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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US envoy queries corruption in Afghanistan

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The United States ambassador to Afghanistan on Thursday openly questioned the Afghan government's commitment to fighting corruption after reports that a key figure in a massive banking scandal received an early prison release in return for a large campaign donation.

Ambassador John Bass' comments came after local media reports alleged that former Kabul Bank chief executive Khalilullah Ferozi was released into house arrest after a \$30 million donation to President Ashraf Ghani's election campaign.

Presidential spokesman Sediq Seddiqi told The Associ-

ated Press that those reports are "a big lie" and said Ferozi was transferred into house arrest because of his deteriorating health.

The U.S. comments further strain relations with the Afghan government as a U.S. envoy and the Taliban near a deal to end America's longest war. The talks have excluded Ghani's government as the Taliban describe it as a U.S. puppet.

"To be honest, I'm very sad to see this," Seddiqi said of the ambassador's comments posted on Twitter.

The Kabul Bank scandal in 2010 drew global headlines and became a test of the Afghan government's ability and willingness to address widespread corruption. The country's

largest private bank nearly collapsed, and Ferozi and chairman Sherkhan Farnood were sent to prison and told to repay more than \$800 million.

Farnood recently died in prison, and Ghani's spokesman said the president approved Ferozi's transfer into house arrest after the judiciary system looked into his health.

The move was a "humanitarian act" and one to help ensure that Ferozi would stay alive to repay the hundreds of millions of dollars, Seddiqi said.

He dismissed the idea of a campaign donation by Ferozi, saying that "if he had this much money, he would have" repaid it as required.

Ferozi has less than a year left in his sentence, Seddiqi

said.

The U.S. ambassador said he was "disturbed" by allegations first raised this week by presidential candidate and former national intelligence chief Rahmatullah Nabil.

"Countless Afghans suffered in the past decade because international assistance funds were stolen for personal gain," the ambassador said.

Washington's Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, which monitors billions of dollars in U.S. aid to the country, said in a report earlier this year that Afghanistan may not be ready for peace unless it finds a way to reintegrate Taliban fighters into society and combat "endemic corruption."

Iranian tanker to leave Gibraltar despite US move

Associated Press

MADRID — Gibraltar on Thursday allowed a detained Iranian supertanker to leave the British overseas territory despite a last-minute U.S. attempt to seize the vessel, potentially defusing tensions between London and Tehran as a British-flagged tanker remains held by the Islamic Republic.

The release of the Grace 1 comes amid a growing confrontation between Iran and the West after U.S. President Donald Trump pulled Washington out of Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers over a year ago.

In past weeks, the Persian Gulf region has seen six attacks on oil tankers that the U.S. has blamed on Iran and the downing of a U.S. surveillance drone by Iranian forces. Iran denied it was behind the tanker at-

tacks, although it has seized other tankers.

Gibraltar Chief Minister Fabian Picardo said the U.S. was still on time to request a new legal procedure for seizing the Grace 1, but that provisions under the European Union's sanctions regulations were ending Thursday after the Iranian government assured him in writing that the ship will not send its 2.1 million barrels of crude to a sanctioned entity in Syria.

Reacting to the developments, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif accused the U.S. of trying to "steal our property on the high seas."

"Having failed to accomplish its objectives through its #EconomicTerrorism — including depriving cancer patients of medicine — the US attempted to abuse the legal system to

steal our property on the high seas," Zarif tweeted, calling the Trump administration's moves a "piracy attempt."

It was not clear whether the Grace 1 would sail away immediately; nor was it known what the Trump's administration strategy was. The U.S. Justice Department did not respond to requests for comment.

"This is an important material change in the destination of the vessel and the beneficiary of its cargo," Gibraltar's Picardo said in a statement, adding that the move ensured that the Syrian government of President Bashar Assad would be deprived of more than \$140 million of crude oil.

Gibraltar said it had "solid documentary evidence" that the vessel was bound for Syria when it was detained on July 4, but that the political fallout had prompted talks with Iranian of-

ficials in London.

Picardo's office released copies of communications with the Syrian Embassy in the U.K. shortly after the British overseas territory's Supreme Court decision to release the tanker.

The court had delayed its decision after the Justice Department made a last-minute application to extend the detention of the oil tanker, the Gibraltar government had said earlier Thursday. But there was no U.S. application to the court when the hearing resumed in the afternoon, the Gibraltar Chronicle newspaper reported, quoting the court's chief justice, Anthony Dudley.

Picardo said that any U.S. request to detain the Grace 1 would now to be examined under bilateral agreements and outside of the EU sanction mechanism.

Head of Fla. Navy medical facility fired

BY CARLOS M. VAZQUEZ II
Stars and Stripes

The Navy's head of Naval Medicine Operational Training Center, headquartered in Pensacola, Fla., has been relieved of his duties as commanding officer.

Capt. Theron Toole was removed by Rear Adm. Tina Davidson, commanding officer of Navy Medicine Education, Training and Logistics Command, on Tuesday "due to a loss of confidence in his ability to command," the U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery spokeswoman Angela Steadman told Stars and Stripes via email Thursday.

