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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US-S. Korean alliance tested by North

By KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea on Sunday stepped up its criticism of U.S.-South Korean military exercises, warning the drills will have “disastrous consequences” despite allied efforts to scale them back.

It was the latest in a surge of saber-rattling and missile tests as the communist state sets the stage for what is likely to be another tough round of talks with the U.S. over its nuclear weapons program.

The North has raised the stakes by conducting six weapons tests in less than a month, which experts say may be short-range but could pose a new threat to U.S. military bases and evade defenses in the South.

Despite the rhetoric, Pyongyang has signaled it might return to the negotiating table after joint exercises due to end Tuesday. Experts say it is likely to come with a higher price and hopes of driving a wedge

in the long-standing U.S.-South Korean alliance.

President Donald Trump has dismissed the launches as a bargaining tactic, saying they haven’t violated North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s promise to suspend tests of long-range missiles and nuclear weapons that could threaten the U.S. mainland.

Instead, Trump has joined the North in its criticism of the “war games,” which he has called very expensive and provocative. The president also has pressed South Korea to pay more to offset the costs of stationing 28,500 American troops on its soil.

Trump’s administration insists it will maintain punishing economic sanctions against North Korea until the communist state agrees to give up its nuclear weapons.

Special U.S. envoy Stephen Biegun is due to arrive in Seoul on Tuesday to “further strengthen coordination on the final, fully verified denuclearization of the DPRK,” the State Department said, using the initials for the North’s formal name, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

The president also has said in the past that he wouldn’t use U.S. troops as bargaining chips in talks with North Korea, although he has frequently stated his desire to eventually withdraw them to save money.

Diplomatic efforts to persuade the North to abandon its nuclear weapons have eased tensions that raised fears of a new war as the North test-fired ICBMs and conducted three nuclear tests in 2016-17.

But talks stalled after Trump and Kim failed to reach an agreement during their second summit in February in Vietnam. The meeting exposed deep differences over the North’s demands for relief from punishing sanctions in exchange for interim steps toward disarming.

Duyeon Kim, a Seoul-based fellow with the Center for a New American Security, said the recent missile-testing binge is aimed at persuading Trump to cancel the joint drills as well as to perfect short-range ballistic missiles and to offer a show of strength for North Korean hard-liners.

Family of soldier killed in Niger receives his Silver Star

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

The family of a U.S. soldier killed during an October 2017 ambush in West Africa was presented the country’s third-highest valor award Friday in Florida, the fourth posthumous medal for valor in that incident presented in the past week.

Sgt. LaDavid Johnson’s widow received the Silver Star Medal on her husband’s behalf from Maj. Gen. John Deedrick during a ceremony at Miami Gardens City Hall, Miami’s WPLG Local 10 reported.

The 25-year-old soldier was among four Americans killed in the ambush and ensuing six-hour firefight outside the rural village of Tongo Tongo near Niger’s border with Mali on Oct. 4, 2017. A team of some 40 Green

Berets, support soldiers and Nigerien partner forces had been on a mission to capture or kill an Islamic State group leader in West Africa when they were attacked by more than 100 militants.

“Facing overwhelming force, LaDavid fought like a warrior,” Deedrick said at the ceremony. “LaDavid fought like a hero.”

Johnson joined the Army in January 2014 as a wheeled vehicle mechanic and was assigned to 3rd Special Forces Group. He was on his second deployment to Niger when he was killed.

“Don’t no medal really bring my husband back to me, but I acknowledge them for ... recognizing my husband for his sacrifice for our country,” his widow, Myeshia Johnson, told WPLG.

The couple’s young son and two daughters, as well as Johnson’s parents and siblings, attended the ceremony. Some wore shirts printed with his name. They were the last family of the four soldiers killed in the ambush to receive a valor award presented posthumously in the past seven days.

In the aftermath of the attack, Johnson’s body was not immediately recovered, leading to rumors he had been captured, which the Army has denied. An investigation later found that he had run some 960 meters seeking cover from the attackers, and was killed in a barrage of small-arms and heavy machine gunfire.

The furor and the surprising loss of life in the ambush in a country many Americans seemed unaware the U.S. had

troops on the ground in, stoked continued interest in the incident for months.

As the incident and its aftermath garnered headlines, it brought scrutiny on special operations missions in Africa and led to multiple reviews.

Military officials have said mistakes were made in the mission’s planning and approval, and they have blamed tactical confusion and a failure to rehearse ahead of the operation as factors contributing to its bloody outcome — the deadliest combat incident for U.S. forces in Africa since the 1993 downing of a Black Hawk helicopter in Somalia.

In its wake, U.S. Africa Command ordered changes to reduce risk to American troops and better prepare them for operations.

