 15th safety inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame on Saturday. Whether he’s the best of all time at his position is a matter of opinion — unless you’re asking Baltimore Ravens coach John Harbaugh, whom Reed helped win a Super Bowl.

“It would be hard to argue that he’s not the greatest safety in the history of football, right?” Harbaugh said. “He’s one of the top-10 players maybe in the history of the game.”

Yes, his coach is expected to say something like that. But Reed, who gained entry into the hall on the first ballot, also drew that kind of praise from his opponents.

“He just does things that nobody else at that position does, or I don’t know if they’ve ever done it,” Patriots coach Bill Belichick said.

When Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger dropped back to throw, his first priority was to determine where Reed was on the field. Then he’d find out that it didn’t matter because Reed was going to meet up with the football anyway.

“You see the safeties out in the middle of the field and have a wide-open throw on the right.

The next thing you know he’s intercepting it,” Roethlisberger said. “Where did he come from? That’s what made him such a challenge. He made the impossible possible.”

A defensive player with the mindset of an offensive star, Reed scored 14 touchdowns during his career (including playoffs) and became the first player to score return touchdowns off a punt, blocked punt, interception and fumble recovery.

“Ed was among the smartest and most remarkable, clutch playmakers in NFL history,” Ravens general manager Eric DeCosta said. “You never felt the game was out of reach when No. 20 was on the field.”

Reed starred at Miami before taking his talent to the Ravens as the 24th overall pick in the 2002 draft. After learning the fine art of studying game film under a coaching staff that included Chuck Pagano, Mark Stoops and Greg Schiano, Reed honed the craft with Baltimore.

“We had a great staff in college, so after I got to the league, I’d already seen stuff I knew,” Reed said. “Then it was enhanced, playing the game with

great guys like Ray Lewis and Terrell Suggs, Haloti Ngata, Chris McAlister.”

Asked whether his knack for tracking down the football could be attributed most to film study or instinct, Reed replied, “I guess you could go 50-50. I studied a lot of tape, but I can’t say a lot of things weren’t instinctive.”

It was one heck of a combination.

The Ravens, born after the franchise left Cleveland for Baltimore in 1996, now have three members in the Hall of Fame: Reed, offensive tackle Jonathan Ogden and Lewis.

“Ed is one of the best teammates I’ve ever had, and he is my brother for life,” Lewis said. “His talents, work ethic and leadership are unmatched.”

To no surprise his biggest thrill was helping the Ravens win the Super Bowl in New Orleans in February 2013, 34-31 over San Francisco, in Lewis’ final game.

“To actually play the Super Bowl in my backyard, that was it right there. It doesn’t get any better than that,” Reed said. “We walked off the field as champions.”

Fangio returns to help Broncos win Hall of Fame game

Associated Press

CANTON, Ohio — For a while Thursday, Vic Fangio didn’t know if his long-awaited debut as a head coach would happen in the Hall of Fame game.

Fangio finished team meetings, then headed to a hospital because of a kidney stone. Though determined to lead his new team, the Denver Broncos, against Atlanta, “I didn’t know if I would make it.”

He did, and he was made a winner thanks to a late rally.

Fangio — an NFL assistant coach for nearly two decades — saw a late interception set up rookie Juwan Winfree’s 15-yard touchdown catch, and his team edged the Falcons 14-10

to open the NFL’s preseason.

Yes, it was an exhibition game — the real first test comes Sept. 9 at Oakland. Still, Fangio was getting his chance to run a team. So this truly was a debut.

“Winning has cured more things than penicillin,” joked Fangio, who still had not passed the stone when he met with the media after the game. “Nobody is doing backflips and cartwheels like in the regular season.”

Trey Johnson’s interception of Matt Schaub’s pass after the Atlanta backup quarterback was pressured set up Denver at the Falcons 38 with 5:21 remaining. A 14-yard pass interference call on fourth down

against Rashard Causey kept Denver in it, but the Broncos were hurt by a holding penalty against rookie Ryan Crozier.

Unfazed, rookie Brett Rypien hurled a pass into the right corner of the end zone, where it was deflected and Winfree latched onto it with 1:26 remaining.