The center trains approximately 18,000 personnel annually in operational medical and aviation survival training, with six detachments on the U.S. East and West Coasts — including 16 training sites, according to the center's website.

The command oversees the medical training of Navy and Marine Corps special operation forces, expeditionary units, submarine forces and aviation units operating throughout the world, according to its website.

Toole will be reassigned to a position within Navy Medicine Education, Training and Logistics Command and will be replaced by the center's deputy commander, Capt. Timothy Richardson, who will "serve as interim commanding officer until a permanent commanding officer is identified," Steadman said.

Richardson became deputy commander of the center in April 2019, according to his online biography.

No additional details surrounding the relief were released as of Thursday.

Toole, of Chicago, was commissioned a lieutenant in the Navy Reserve in 1989, two years after receiving his medical degree from Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tenn., according to his biography on the center's website.

Quakes caused up to \$5B in damage to Calif. naval base

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Two months after twin earthquakes rocked the small California towns of Ridgecrest and Trona, details are emerging about the damage done to the nearby China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, the Navy's largest base for developing and testing weapons of warfare.

The base was so badly damaged that officials are suggesting several buildings be demolished and replaced. The cost of returning the facilities to normal could top \$5 billion, according to Navy documents.

The recommendations still have to be approved by Congress and President Donald Trump, according to Lee Saunders, spokesman for the Southwest division of the Naval Facilities Engineering Command.

The China Lake naval station is less than 10 miles from the epicenters of the Ridgecrest quakes that rocked the region on July 4 and July 5. The base

was open only to essential personnel after the first earthquake, a magnitude 6.4. But following the larger 7.1 temblor, the facility was evacuated.

Two weeks after the quakes, the base told personnel in a Facebook post that building use remained limited and many services had been relocated. Information about damage to the base has been sparse since.

"A degree of normalcy has outwardly returned to the Western Mojave Desert," the social media post said. "Nevertheless, restoration and repair of infrastructure and facilities diligently continues throughout the installation."

Naval engineers have worked to repair facilities on the base so employees and their families could return, but according to a report this week in the Navy Times, the base has still not been deemed "fully mission capable." The latest report shows that officials assessed all buildings, utilities and facilities (3,598 structures) for 13

days after the earthquakes and found damage totaled \$5.2 billion. Replacing buildings would cost \$2.2 billion, but officials also must replace or repair specialized equipment, furniture, machine tools, telecommunication assets and other facilities, the document shows.

Capt. Mark Edelson, a commanding officer for the Naval Facilities Engineering Command's Southwest division, could not immediately be reached for comment, but he told Navy Times this week that more than half of the base's damaged buildings were built before 1980 and did not meet seismic standards.

The base's Hangar 3, which holds advanced weaponry and aircraft, suffered structural cracking. The Michelson Laboratory, which houses a unit that tests advanced weapons technology, was declared unsafe after major cracks and other signs of "stress" were found in its foundation, columns and beams, Navy Times reported.

AMRDEC SAFE done as DOD moves to 2.0

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Users will be unable to download material from a popular military file exchange service after Thursday, as the Defense Department transitions to a new site with larger capacity and better security.

Aviation and Missile Research, Development and Engineering Center Safe Access File Exchange, known as AMRDEC SAFE, had become a hub for transferring large files. A message on the site Thursday announced its end and directed visitors to the new site, DOD SAFE.

An AMRDEC temporary shutdown last year caused hic-

cups for military commands and government workers who had come to rely on it to handle sensitive unclassified information. Pentagon officials were forced to find an alternative.

"It was never intended to be the enterprise solution for DOD members that it turned into," Sophie Johnson-Shapoval, a computer engineer with the Defense Collaboration Service, said in a statement Thursday.

The Defense Information System Agency, which operates DOD SAFE "will bridge the capability gap as AMRDEC sunsets," said Carey Burris, project manager for the Defense Collaboration Service, as quoted in the statement.

Found online at <https://safe>.

apps.mil/, DOD SAFE offers several improvements, including larger transfer sizes and end-to-end encryption.

"We're working with [the missile center's] team to transition between the two services, and our goal is to provide an even better service," Johnson-Shapoval said.

Originally developed for the Huntsville, Ala.-based R&D center, now known as U.S. Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Aviation & Missile Center, AMRDEC SAFE was designed to allow government officials at Redstone Arsenal to exchange data with civilian industry partners.

Military Spouse Transition Program launched

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is rolling out a new program that provides military spouses resources to prepare them and their family for the time when their husband or wife transitions out of the military.

The Military Spouse Transition Program, or MySTeP, is an initiative that launched in early August through the Pentagon's Military Community and Family Policy office and provides military spouses information to help prepare them for the inevitability of their family leaving the military.

While servicemembers go through the Transition Assistance Program, or TAP, to prepare for their transition, military spouses have faced a lack of information about the transition, which causes a chal-

lenge for families, according to Eddy Mentzer, the associate director for children, youth, and families in Military Community and Family Policy office in the Defense Department's office of the undersecretary for personnel and readiness.