Bahrain signs deal to buy Patriot system

BY JOSHUA KARSTEN
Stars and Stripes

MANAMA, Bahrain — Bahrain has signed an agreement to purchase the Patriot air and missile defense system, putting it in line with other Persian Gulf nations partnered with the U.S. amid ongoing tensions in the region with Iran.

Bahrain will purchase the system from the U.S. Army, defense contractor Raytheon said in a statement last week.

The purchase agreement allows the U.S. to negotiate with Raytheon for an undisclosed number of systems and missiles.

However, Bahrain had its request approved by the State Department in May to purchase the Patriot system with 96 missiles, two radar systems, two control stations with nine launchers and all associated equipment and services, according to a Defense Security Cooperation Agency statement in May.

The deal was worth an estimated \$2.5 billion and intended to support the “foreign policy and national security” of the United States, the May statement said.

Raytheon said Bahrain is the 17th nation to purchase the Patriot system, along with Persian

Gibraltar rejects US pressure not to release Iranian tanker

Associated Press

MADRID — Authorities in Gibraltar on Sunday rejected the United States’ latest request not to release a seized Iranian supertanker, clearing the way for the vessel to set sail after being detained last month for allegedly attempting to breach European Union sanctions on Syria.

The ship was expected to leave Sunday night, according to a statement on Twitter by Hamid Baedinejad, Iran’s ambassador to Britain.

The tanker’s release comes amid a growing confrontation between Iran and the West after President Donald Trump pulled Wash-

ington out of Tehran’s nuclear deal with world powers over a year ago.

Shortly after the tanker’s detention in early July near Gibraltar — a British overseas territory — Iran seized the British-flagged oil tanker *Stena Impero*, which remains held by the Islamic Republic. Analysts had said the Iranian ship’s release by Gibraltar could see the *Stena Impero* go free.

Gibraltar’s government said Sunday it was allowing the Iranian tanker’s release because “the EU sanctions regime against Iran — which is applicable in Gibraltar — is much narrower than that applicable in the U.S.”

Gulf nations including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

Bahrain, a small island kingdom connected by a bridge to Saudi Arabia, is the headquarters of the U.S. Navy’s 5th Fleet. Britain also bases its

naval forces in the country.

Meanwhile, Iranian officials last week aimed threatening rhetoric at the United States following months of low-level conflict in the Persian Gulf.

The commander of Iran’s navy, Rear Adm. Hossein

Khanzadi, called on enemies to leave the region immediately or face a humiliating withdrawal, Iran’s *Tasnim News* reported.

Iran has stopped or attempted to detain international shipping transiting the Persian Gulf in recent months, prompting the U.S. to announce plans for a coalition of nations to escort commercial ships through the waterway.

The most recent tensions began in May, when the U.S. sent bombers and hastened the arrival of a Navy carrier group following intelligence reports that indicated threats from Iran or its proxies on U.S. forces.

The exact threats were not specified. However, U.S. officials said in May that they suspected increased rocket attacks in Iraq near U.S. bases, and the embassy may have been the work of Iranian-backed militias. Iran denied that.

In July, the USS *Boxer* downed an Iranian drone that the U.S. said threatened the ship over international waters in the Strait of Hormuz, though Iran denied that it lost any aircraft. The previous month, Iran shot down a U.S. *Global Hawk* that it said flew into its airspace. The U.S. said the drone was well within international airspace.

Afghan blast kills 63 at wedding party; ISIS takes credit

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The suicide bomber stood in the middle of the dancing, clapping crowd as hundreds of Afghan children and adults celebrated a wedding in a joyous release from Kabul’s strain of war. Then, in a flash, he detonated his explosives-filled vest, killing dozens — and Afghanistan grieved again.

The local Islamic State affiliate claimed responsibility for the deadliest attack in the capital this year, with 63 killed

and 182 wounded, while outraged Afghans questioned just how safe they will be under an approaching deal between the U.S. and the Taliban to end America’s longest war.

Stunned families buried the dead, some digging with their bare hands. One wounded survivor, Mohammad Aslim, wore his bloodied clothes the day after the blast late Saturday. He and his friends already had buried 16 bodies, among them several close relatives, including a 7-year-old boy.

Aslim looked exhausted and

said he was waiting to bury more. Nearby, a man named Amanullah, who lost his 14-year-old son, said in anguish that the explosion had mangled the boy’s face so badly he could no longer recognize it.

“I wish I could find the pieces of my son’s body and put them as one piece into the grave,” he cried.

The emergence of the ISIS affiliate in recent years might be the greatest threat to Afghan civilians as the U.S. and Taliban seek an agreement to end nearly 18 years of fighting. While

the U.S. wants Taliban assurances that Afghanistan will no longer be used as a launchpad for global terror attacks, there appear to be no guarantees of protection for Afghan civilians.