“Trey made a nice play at the end, and Winfree made an acrobatic catch,” Fangio said. “It’s always good to be here for this game. It’s always great to be around great ex-players and owners.”

Fangio also became the first coach to utilize the new rule allowing challenges of pass interference calls. Late in the second quarter, Linden Stephens was called for a 43-yard

defensive penalty. Officials upheld the call.

“I made a statement I’d be the first to throw the flag on defensive pass interference,” said Fangio, one of the premier defensive coordinators the league has seen.

Both teams had eight-play, first-half drives for touchdowns. Denver’s was finished by Khalifani Muhammad’s 3-yard run up the middle.

Atlanta tied it with a precise two-minute drill guided by first-year quarterback Kurt Benkert, who is seeking a backup job to Matt Ryan. Benkert took the Falcons 61 yards in 1:17, hitting running back Brian Hill with a 3-yard touchdown pass.

Undersize Mawae used head

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Dirty. A cheap-shot artist. Even a dirty Christian for wearing a cross on his face mask and then using every trick Kevin Mawae knew to open holes for his running back or protect his quarterback.

Mawae heard all that chatter, and it bothered him.

Then he realized he was playing football the only way he knew how as an undersized center in the NFL.

"I wasn't stronger and bigger than a lot of guys," Mawae said. "Early in my career, I was considered a finesse player, and that bothered me because I wasn't. I was a technician. And I learned my craft, and I took it to an art form in some sense that I knew what I was doing. I put my body in position to do things that guys didn't know how to counter, and they didn't like that."

And on Saturday, Mawae will be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, capping a career of 241 games played over 16 seasons with three teams. A three-time All Pro, he was an eight-time Pro Bowl center

and a member of the NFL's All-Decade Team for the 2000s. He also blocked for a 1,000-yard rusher in 13 seasons by five different running backs, capped by the NFL's sixth 2,000-yard rushing performance in his final season.

This honor is still a surreal feeling for Mawae, who found it difficult just going into the bust room at the Hall of Fame a couple of months ago.

"That's where legends live, and I'm thinking about guys I played against that are there or played with or the legends I grew up watching play and I get to be among them," Mawae said. "And you know it's exciting, but it's still like you got to pinch yourself to make sure it's still a reality."

Mawae earned his spot by finding ways to fend off men bigger and stronger than he was at 6-foot-4 and 289 pounds. That meant studying each opponent, knowing the game, making calls and run checks at the center spot. Mawae never made a mistake when making a run check.

"It definitely was the right decision," Chris Johnson said

with a chuckle of Mawae's calls while in Tennessee.

He blocked for two of Chris Warren's 1,000-yard rushing seasons in Seattle. When the Seahawks told Mawae he wasn't the caliber of player he thought he was after four seasons, he became the highest-paid center in the NFL in 1998 playing for coach Bill Parcells with the New York Jets.

That's where Mawae and his fellow offensive linemen started including running backs in their meetings each Thursday to keep everyone on the same page. Mawae blocked for seven of Curtis Martin's 10 1,000-yard seasons with the Jets, including a then-franchise record 1,464 yards in 1999 by the now Pro Football Hall of Fame running back.

Mawae played 177 consecutive games until a torn left triceps ended his final season with the Jets after six games in 2005. He signed with the Tennessee Titans and impressed coach Mike Munchak, who noticed that Mawae aggravated his opponents so much they talked to the center throughout a game.

Gonzalez redefined tight end

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Matt Ryan was in only his second season in 2009 when he kept hearing newly acquired tight end Tony Gonzalez insist he was open on plays.

"I would go back and watch the film and he was like completely covered," Ryan said.

Covered? The Atlanta Falcons quarterback saw play after play where Gonzalez was surrounded by two or three defenders.

"I was like, 'What are you talking about, man?'" Ryan said. "And he was like, 'Nah, if you just put it in this one spot, it'll be perfect.' It took me a while to develop that trust to let it rip and throw it to this spot, but he was right. He was open, and if you could deliver the ball in a spot that he could make a play, he didn't let you down."