"And we recognize very seriously that when there's a family involved, the military spouse plays an equal role in the entire transition process," he said.

Pentagon officials realized about three years ago that there was an information and resources gap for spouses, Mentzer said. Though spouses can attend the TAP program, they found it was often difficult for families to find child care or to take time off from their jobs.

The program's team spoke to military spouses who had gone through a transition about what they wished they had done as a spouse to prepare them for eventually tran-

sitioning out of the military and what resources they wish they had once they left, Mentzer said. Some spouses mentioned how they wished when they were younger that they had developed better financial habits such as saving money. Mentzer said he also was interested to know how important networks were to them, for a career and personal support.

"So we want to educate them ... that there are things they can do right now that they can take advantage of," he said.

The Pentagon developed the MySTeP program as a journey, with resources for the first day that they became a military spouse to the day that their husband or wife retires or separates. MySTeP is available on the Military OneSource website, a one-stop for programs and resources for military families through the Defense Department.

N. Korea missile tests crank up threat level

The Washington Post

TOKYO — President Donald Trump has brushed off North Korea's resumption of missile launches, but the volley of tests in the past four months has significantly raised the country's military capabilities and the threat they pose to South Korea and U.S. forces on the peninsula, experts say.

The launches have included at least two new types of short-range ballistic missiles and a mobile multiple-rocket launcher. Pyongyang has also seen fit to show off a submarine that may be intended to carry nuclear warheads.

Trump says he's been told that Kim Jong

Un, the North Korean leader, "only smiles when he sees me." But photos released by North Korean state media show the dictator beaming from cheek to cheek at the successful tests.

"There's no question that the 2019 testing campaign that began in April has showcased some quite serious qualitative advancement in North Korean missile capabilities," said Ankit Panda, an adjunct senior fellow in the Defense Posture Project at the Federation of American Scientists. "The core theme across all of the new weapons seems to be survivability, responsiveness, and missile-defense defeat."

The weapons that North Korea has show-

cased, including a road-mobile short-range ballistic missile known as the KN-23, with a range of at least 280 miles, appear specifically designed to confound South Korea's missile-defense system.

"The three missiles have several things in common: they are solid fuel, they are mobile, they are fast, they fly low, and at least the KN-23 can maneuver in-flight, which is very impressive," said Vipin Narang, an associate professor of political science at MIT.

"Any one of the missiles would pose a challenge to regional and [South Korean] missile defenses given these characteristics. Together, they pose a nightmare."

Merkel says military must improve amid US moves

BY SLOBODAN LEKIC
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — German Chancellor Angela Merkel said her country must take "pains" to improve its armed forces amid U.S. threats to move American bases from Germany unless Berlin boosts defense spending.

Merkel played down U.S. diplomatic warnings about the possibility of relocating some of the roughly 35,000 troops in Germany to neighboring Poland.

"I think that the German (bases) are good locations for the American soldiers," she said after a meeting Wednesday with Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda,

as cited by the German t-online news website.

"There are good reasons for the (U.S.) bases here in Germany but at the same time we know that we must take the pains to get the German military in better shape."

The German armed forces have come under sharp criticism in recent years for a steady decline in readiness, despite growing security threats from Russia and others.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly criticized NATO members, specifically Germany, for not stepping up to contribute more for the defense of the Continent.

Merkel appeared to be referring to a statement last Friday by U.S. Ambassador

Richard Grenell, who said it was "actually offensive" that Washington had to pay to keep its forces based in Germany while Berlin failed to meet NATO's defense spending target of 2% of its gross domestic product.

Meanwhile, U.S. envoy to Poland Georgette Mosbacher last week suggested relocating U.S. troops from Germany to Poland, echoing earlier comments by Trump.

Grenell told the German dpa news agency that he agreed with Mosbacher.

Poland has offered to contribute up to \$2 billion to construct a permanent U.S. base. The U.S. currently maintains troops in Poland only on a rotational basis.

Autopsy: Broken bones in Epstein's neck

The Washington Post

An autopsy found that financier Jeffrey Epstein sustained multiple breaks in his neck bones, according to two people familiar with the findings, deepening the mystery about the circumstances around his death.

Among the bones broken in Epstein's neck was the hyoid bone, which in men is near the Adam's apple. Such breaks can occur in those who hang themselves, particularly if they are older, according to forensic experts and studies on the subject. But they are more common in victims of homicide by

strangulation, the experts said.

The details are the first findings to emerge from the autopsy of Epstein, a convicted sex offender and multimillionaire in federal custody on charges of sex trafficking. He died early Saturday morning after guards found him hanging in his cell at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan and he could not be revived.

U.S. Attorney General William Barr, whose department oversees the Bureau of Prisons facility where Epstein died, has described his death as an "apparent suicide." Justice officials declined to comment

on the new information from Epstein's autopsy.

The office of New York City's chief medical examiner, Barbara Sampson, completed an autopsy of Epstein's body Sunday. But Sampson listed the cause of his death as pending.

Sampson's office did not comment on the injuries found in the autopsy.