The Taliban, which the U.S. hopes will help curb the ISIS affiliate’s rise, condemned Saturday’s attack as “forbidden and unjustifiable.”

The blast took place in a western Kabul neighborhood that is home to many in the country’s minority Shiite Hazara community.

Gun control advocates call for new laws at rally

Associated Press

Gun control advocates rallied around the country Saturday, seeking to pressure Congress to tighten the nation's gun laws after the recent mass shootings in El Paso, Texas; Dayton, Ohio, and Northern California.

Several dozen people gathered in Providence, R.I. Some held signs that said, "Disarm Hate," "Enough" and "No One Needs a Weapon of War at Home."

In Baltimore, activists organized a march. Protesters in Charleston, W.Va., carried signs that called for changing Congress if it didn't change gun laws.

Demonstrators also gathered in front of City Hall in San Francisco.

The group Everytown for Gun Safety announced recently that it planned to hold rallies over the weekend in every state. The group is demanding a strong federal "red flag" bill to allow seizure of weapons in certain cases and legislation requiring background checks on all gun sales.

Congress is on summer recess, but Republican Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky has asked committee chairmen to review possible gun bills for consideration when lawmakers return in September.

Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee announced Friday that they will be returning early to consider other gun violence legislation. The House has already approved legislation bolstering background checks for gun purchases.

The gunmen in El Paso and Dayton killed a total of 31 people in back-to-back weekend shootings in early August that stunned the nation and revived calls to tighten access to firearms.

Those shootings came days after another gunman opened fire at a festival in Gilroy, Calif., killing three people.

Far-right, anti-fascist groups clash at protest in Portland

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Hundreds of far-right protesters and anti-fascist counterdemonstrators swarmed downtown Portland, Ore., on Saturday for a long-hyped rally that attracted President Donald Trump's attention and resulted in at least 13 arrests.

Police seized metal poles, bear spray and other weapons and closed bridges and streets to try to keep the rival groups apart. They were largely successful. Six minor injuries were reported.

"This was a dynamic event with demonstrators frequently moving from one part of the city to another," Mayor Ted Wheeler said at an evening news conference.

Leaders of the right-wing groups vowed to return to Portland, saying they would keep coming back to the liberal West Coast city so long as the left-wing anti-fascists, known as antifa, groups remained active.

President Donald Trump weighed in early Saturday, writing on Twitter that "Portland is being watched very closely ... Hopefully the Mayor will be

able to properly do his job."

He also wrote that "major consideration is being given to naming ANTIFA an 'ORGANIZATION of TERROR.'" It wasn't immediately clear what he meant by that because there's no mechanism for the United States government to declare a domestic organization a terrorism group.

Joe Biggs, the organizer of the right-wing gathering, said it was a success.

"Go look at President Trump's Twitter," he told The Oregonian/OregonLive. "He talked about Portland, said he's watching antifa. That's all we wanted."

At the evening news conference Portland's mayor said Biggs was not welcome. "We do not want him here in my city, period," Wheeler said.

Wheeler tied the demonstrations to "a rising white nationalist movement" and a growing sense of fear in the country.

"We're certainly seeing that play out," he said. "Portland being a very progressive community is always going to be at or near ground zero of this battle."

The events began late Sat-

urday morning. Flag-waving members of the Proud Boys, Three Percenters militia group and others gathered downtown, some wearing body armor and helmets like the antifa protesters. Police said they had seized the weapons, including shields, from multiple groups as they assembled along the Willamette River, which runs through the city.

More than two dozen local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, were in the city for the right-wing rally. Portland police said all of the city's 1,000 officers would be on duty for the gathering that was hyped on social media and elsewhere for weeks.

As of early afternoon, most of the right-wing groups had left the area via a downtown bridge. Police used officers on bikes and in riot gear to keep black-clad, mask-wearing anti-fascist protesters from following them.

But hundreds of people remained downtown and on nearby streets, and there were skirmishes throughout the day.

Funerals held for 4 killed in day care fire

Associated Press

ERIE, Pa. — Residents of a Pennsylvania city gathered to mourn and remember four of the five children who died when fire swept through a home child care center.

A funeral service was held Saturday in Erie for La'Myhia Jones, 8, Luther Jones Jr., 6, Ava Jones, 4, and 9-month-old Jaydan Augustyniak. All are siblings. The funeral for Dalvin Pacley, 2, will be held Monday.

Three of the victims were the children of a volunteer firefighter, Luther Jones. Their mother,

Shevona Overton, is also the mother of Jaydan. An adult and two adolescent boys were able to escape. Fire officials suspect Sunday's blaze was accidental and possibly electrical.