It was the ability of Gonzalez to make those tough catches, especially on third down and in the red zone, that helped make him a first-ballot pick who will be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame on Saturday.

Gonzalez became the most productive tight end in NFL history in his career with the Kansas City Chiefs and Falcons. He was elected to the Chiefs' Hall of Fame in 2018 and says he's grateful to fan bases in Kansas City and Atlanta.

Gonzalez's mark on the game was about more than his 1,325 receptions, second only to Jerry Rice in league history.

A six-time All-Pro and member of the NFL All-Decade Teams of the 2000s, Gonzalez played a lead role in revolutionizing the tight end position. Instead of just coming out of a blocking stance to catch passes like old-school tight ends, Gonzalez lined up all over the field, forcing mismatches with slower linebackers or smaller defensive backs.

Chiefs' Robinson finally gets into HoF

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — It seemed that one by one, members of the only Kansas City Chiefs team to win the Super Bowl would get a phone call or a knock on the door letting them know they had become Hall of Famers.

The quarterback, Len Dawson. The linebackers, Bobby Bell and Willie Lanier. Even the coach, Hank Stram. Eight in all from the team that beat the Vikings in Super Bowl IV were enshrined in Canton.

Now there are nine.

Johnny Robinson, the former LSU standout-turned-star safety during the years of the AFL-NFL merger, was chosen by 48 selectors after being nominated by the Hall of Fame's seniors committee. Robinson was

passed over six times during the 1980s, but will finally get to slip on that famous gold jacket.

"I'm thrilled," he said in a statement. "I can't tell you how pleased I am to have been selected."

Robinson declined interview requests through a Chiefs spokesman, but his induction still echoed through the halls of their team facility. He is the sixth defensive starter from the 1967 championship team headed to Canton, joining Curley Culp, Buck Buchanan and fellow defensive back Emmitt Thomas, along with Bell and Lanier.

He shined during that Super Bowl win, too.

The Chiefs led the Vikings early in the second quarter when Robinson was in position

to pick up a fumble that scuttled Minnesota's drive. Then in the fourth quarter, he had one of three interceptions of Joe Kapp and Gary Cuozzo that helped them seal the 23-7 victory.

It remains the last Super Bowl appearance by the Chiefs.

"We are thrilled that Johnny Robinson will be enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame," team chairman and CEO Clark Hunt said in a statement. "Johnny was part of the foundation of the Super Bowl 4 championship team and was one of the best defensive backs of his generation."

Robinson emerged as one of the biggest stars on the LSU Tigers' football team, joining Louisiana locals Billy Cannon and Warren Rabb in the backfield.

Cole wins 9th straight as Astros roll

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Gerrit Cole didn't lose a game in June or July and continued his remarkable run on the first day of August.

Cole pitched one-run ball over seven innings and extended his winning streak to a career-best nine games as the Houston Astros beat the Indians 7-1 on Thursday, spoiling the Cleveland debut of Yasiel Puig and the return of Danny Salazar.

The right-hander gave up four hits, all in the first four innings, and struck out four for Houston, which has the best record in the American League at 70-40. Cole (13-5) leads the majors with 216 strikeouts and has not lost since May 22.

"We just kept making pitches and trying to mix up spots," said Cole, who has a 1.91 ERA

in 13 starts since his last loss. "Although they were putting them in play for the most part, their hitters were off-balance outside of maybe four-five. It was a good night."

Alex Bregman, Michael Brantley and Yordan Alvarez drove in two runs apiece, while George Springer hit his MLB-leading eighth leadoff home run and scored three times. Bregman went 3-for-3 with a solo homer.

The Astros won the rubber match of the three-game set and reached 70 victories in a franchise-record tying 110 games. Houston went 4-2 on its road trip against playoff contenders St. Louis and Cleveland.

"Two series wins against two really good teams," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "We've got a good demeanor on this club about staying

above everything else, getting through the trade deadline. I applaud our guys for continuing to methodically win."

The enigmatic Puig doubled off the wall in the fourth and went 1-for-3 with a stolen base in his first game since being acquired from Cincinnati. Framil Reyes, who came over from San Diego in the same three-team trade, had a single in four at-bats.