The details add to the bizarre circumstances surrounding Epstein's death, which have launched a wave of questions and conspiracy theories about how he could have died in federal custody. Even President Donald Trump has egged on

speculation, without evidence, that Epstein — whose alleged victims say they were pushed to have sex with his powerful and celebrity friends — might have been killed to keep him from spilling the secrets of others.

The revelation of Epstein's neck injuries follows reports that officers at the Metropolitan Correctional Center broke protocol and failed to properly monitor him.

Corrections officers had not checked on Epstein for "several" hours before he was found hanging in his cell, a person familiar with the matter said, one of a series of missteps in the hours leading up to his death.

Syrian forces move closer to major rebel-held town

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Syrian forces gained more ground from insurgents in the country's northwest on Thursday, edging closer to a major rebel-held town a day after militants shot down a government warplane in the area.

The government offensive, which intensified last week, has displaced nearly 100,000 people over the past four days, according to the Syrian Response Coordination Group, a relief group active in northwestern Syria.

Syrian troops have been on the offensive in Idlib and its surroundings, the last major rebel stronghold in Syria, since April 30. The region is home to some 3 million people, many of them displaced in other battles around the war-torn country.

The fighting over the past days has been concentrated on two fronts as government forces march toward the town of Khan Sheikhoun from the east and west. The latest offensive also aims to besiege rebel-held towns and villages in northern parts of Hama province, according to opposition activists.

The town of Khan Sheikhoun is a stronghold of al-Qaida-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the most powerful group in the rebel-held areas. The town was the scene of a chemical attack on April 4, 2017, that killed 89 people.

The government-controlled Syrian Central Military Media said Thursday that pro-government fighters captured three small villages, just west of Khan Sheikhoun.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitoring group, said the villages fell in the morning hours and that the town of Khan Sheikhoun is being bombarded relentlessly.

Syrian state media confirmed insurgents had downed the government plane on Wednesday. An al-Qaida-linked group has released a video of the pilot in which the handcuffed man identified himself as a lieutenant colonel in the Syrian air force.

In the video, the pilot says his fighter jet was shot down when he was carrying out a mission near Khan Sheikhoun.

Vaping companies sue to delay e-cigarettes review

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A vaping industry group sued the U.S. government on Wednesday to delay an upcoming review of thousands of e-cigarettes on the market.

The legal challenge by the Vapor Technology Association is the latest hurdle in the Food and Drug Administration's yearslong effort to regulate the multibillion-dollar vaping industry, which includes makers and retailers of e-cigarette devices and flavored solutions.

The vaping group argued that the latest deadline of next May to submit products for review could wipe out many of the smaller companies. The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in Kentucky.

E-cigarettes first appeared in the U.S. more than a decade ago and have grown in popularity despite little research on their long-term effects, including whether they can help smokers quit cigarettes.

In recent years, health authorities have warned of an epidemic of vaping by underage teenagers, particularly the leading brand Juul, known for its high nicotine content and

easy-to-conceal device, which resembles a flash drive.

Nicotine is what makes both cigarettes and e-cigarettes addictive, and health experts say the chemical is harmful to developing brains.

San Francisco-based Juul is among 800 member companies of the vaping association.

The 2009 law that gave the FDA power over the traditional tobacco products did not mention e-cigarettes. And it wasn't until 2016 that the agency expanded its own regulations to include the devices. But since then FDA regulators have repeatedly pushed back the timeline, at one point until 2022, to begin review of the legions of vaping products that have come to market.

Frustrated by the delays, anti-tobacco groups including the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids sued the FDA to speed up the process. In June, a federal judge sided with the groups and set a deadline of next May for all companies to submit their products for federal review. The FDA has until next month to appeal the decision.

The vaping group's lawsuit said the FDA has now set five different deadlines.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Man broke into hotel, showered, stole TV

NM LAS VEGAS — A northern New Mexico man faces charges after authorities said he broke into a hotel room and took a shower before stealing a television.

The Las Vegas Optic reported Ignacio Gallegos was recently arrested following reports of a man leaving the Plaza Hotel in Las Vegas with a TV.

Las Vegas Police said Gallegos, 30, broke into the hotel room, apparently took a shower, then removed a 50-inch television from the wall.

Gallegos is facing commercial burglary and larceny charges.

Charity swim rerouted after sharks spotted

MA PROVINCETOWN — An increase in the number of great white sharks around Cape Cod has forced a longtime Massachusetts charity swim race to be rerouted.

The Cape Cod Times reported that Cape Cod National Seashore officials denied a permit for the 32nd annual Swim for Life & Paddler Flotilla. The race was originally slated to start off Long Point Beach in Provincetown Harbor.

Agency superintendent Brian Carlstrom said the agency made the decision out of an abundance of caution.

The rerouted Sept. 7 race will be closer to shore.

Injured baby raccoon walks with wheelchair

AR LITTLE ROCK — A baby raccoon with a brain injury that hinders her mobility is walking again in Arkansas with the help of a wheelchair.

Walkin' Pets, which makes wheelchairs for animals, said the source of Vittles' injury is unknown, but it prevented her from balancing and supporting herself. Susan Curtis is a wildlife rehabilitation specialist who helps the state's bats and raccoons. The company said Curtis found Vittles when she was 8 weeks old.