"There are things that happen in this life that take years to understand. There are things that happen in this life that we will never understand," said Mayor Joe Schember. "Why are bright, beautiful children taken away from us in a tragic accident in the middle of the night?"

The most important lesson from such a tragedy, Schem-

ber said, "is to really value and treasure the relatives and friends that are still with us." And, he said, "only a strong belief in God can help us humans through a loss like this."

The Rev. Charles Mock of Community Baptist Church drew an ovation as he urged the community that had come together "Don't stop now."

"Don't stop the kisses, don't stop the hugs, don't stop the warm embraces, don't stop the coming together, don't stop the partnerships that have come out of five children who have gone into heaven," he said.

Strangers gather to mourn El Paso victim

Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas — Thousands of strangers came to say goodbye to a woman who was killed in a mass shooting in El Paso after hearing her long-time companion had few family members left.

Antonio Basco had told reporters he felt alone in planning the funeral for Margie Reckard, one of 22 people killed when a gunman opened fire at a Walmart on Aug. 3. Basco had almost no family left, so he invited the world to join him in remembering his companion of 22 years.

He thought he might get a few well-wishers from El Paso.

Then, the flowers started coming in.

Then, the funeral home had to change venues.

People came from California, Arizona, Texas, New Mexico and across the border in Mexico. They stood in line for hours Friday for Reckard's funeral, then patiently waited Saturday in sweltering temperatures as Basco buried her.

Few of those in attendance had ever met Reckard, but almost all said the suffering city — and the nation — needed to see how to rally around those in pain.

Jordan Ballard, 38, of Los

Angeles, said she lived in New York City during the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and in Oklahoma City during the 1995 bombing. After reading about Basco online, she bought a plane ticket Thursday.

"The potential of him experiencing this alone made me come," she said. "I know if I was lost, my family had each other."

'We wanted to be here'

Angelique Tadeo, 52, her husband, Paul, 69, and their granddaughter, 3, drove more than four hours from Tucson, Ariz. Tadeo worked as a nurse and treated victims during the 2011 shooting in Tucson that injured former Rep. Gabrielle Giffords and killed six.

"We know what the city is going through and we wanted to be here," Tadeo said.

As soon as he got the memorial details, Jerry Brown, 58, of San Angelo, Texas, got in his car and drove 400 miles in six hours.

"In the military, we have this saying: 'We don't leave people behind,'" said Brown, a veteran. "It didn't matter where I was. I knew I was going to come here today."

He got into town, stood in line for hours to pay his respects and planned on driv-

ing all night back home for a child's soccer practice. But he paused for a moment to look at the crowd of strangers who had created a line that wrapped around the block and into the city's Manhattan Heights Historic District.

"This is amazing," said Brown, a contractor.

"This is El Paso, bro," Jerry Medina, 42, of El Paso, wearing a black-and-red zoot suit, said when asked about the crowd.

He brushed off the 100-degree temperatures and wore a similar suit the next day to the burial.

"I really felt for that guy," Medina said. "Our love is for him. Hopefully, he gets through this."

'I started crying'

Isabel Regalado, 27, held her 10-month-old boy, Preston Regalado-Soliz, as she stood in line for more than two hours with her husband, Esteban Soliz.

"As we drove up here, I started crying," Regalado said. "It's beautiful."

The family had been heading to the mall where the gunman opened fire that day. Regalado stops before continuing the story, holding back tears.

A mariachi band begins playing for the people in line. Some clap. The band plays recogniz-

able tunes to many in El Paso. Then the musicians cross the street and play "Amor Eterno" — the 1984 ballad by the late-Juan Gabriel that has become an anthem of sorts in El Paso in the days after the shooting.

"How I wish that you still lived, that your precious eyes had never closed, so that I could see them now," the translated lyrics go.

The lips of a woman in line quiver. She eventually breaks down and walks away. Another woman offers to hold her place in line. Emma Portela, 81, who drove in from Chihuahua, Mexico, shakes her head: "That song has so much power right now."

Glen Blasdel, 83, standing alone, was one of the first in line. "I know what it's like to have no family," said Blasdel, a Vietnam War veteran who drove in from nearby Las Cruces, N.M. Moments before burying his companion, Basco spoke to reporters.

"My life is not complete no more," he said. But when he looked out and saw a crowd of 3,000 on Friday, he was in awe. "It's the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen."

Heavy rain falls on protesters in Hong Kong march

Associated Press

HONG KONG — Heavy rain fell on tens of thousands of umbrella-toting protesters Sunday as they marched from a packed park and filled a major road in Hong Kong, where mass pro-democracy demonstrations have become a regular weekend activity this summer.