Both sluggers received warm ovations each time they batted and after being thrown out at home plate on different plays; Puig by right fielder Josh Reddick, Reyes by left fielder Brantley.

"That was a big part of their game tonight, good defense," said Puig, who was in the lineup after appealing a three-game suspension for his role in a wild brawl Tuesday between the

Reds and Pirates. "And Cole was very good today."

Salazar (0-1) had his first appearance in the majors since the 2017 AL Division Series cut short because of a strained groin. The former All-Star right-hander had surgery on his throwing shoulder last July, and allowed two runs in four innings and 66 pitches.

"At least I got through four innings," said Salazar, who topped out at 88.3 mph. "I'll take that as a positive after being out of the game for two years. My groin started getting worse as the game went on, and that took me down a little bit."

Indians manager Terry Francona missed the game after undergoing an eye operation earlier in the day. Bench coach Brad Mills filled in. A team spokesman said Francona is expected back Friday.

MLB roundup

Cardinals blank Cubs, move into first in NL Central

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Jack Flaherty didn't panic. Instead, the St. Louis Cardinals' right-hander simply stayed the course during a lengthy stretch without a victory.

That patience paid off Thursday.

Flaherty struck out nine in seven strong innings and catcher Matt Wieters hit a three-run homer as the Cardinals beat the Chicago Cubs 8-0 in a matchup of NL Central leaders.

The Cardinals won two games in the three-game set and claimed first in the division, a game ahead of Chicago. The Cubs have lost four of six overall and 11 of their last 16 on the road.

Flaherty (5-6) allowed just one hit and walked two in recording his first win since May 14, a span of 79 days and 12 starts.

He threw well at times dur-

ing the skid — he allowed two earned runs or less in four successive starts coming into Thursday.

Most importantly, he remained philosophical during the rough stretch.

"It's going to take care of itself nine times out of 10," Flaherty said.

It certainly did.

Flaherty held the Cubs without a hit until newcomer Nicholas Castellanos singled to right with two out in the sixth. Flaherty retired 13 straight batters from the first to fifth innings.

"He was in control of what he was doing," St. Louis manager Mike Shildt said. "He saw good life to his fastball. A lot of quality pitches."

Rays 9, Red Sox 4: Rookie left-hander Brendan McKay struck out seven, Mike Zunino and Austin Meadows homered, and visiting Tampa Bay completed a three-game sweep of Boston.

The Rays have won four straight and hold the AL's final wild card by a half-game over Oakland. Boston fell 3½ games behind Tampa Bay.

The Red Sox lost their fourth straight and fell 10½ games behind the AL East-leading Yankees.

Marlins 5, Twins 4 (12): Newly acquired reliever Sam Dyson blew a three-run lead in the ninth inning, then Harold Ramirez hit a leadoff homer in the 12th to make host Miami a winner over Minnesota.

Phillies 10, Giants 2: J.T. Realmuto hit a three-run homer and fell a triple shy of the cycle, Cesar Hernandez and Roman Quinn also went deep, and host Philadelphia beat San Francisco.

Mets 4, White Sox 0: Zack Wheeler (8-6) tossed seven innings of four-hit ball, Robinson Cano drove in two runs with a homer and double and visiting New York beat Chicago for its

seventh straight win.

Athletics 5, Brewers 3: Matt Chapman hit a two-run home run off struggling closer Josh Hader (1-5) in the eighth and host Oakland beat Milwaukee.

Blue Jays 11, Orioles 2: Vladimir Guerrero Jr. hit two of visiting Toronto's five home runs to back a solid performance by fellow rookie Trent Thornton (4-7) in a win over Baltimore.

Braves 4, Reds 1 (6): Freddie Freeman hit a three-run homer, Adam Duvall went deep and Max Fried (12-4) pitched six strong innings to lead host Atlanta past Cincinnati in a game that was cut short by heavy rain.

Dodgers 8, Padres 2: Rookie Will Smith hit his first career grand slam, and Clayton Kershaw passed Sandy Koufax on the franchise career strikeouts list while throwing six strong innings in host Los Angeles' win over San Diego.