Walkin' Pets project manager Jennifer Pratt said the wheelchair will adjust as Vittles grows. The company said Vittles can use the wheelchair to sharpen her balance and stability so she can walk on her own.

Police: Woman drove 10 miles the wrong way

NH MANCHESTER — State police in New Hampshire said a 22-year-old woman is facing multiple charges after she allegedly drove the wrong way for 10 miles on a state highway, even going through a toll plaza in the wrong direction.

Police said the vehicle driven by Rachel Barris of Hollis continued traveling northbound on the wrong side of F.E. Everett Turnpike.

She entered Interstate 293 before eventually going into Manchester. Along the way, Barris passed the wrong way through Bedford toll plaza.

Police say Barris was charged with driving while intoxicated and reckless conduct.

State liquor stores top \$1B in revenue

VA RICHMOND — Virginia's state-owned liquor stores had another record-breaking year and topped \$1 billion in revenues.

Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority officials attributed the increase in part

to customers buying more top shelf liquor than in the past. Irish whiskey was up 15%, tequila at 14% and bourbon at 10%.

Tito's Handmade domestic vodka was the number one seller for the second year in a row.

Man arrested on 12th drunken driving offense

WI EAU CLAIRE — Police said a man found passed out behind the wheel at an Eau Claire gas station faces his 12th drunken driving charge.

WQOW-TV reported Keith Bondie, 60, appeared in Eau Claire County Circuit Court where bond was set at \$10,000 cash. The Elk Mound man was arrested at the Kwik Trip. First responders told police they were unable to wake Bondie. He eventually got out of the car after officers arrived.

Bondie was charged with his 12th offense operating while intoxicated and driving with a revoked license.

Thomas the train to deliver school supplies

MI FLINT — More than 1,000 pounds of school supplies were headed to the Flint area along with characters from the popular children's show "Thomas & Friends."

Thomas the Tank Engine and Sir Topham Hatt were scheduled to arrive at Crossroads Village & Huckleberry Railroad in Flint.

The school supplies are for Cummings and Educare, two pre-kindergarten programs created to combat possible developmental delays following Flint's crisis with lead-tainted water. Elevated lead levels can cause such delays and other health problems.

The supplies were collected

at "Day Out with Thomas" events across the country and by the United Way of Genesee County.

Firework from event lands inside home

WY GILLETTE — Officials said a firework rocket that was launched during a show for the Pyrotechnics Guild International convention landed in a Wyoming home and sparked a small fire.

The Gillette News Record reported the rocket broke through the roof of the Gillette home about 2 miles from the event center where the fireworks display was taking place.

The Campbell County Fire Department said the flames were extinguished before firefighters got to the house. No one was injured.

Guild spokesman Tom Sklebar says the organization will pay for the damages.

Ex-theme park worker accused of stealing

FL ORLANDO — Authorities said a 28-year-old former worker at Walt Disney World's Typhoon Lagoon stole cash, credit cards, gift cards and other items from an employee locker room at the water park.

An Orange County Sheriff's Office arrest affidavit said Shariel Agosto knew how to navigate the behind the scenes area of the water park. She is accused of using the cash and credit cards to buy gas for her car, food at a restaurant and of attempting to purchase \$250 in alcohol.

The Orlando Sentinel reported Agosto was arrested Aug. 1 on charges including unlawful possession of a stolen credit card and petit theft.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Air Force LB Johnson has future mapped out

Associated Press

AIR FORCE ACADEMY, Colo. — Air Force senior linebacker Kyle Johnson did some mapping and data collecting during his confidential summer internship at a think tank in the nation's capital.

Sorry, that's really all he can reveal. His work was either sensitive or classified.

He does have clearance to divulge his long-term game plan: Attend graduate school, go through special forces training and down the road become a leader in the intelligence community.

More immediately, and considerably less hush-hush, Johnson wants to lead the Falcons back to a bowl game. The secret's certainly out on Air Force's hard-hitting, ball-hawking inside linebacker who runs like a safety.

"On a scale of 1 to 10, he's a 100 in terms of being an alert and instinctive football player," Air Force coach Troy Calhoun said. "He is focused and he is driven."

An apt description — focused on the now and driven toward the future.

About the now: The 6-foot, 225-pound Johnson's mind is strictly on Colgate in the season opener on Aug. 31 at Falcon Stadium. It's the first step in bouncing back after two consecutive 5-7 seasons. The Falcons are predicted to finish third in the Mountain division of the Mountain West.

"As far as pure talent goes, this is the best team we've had since I've been here," said Johnson, a management major/Spanish minor from Jacksonville, Fla. "It's all about how we capitalize and use that potential."

About the future: He's got his path care-

fully mapped out to accomplish his goal of becoming a top figure in the world of intelligence by the time he's in his 50s.

Over the summer he worked with C4ADS, a nonprofit think tank in Washington that provides data-driven analysis on global conflict and security issues. On its website the company said it uses "cutting-edge technologies to manage, integrate, and analyze disparate data from diverse languages, regions, and sources, incorporating our own field research from conflict zones and fragile states."