Organizers said they hoped the assembly would be peaceful, which would make for a rare calm weekend in a monthslong movement that has been marked by violent clashes with police. Law enforcement officers were keeping a low

profile on Sunday, with no riot police seen from the procession's main routes.

"We hope that there will not be any chaotic situations today," said organizer Bonnie Leung. "We hope we can show the world that Hong Kong people can be totally peaceful."

Leung's group, the Civil Human Rights Front, has organized three massive marches in Hong Kong since June. The protest movement, however, has been increasingly marked by clashes with police as demonstrators vent their frustrations over what they perceive to be the government's blatant

refusal to respond to their demands.

"Peace is the No. 1 priority today," said Kiki Ma, 28, an accountant participating in the march. "We want to show that we aren't like the government."

While police had granted approval for the rally, they didn't approve an accompanying march. Demonstrators, nevertheless, fanned out and filled the streets as there was not enough space at the designated assembly area.

Public transit trains did not stop at stations near the assembly because of overcrowding.

In Beijing, You Wenze, a spokesman for China's ceremonial legislature, condemned statements from U.S. lawmakers supportive of Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement.

He called the lawmakers' comments "a gross violation of the spirit of the rule of law, a blatant double standard and a gross interference in China's internal affairs."

He said that Hong Kong's 7.5 million people and the Chinese population as a whole rejected the actions of a "very small group of violent protesters," as well as "any interference of foreign forces."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

90 panels from solar farm are stolen

IN HENRYVILLE — A solar power generating farm in southern Indiana was disrupted when about 90 panels were stolen.

Hoosier Energy said the theft from the Henryville Solar facility in Clark County was spotted Wednesday and reported to police.

The Bloomington-based company said the stolen industrial panels have little resale value and aren't useable for residential solar power. The solar farm near Louisville, Ky., has more than 4,100 panels. The company said electricity to customers wasn't disrupted.

Company spokesman Greg Seiter said whoever stole the panels risked electrocution in the high-voltage area.

Man who let python escape misses hearing

WV MORGANTOWN — The man accused of letting his 15-foot python escape into the woods outside Morgantown did not show up for his initial court date on Wednesday.

The Dominion Post reported the judge scheduled another hearing for Shane Stevens in September. He is charged with allowing an animal to run at large, which carries a \$500 fine.

Authorities said Stevens was transporting his pet snake in a truck on May 30 when it escaped its cage. A search party that included a drone aircraft couldn't find the python and officials have since called off the hunt. Stevens told officers the snake is dangerous.

Municipal Judge Stephen Higgins said on Wednesday if Stevens does not show up for

his next hearing, a warrant will be issued for his arrest.

Salmon cannon offers upstream fish detour

WA SPOKANE — A fish-propelling tube could restore salmon populations to portions of a Washington river that has not seen the species in 90 years.

The Spokesman-Review reported Friday that if the salmon cannon is approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, it could restore populations to native waters in the Upper Columbia. Officials said the system is expected to give fish a detour to avoid dams when traveling upstream to reproduce.

Wildlife experts said dams and other factors threaten salmon, and the cannon can serve as a safe alternative during the journey.

Crews reopen park road; buses return

AK DENALI NATIONAL PARK — Road crews have cleared one lane in Denali National Park and Preserve, and buses are beginning to return about 300 stranded tourists back to the park entrance.

The tourists became stranded Friday after heavy rains triggered mudslides and caused excess water from a culvert to damage a road.

Park spokesman Paul Ollig said that all the stranded passengers are expected back at the park entrance Friday night, but he didn't have an exact time of when they would arrive.

Earlier Friday, Denali's superintendent closed Denali Park Road to all traffic at mile 30. The road is the only one inside the vast park.

Similar debris flows led to daylong traffic restrictions last week. Continued heavy rains

since kept the road and surrounding tundra saturated with water.

2 assault McDonald's workers, are arrested

TN NASHVILLE — Authorities in Tennessee have arrested two people accused of assaulting McDonald's workers over a mistake in their order.

WKRN-TV reported Antronette McGlowan and Quincy Owens were charged Friday in Nashville.

A police report said McGlowan went through the drive-thru Tuesday and became upset when she didn't get fries she ordered. The arrest affidavit said she parked her car and went inside with Owens.

McGlowan is accused of jumping over the counter and repeatedly hitting a juvenile worker. Owens is accused of pulling out a handgun and threatening the worker. Police said another employee who tried to break up the fight was also assaulted.

Police recover 60 guns during raid

IL CHICAGO — Police officials said they were acting on intelligence when they seized more than 60 guns from a home on the city's West Side.

Police Lt. Jeff Schaaf said Friday officers served a search warrant late Thursday at the home in the Lawndale neighborhood. He said investigators believe the two people arrested during the raid were selling weapons out of the home.

Schaaf said among the weapons seized were handguns, semiautomatic handguns, AK-47s and revolvers. Officers also found "numerous" extended magazines.

Authorities said a police tac-

tical team had the home under surveillance before the raid, in order to safely serve the warrant amid the firepower.

Chicago police Capt. Gilbert Calderon said the department is talking with federal prosecutors as well as local prosecutors about charges.

Home invaded by vomiting vultures

FL WEST PALM BEACH — A New York couple's Florida vacation home has been taken over by dozens of black vultures that are vomiting and defecating everywhere.

The Palm Beach Post reported the Casimano family can't even visit the \$702,000 home they purchased earlier this year in the Ibis Golf and Country Club.

Siobhan Casimano describes the smell as "like a thousand rotting corpses," and said vultures have destroyed their screened enclosures, overtaken the pool and dented cars with their beaks.

Misleading gas jug thwarts thieves

KY KEAVY — Authorities said three thieves thought they were stealing gasoline from a property for their broken down car until the car stopped working again.

Laurel County Sheriff's Office on Facebook said the three stole a 5-gallon gasoline jug from a garage for their car. Except there wasn't gasoline in the jug. It was peroxide.

News outlets reported that Latasha Bryant, Timothy Storms and Dustin Napier were arrested Wednesday on various charges including burglary.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Miocic takes out Cormier, reclaims belt

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Stipe Miocic waited over a year to face Daniel Cormier again, and his plan for the rematch didn't start to work until they were deep in the fourth round.

That's when the patient, determined firefighter from Cleveland finally got his revenge — and suddenly reclaimed his UFC heavyweight title.

Miocic stopped Cormier with a barrage of punches in the fourth, taking back his championship belt with a comeback victory at UFC 241 on Saturday night.

Miocic (19-3) lost the first two rounds on every judge's scorecard in his rematch with the 40-year-old Cormier (22-2). After making some progress in the third, Miocic steadily came forward through Cormier's blows in the fourth and finally hurt the champion with a punch to the body.

Miocic then landed several powerhouse right hands to Cormier's head, buckling his

knees and eventually forcing referee Herb Dean to stop the fight with 51 seconds left in the fourth round. The 6-foot-5 behemoth leaped onto the wall of the cage and celebrated with fans still stunned by the fight's sudden turn.

"I saw some weakness in that third round," Miocic said. "And then in that fourth round, I caught him with that right hand. Thank God, because he's tough."

Nate Diaz also returned from a three-year hiatus with a dominant decision over Anthony Pettis at Honda Center, but he was upstaged by the remarkable redemption of Miocic.

Miocic reigned as the UFC's heavyweight champion for 26 months, and he defended his belt a UFC-record three consecutive times before Cormier dethroned him in July 2018 with a first-round stoppage victory. Despite Cormier's decisive victory, Miocic campaigned for a rematch and eventually re-

ceived it when Cormier said he "deserved it."

Cormier's quick hands were the difference early in the rematch. The 5-foot-11 Cormier also picked up his much larger opponent and slammed him onto the canvas during the first round, showing off the elite athleticism lurking in his dad bod.

"He got hit with everything but the kitchen sink, and he managed to stay in the fight," UFC President Dana White said of Miocic.

Miocic landed plenty of shots, but Cormier's blows were more frequent and more impactful — although not much makes an impact on the hulking Miocic. The fight turned quickly and decisively when Miocic finally hurt Cormier, who couldn't recover.

"I took the pressure off a little bit," Cormier said. "I don't know why. Maybe (I) tried to rest and recover for the fifth round, because he wasn't going anywhere. I don't know what the reasoning was, but it was a mistake."

Cormier didn't announce his retirement in the cage afterward, but the former two-belt champion planned to think seriously about quitting MMA after this fight, no matter its outcome. The former Olympic-level wrestler had always planned to get out of the sport before he turned 40, but Cormier pushed his deadline by five months after surgery prevented him from fighting last March.

Right before Miocic's win, the 34-year-old Diaz (20-11) cemented his wild popularity with an impressive performance in his first fight since he split a pair of bouts with Conor McGregor in 2016.

Diaz punished Pettis (22-9) in standup striking and on the ground, winning 30-27 on two judges' scorecards and 29-28 on the third. Fighting through a serious cut near his eye, Diaz repeatedly hurt the former lightweight champion and nearly got a finish several times in the third.

Venezuela youth still have MLB dreams

Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela — More than 100 boys train daily on a baseball field next to the biggest slum in Caracas, using old bats, balls and gloves in hopes of achieving the ultimate goal: a professional baseball career in the United States and an escape from Venezuela's hardship.