Johnson couldn't get into specifics about his role with C4ADS given the sensitive or classified nature of various projects. He did write a dossier that just might wind up in the hands of an intelligence agency.

Now that sure would look good on a graduate-school application.

A standout student, he's considering a list of grad schools that includes Oxford, Georgetown, Harvard and MIT. Johnson wants to earn a master's degree in international relations.

Then, it's on to special forces training to fulfill his military duties. Maybe through the Air Force or possibly a cross-commission program with the Army Green Berets or Navy SEALs.

"There's a clear pipeline to the intelligence agency especially from the officer corps," said Johnson, who completed a language immersion program a summer ago and was on the cadet leadership team during survival training. "There's a lot of ways to make the world a better place. In the short term, reducing and subtracting negatives is probably the most efficient. When my body can no longer support the

lifestyle of an operator, I can move on to using what God's given me up here (his head) and make an even bigger impact."

Hence, his designs on going into the intelligence field.

"I'm hoping to bring a moral purpose and a modern perspective," Johnson said.

He couldn't disclose more of his vision than that. Not because it's classified, but because it's actually part of his grad-school essay.

There's one thing that could put his plans on temporary hold — a chance in the NFL. President Donald Trump recently said he is looking into offering a waiver that would allow athletes attending the nation's military academies to play professional sports immediately upon graduation. Under the current framework, athletes have to serve two years of active duty before applying for reserve status to pursue a career in professional sports.

"If I play really well, of course I'd love to have that opportunity," Johnson said. "But that's selfish. More than me, I'm part of a team. That's bigger than what I am. My commitment is to be the best football player I can right now for them."

Johnson is coming off a season in which he was second on the team in tackles (70) and tackles for loss (7½). He also returned an interception 32 yards for a TD against Stony Brook.

"Kyle is a character," friend and defensive back Jeremy Fejedelem said. "He's always high-energy and a super-athletic football player. You can expect a lot of big things out of Kyle."

Talks between women's team, US Soccer collapse

Associated Press

Players for the World Cup champion women's national team say mediation talks with the U.S. Soccer Federation in their dispute over equal pay are over.

Molly Levinson, who represents the players in matters concerning the dispute, said in a statement Wednesday that the players look forward to a jury trial.

"We entered this week's mediation with representatives of USSF full of hope," Levinson said. "Today we must conclude these meetings sorely disappointed in the federation's

determination to perpetuate fundamentally discriminatory workplace conditions and behavior."

U.S. Soccer said it had hoped to reach a resolution, but accused the counsel for the players of "an aggressive and ultimately unproductive approach."

"We value our players, and have continually shown that, by providing them with compensation and support that exceeds any other women's team in the world," the federation's statement said.

The players sued U.S. Soccer in March, charging institutionalized gender discrimination

that includes inequitable compensation when compared with their counterparts on the men's national team. The federation countered that pay and benefits for members of the men's and women's teams, bargained by separate unions, can't be compared and said there was no basis for allegations of illegal conduct.

The two sides agreed to mediate the matter once the Women's World Cup in France was over. The United States beat the Netherlands to win the title last month, and afterward fans in the crowd chanted "Equal Pay!"

Federation President Carlos Cordeiro wrote U.S. Soccer members in late July claiming the women's team was paid more overall than the men's team between 2010 and 2018.

The letter stated that the federation paid out \$34.1 million in salary and game bonuses to the women between 2010 and 2018 as opposed to \$26.4 million paid to the men.

The total did not include the value of benefits received only by the women, like health care, Cordeiro wrote.

The players have disputed the figures, claiming they are misleading.

Saints' Cook finding place in offense

Associated Press

METAIRIE, La. — First-year Saints tight end Jared Cook won't take his apparent good fit with record-setting quarterback Drew Brees and New Orleans' prolific offense for granted.

After a decade in the NFL that often fell short of expectations — particularly in Green Bay with star QB Aaron Rodgers in 2016 — Cook has decided that the degree to which he succeeds begins with his own determination to master the scheme in which he plays and his effort to cultivate a strong rapport with his quarterback.

"It's all about the preparation. The more you go into a game plan knowing what to do, knowing what your quarterback is going to check to or tell you before he even says it, I think the preparation in that aspect gives you a step above the competition," said Cook,

who arrived in New Orleans this offseason after signing a two-year, \$15 million contract.

"It's your preparation that's going to get you a little extra open," Cook said. "That's going to make the difference between a 1-yard contested catch or 5-yard separation, wide open. So it's just how I approach the game, how I go about it, how I'm learning. I think that's more important on your growth and it's on you. It starts with you first."

With a 6-foot-5, 254-pound frame, relatively good speed and reliable hands, Cook has been viewed as a tight end with a lot of upside since the Tennessee Titans took him in the third round of the 2009 draft out of South Carolina.

But it wasn't until last season — his 10th in the NFL — that he made his first Pro Bowl with Oakland after posting career highs of 68 catches for 896 yards and six touchdowns.

Last season also happened to mark Jon Gruden's return to coaching with the Raiders. Not surprisingly, Saints coach Sean Payton noticed.

Payton began his NFL coaching career in 1997 as an offensive assistant in Philadelphia, where Gruden was the offensive coordinator at the time. While Payton has evolved in the two decades since, he still sees common threads in his and Gruden's offensive philosophies.

"I cut my teeth a little bit offensively in his system," Payton said. "Jon is extremely talented in putting together a plan. Just the installation, the consistency with how you teach and what you do with your players.

"We're different, but yet there's some similarities," Payton continued. "We'll watch and study their film and look for ideas."

Or in Cook's case, a player who was about to enter free

agency in the same year he'd found a role in which he could thrive.

"There's a little bit of: Is it the right script for success?" Payton said, making a comparison to the film industry. "There's been a lot of real good actors in poor movies and there've been a lot of poor actors in poor movies. I think it is up to us to really look closely at the things that he does well and feature those things."

Brees-to-Cook connections, often 15 to 20 yards downfield, have become commonplace during the first few weeks of training camp.

"One thing you see with Cook is his stature," Payton said. "A lot of times you'll talk about a big target and there is a confidence level when you throw it to someone who's that tall and who's got really good hands. So they've been able to make some good plays."

Giants' Barkley OK with sitting out preseason games

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Saquon Barkley has no problem watching preseason games from the sidelines, if that's what New York Giants coach Pat Shurmur wants.

The NFL offensive rookie of the year last season was in uniform but was a spectator and cheerleader for the Giants' 31-22 victory over the Jets on Thursday.

Speaking to the media Monday after practice, Barkley shrugged off his role as a non-participant. He is getting a lot of work every day in practice. He's been a halfback long enough to know how to run the ball. And he certainly doesn't need to get hit to get ready for the season opener at Dallas on Sept. 8.

If last season is any indication, the 2018 second pick overall is going to be hit around 400 times this season. He carried the ball 261 times for

1,307 yards and was targeted for passes 121 times, catching 91. That's 382 times he was a target and doesn't take into account either the times he has to block or when he is hit while carrying out a fake.

Still, Barkley would not object to playing in the preseason.

"If you know anything about me, or if you ask my teammates, I love the game of football," the Penn State product said. "Any opportunity that you get to play. Every single day we stop, and we mention, especially in the RB group, how big of a blessing it is to come out here and play the sport that you love."

Barkley spoke to Shurmur after being told he was not going to play in the opener and was told there is a plan. Neither he nor Shurmur discussed it.

"I'll let it reveal itself," Shurmur said.

Barkley missed most of preseason last year after straining a hamstring in the opener.

"Do I think I need it? I think

it depends on the player," Barkley said. "Every year is different. Am I ready if I have to? Yes, my mindset every week is to prepare to get ready to go out there and compete at a high level for my team, no matter if it's one snap, two series, one quarter or if I don't play. If I don't play, I stay locked in and try to be the leader that I can to keep the energy and the vibes good on the sideline."

Barkley showed his energy level on Thursday running down the sideline to congratulate rookie quarterback Daniel Jones and receiver Bennie Fowler after a touchdown pass.

Barkley laughed at the idea he needs to get hit to be ready for the season.

"Yeah, I don't think anyone needs to be hit. I think if everyone could choose not to get hit until Week 1 they would choose that," he said. "But you are right, some people like to get that first contact, like to get that first hit. But for me, I'm

the type of player that no matter if it is preseason, playoffs or the regular season, once that first play goes and I get hit, I'm fine."

The Giants have had Barkley lined up as somewhat of a wide receiver on some plays recently. The hope is to match him against a linebacker or safety in open space.

It would be an interesting wrinkle this season, with Odell Beckham Jr. now playing in Cleveland.

However, Barkley is a running back first.

Second-year left guard Will Hernandez said the line is going to do its job whether Barkley is carrying the ball or it's Wayne Gallman, Paul Perkins or any other back.

"We always come out and we give it our all, it doesn't matter what back we've got back there," Hernandez said. "Obviously, Saquon makes things a little bit easier sometimes."

Kershaw fans 10, ties Koufax win mark

Associated Press

MIAMI — An additional day of rest helped Clayton Kershaw to one of his most dominant outings of the season.

Kershaw struck out the first seven batters he faced and matched a season high with 10 strikeouts in seven shutout innings as the Los Angeles Dodgers beat the Miami Marlins 9-1 on Wednesday night.

“Sometimes you get in that groove early,” Kershaw said. “I really don’t care how we get the outs as long as I’m efficient with it. Tonight I was able to get ahead and did a decent job with fastball command.”

Originally scheduled to start the series opener Tuesday, Kershaw (12-2) allowed

two hits and retired the first 14 Miami batters before Harold Ramirez’s two-out single to right in the fifth. The three-time Cy Young Award winner left after 90 pitches.

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts again dealt with the familiar dilemma of removing Kershaw from a game when he is still shutting down the opposition.