Chances are small, and getting remoter. Major League Baseball's teams have shut down their academies in Venezuela and no longer send scouts. Sometimes, local trainers say, a player faints on the field because he hasn't had enough to eat, a sign of how nationwide shortages of food, medicine and other necessities inflict a heavy toll.

A junior team from Maracaibo is participating this week in the Little League World Series in Williamsport, Pa. Two Venezuelan pro players, Roug-

Odor of the Texas Rangers and Ender Inciarte of the Atlanta Braves, donated funds for the trip.

Still, there is a precedent for youthful ambitions. Venezuela was an incubator of major league stars such as Miguel Cabrera and Felix Hernandez, and the flair is still there. Another young Venezuelan team arrived two hours before their first game at a tournament in Mexico and ended up winning the whole contest.

"My dream came true," said Diego Gutierrez, a 10-year-old on the Cacique Mara team that won the junior Latin America title this month. He spoke to The Associated Press by telephone from Maracaibo, a Venezuelan city hit hard by power cuts, gasoline scarcity and other problems.

The team's victory was a bright spot for a country more accustomed to news about political conflict and economic

turmoil.

The 14 players barely made it to the tournament because they didn't have money to buy plane tickets. Daniel Gutierrez, Diego's father and head of the junior team, took the boys and some family members anyway on a 10-hour bus journey to Caracas in late July in hopes of securing financial support.

Red Sox pitcher Eduardo Rodriguez got involved with little time to spare, buying tickets after learning about the team's plight.

"I saw it on Instagram and sent them a text and asked: 'How can I help you guys to make the dream come true for the kids?' They said they needed money for the flight," Rodriguez told AP.

"I know how it is," he said. "When I was a kid, I had a lot of invitations to play in some competitions, but I didn't have the money to go there so I know how it feels, so that's why I did

it."

Another Venezuelan major leaguer, Jhoulys Chacin of the Milwaukee Brewers, also donated money for the trip. Venezuela's sports ministry and the Panamanian airline Copa then gave support.

Boys run hard, lift weights, bat and pitch in the heat on the baseball field at the Petare slum in Caracas. But strains are evident.

"It's sad to see that the number of boys attending has dropped a lot," said trainer Nelson Castro, who has coached for decades and shaped future stars, including Armando Galarraga.

Diego Gutierrez, the young player who was on the winning team in Mexico, started playing baseball when he was 3, helped by his father.

Right now, the 10-year-old is bursting with gratitude toward Rodriguez of the Red Sox for helping his team.

MLB roundup

Yankees overcome ejections, then Indians

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Manager Aaron Boone, Brett Gardner and the New York Yankees again hammered away at the umpires, this time in prolonged rants that brought several members of the team spilling onto the field, while beating the Cleveland Indians 6-5 Saturday.

Gleyber Torres hit two home runs and Didi Gregorius and DJ LeMahieu also connected for the AL East-leading Yankees.

But what really fired up the crowd of 47,347 at Yankee Stadium occurred in the sixth inning after Cameron Maybin was called out on strikes by Triple-A ump Ben May.

For the third time in a month — each time with a minor league call-up umpire behind the plate — the team with the best record in American League lost its temper in a big way. This episode led to Boone, Gardner and pitcher CC Sabathia being ejected.

James Paxton (9-6) went five innings for the win. Zach Plesac (6-4) was chased in the fifth.

Aroldis Chapman closed for his 35th save in 40 chances.

Brewers 15, Nationals 14 (14): Eric Thames hit a two-run homer in the 14th inning and Milwaukee finally held on for a wild victory at Washington.

Christian Yelich hit two home runs, tying for the major league lead with 41, and the Brewers equaled their franchise record with seven. Thames' tiebreaking drive off Javy Guerra (1-1)

was the last of them in a 5-hour, 40-minute marathon between National League playoff contenders that featured 38 hits, 17 pitching changes, 11 home runs and blown saves by both closers.

Yelich went 5-for-6 with four RBIs, breaking out of a 1-for-16 slump since returning from a back injury that cost him four games.

Cubs 2, Pirates 0: Kris Bryant homered in the seventh inning, and Chicago got out of three bases-loaded jams to snap a four-game skid and win at Pittsburgh.

After committing an error at third base each of the previous two innings, Bryant drove the first pitch of the seventh from Steven Brault (3-2) into the left-field bleachers to put the Cubs ahead 1-0. It was Bryant's 25th homer this season and third in five games.

Reds 6, Cardinals 1: Aristides Aquino hit a three-run homer, Nick Senzel added a leadoff shot and host Cincinnati dropped St. Louis back into a tie with Chicago for first place in the NL Central.