“Obviously Clayton doesn’t want to come out of any game, especially when you feel as good as he did tonight,” Roberts said. “He wasn’t stressed at all. Tonight was as good as I’ve seen with all his pitches, mainly his fastball.”

Kershaw earned his 165th win, tying Dodgers Hall of Famer Sandy Koufax.

“Any time you’re mentioned with Sandy, it’s special,” Kershaw said.

Rookie Edwin Rios hit his first two major league homers. Justin Turner went 3-for-5 with a home run and Corey Seager homered and had three RBIs for the Dodgers, who have outscored Miami 34-2 in the last three games.

“I was just looking for my pitch,” Rios said. “I was able to put good swings. Happy to see them go.”

The Marlins didn’t put a ball in play until Lewis Brinson grounded out with one out in the third inning.

“The games with L.A. in particular, I think they’re good because they kind of let you know where you’re at,” Mar-

lins manager Don Mattingly said. “They’re probably one of three teams, maybe four, that legitimately if they don’t win the World Series, they’re going to look at it like it’s been a bad year.”

Rios’ second blast off Marlins starter Elieser Hernandez (2-5), a two-run shot that landed on the upper deck seats in right field, gave the Dodgers a 6-0 lead.

Max Muncy’s two-run double in the eighth increased Los Angeles’ advantage to 9-0.

The Dodgers wasted little time following up their six-homer performance Tuesday with home runs from Turner and Seager in the first.

MLB roundup

Realmuto, Harper go deep to lead Phillies past Cubs

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — J.T. Realmuto hit a grand slam, Bryce Harper went deep twice and the Philadelphia Phillies beat the Chicago Cubs 11-1 in Charlie Manuel’s first game as hitting coach, ruining Cole Hamels’ return home Wednesday night.

Manuel was back in red pin-stripes in his old dugout exactly six years to the day the franchise icon managed his last game for the Phillies. He heard “Charlie! Charlie! Charlie!” chants after Realmuto connected to make it 10-0 in the third.

Hamels, the 2008 NLCS and World Series MVP with Manuel’s Phillies, was roughed up in his first game in Philadelphia since he was traded to Texas in July 2015. Hamels (6-4) gave up eight runs and nine hits in two-plus innings.

Aaron Nola (11-3) benefited from the offense’s rare outburst. He allowed three hits, including Kris Bryant’s homer, and struck out seven in seven innings.

Nationals 17, Reds 7: Anthony Rendon, Kurt Suzuki and Adam Eaton hit homers in a 10-run fifth that included an RBI single from Stephen Strasburg (15-5), and host Washington tacked on another six runs in the next inning to complete a three-game series sweep of Cincinnati.

Yankees 6, Orioles 5: Gary Sanchez hit a three-run homer and host New York beat Baltimore for the 16th straight time this season.

Red Sox 5, Indians 1: Rafael Devers homered and singled, extending his hit streak to eight straight at-bats, and Xander Bogaerts connected twice to lead Boston to a win at Cleveland.

Braves 6, Mets 4: Tyler Flowers drove in a tiebreaking run with an infield hit, and host Atlanta scored five runs off Seth Lugo in the seventh and survived a ninth-inning scare in a win over New York.

Cardinals 6, Royals 0: Rookie Dakota Hudson tossed six innings of five-hit ball, Kansas City counterpart Brad Keller

allowed a no-hit bid to crumble in spectacular fashion, and visiting St. Louis earned a two-game sweep.

Angels 7, Pirates 4: Albert Pujols had two hits and three RBIs and set the major league record for career hits by a foreign-born player, leading host Los Angeles over Pittsburgh.

Pujols had an RBI single in the fourth inning. His 3,167th hit moved him past fellow Dominican Republic native Adrian Beltre (3,166) and into sole possession of 15th place for career hits.

Rockies 7, Diamondbacks 6: Nolan Arenado hit a two-run homer in the ninth inning to give host Colorado the victory.

White Sox 13, Astros 9: James McCann hit a tiebreaking grand slam in the eighth inning and host Chicago outlasted Houston to win the season series from the runaway AL West leaders.

Athletics 9, Giants 5: Matt Chapman homered twice, including a pivotal drive in the ninth inning that followed a late collapse by his team’s bullpen,

and Oakland held on to win at San Francisco. Homer Bailey (10-8) pitched seven scoreless innings and singled twice.

Brewers 6, Twins 5: Rookie Trent Grisham hit a three-run homer in the eighth inning, and host Milwaukee rallied to beat Minnesota.

Padres 7, Rays 2: Cal Quantrill contributed with his arm and bat as host San Diego beat Tampa Bay for the first time in more than nine years.

The Padres had lost nine in a row to the Rays overall since June 23, 2010.

Tigers 3, Mariners 2: Victor Reyes hit a two-run single in the second inning and host Detroit held on to beat Seattle.

Harold Castro had three hits for the Royals while catcher Jake Rogers threw out two baserunners to end innings.

Rangers 7, Blue Jays 3: Kolby Allard pitched 5²/₃ innings to win for the first time with his new team, Elvis Andrus had four hits and two RBIs and Texas won at Toronto to avoid a three-game sweep.