Aquino's blast off Miles Mikolas (7-13) gave the Reds a 5-1 lead in the fifth. It was the rookie's 11th homer in his 17th career game.

Rays 1, Tigers 0 (13): Mike Brosseau's pinch-hit RBI single in the 13th inning drove in Eric Sogard and gave host Tampa Bay the win over Detroit.

Sogard doubled off Matt Hall (0-1) with two outs and Tommy

Pham was intentionally walked. Brosseau singled to right-center field for the Rays' first run since Wednesday, ending a streak of 29 scoreless innings.

Mets 4, Royals 1: Jacob deGrom pitched seven sharp innings and Pete Alonso put New York ahead with a two-run single in its win at Kansas City.

Alonso got three hits and snapped a 1-all tie with two outs in the seventh when he rolled a bases-loaded grounder up the middle. Juan Lagares, who also had three hits, added an RBI triple in the eighth.

Athletics 8, Astros 4: Matt Chapman doubled among his three hits and Mark Canha had two hits and three RBIs to back Chris Bassitt's six solid innings, and host Oakland beat Houston.

Matt Olson and Josh Phegley each had two hits for the A's, who have won four straight games and 11 of their last 16.

Red Sox 4, Orioles 0: Eduardo Rodriguez pitched 7 stellar innings, red-hot Rafael Devers belted a two-run homer and host Boston beat Baltimore for its fourth straight victory.

Trey Mancini had a double — his eighth straight game in Fenway Park with an extra-base hit — for the Orioles, who have dropped six straight.

Padres 5, Phillies 3: Dinelson Lamet pitched six solid innings, Ty France hit a tiebreaking single and visiting San Diego cooled off Philadelphia.

Lamet (2-2) allowed three runs and six hits with six

strikeouts and a walk.

Mariners 4, Blue Jays 3: Kyle Seager hit a tiebreaking home run in the eighth inning, Austin Nola also went deep, and Seattle won at Toronto.

Seager's two-out drive off the right field foul screen came on the first pitch from left-hander Tim Mayza (1-2).

Twins 12, Rangers 7: C.J. Cron homered in Minnesota's six-run first inning in at win at Texas.

Tyler Duffey (4-1) retired the last two batters in the fifth to leave the bases loaded. He got his second win of the day, because hours before the game he was awarded the victory from Friday night that originally was credited to teammate Sam Dyson.

Giants 11, Diamondbacks 6: Brandon Belt hit a grand slam and tied a career high with six RBIs, and Kevin Pillar had a career-best five hits to lead San Francisco to a win at Arizona.

Angels 6, White Sox 5: Mike Trout and Brian Goodwin drove in two runs apiece, and host Los Angeles scored four in the seventh inning to rally past Chicago.

Rockies 11, Marlins 4: Ryan McMahon continued his power surge with two home runs to help host Colorado beat Miami for its first three-game winning streak in two months.

Braves power way to rare win over Dodgers

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Josh Donaldson and Adam Duvall hit consecutive homers off Hyun-Jin Ryu in the sixth inning, the faulty Atlanta bullpen redeemed itself for a change, and the Braves beat the Los Angeles Dodgers 4-3 on Saturday night.

Donaldson stirred the largest crowd in

SunTrust Park's three-year history when his 29th homer landed in the Atlanta bullpen in right-center. Duvall added on by going deep into the left-center seats to make it 4-2.

Atlanta won the matchup of NL division leaders one night after the Dodgers' powerful offense homered four times, sending the Braves to a 27th loss in the last 37

regular-season games between the teams. With their first win in five meetings this season, the Braves are trying to stand up to the club that eliminated them from the playoffs last year.

Ryu (12-3) lost for the first time in seven starts as his ERA, still best in the major leagues, rose 19 points to 1.64.

NFL preseason roundup

Prescott, Pollard sharp in Cowboys' win

Associated Press

HONOLULU — Dak Prescott appears ready for the regular season, with or without Ezekiel Elliott.

The Dallas quarterback completed all five of his pass attempts in his only series, and the Cowboys came away with a 14-10 victory over the Los Angeles Rams on Saturday night.

Prescott dropped back to pass seven times, completed passes to five different receivers, had one short completion negated by an ineligible lineman downfield penalty and was sacked once.

Prescott's only drive covered 97 yards in 12 plays, took more than six minutes and culminated with Tony Pollard's 14-yard touchdown run.

"It's always a challenge coming off your own goal line. We call that a 'coming out situation.' One of your goals is to get a first down and change field position. To be able to have a 13-play drive and cash it in for points was big for us," Cowboys coach Jason Garrett said.

Through his first two preseason games, Prescott has completed all nine of his pass attempts.

"It is a small sample size and we're not going crazy about him being 9-for-9, but what he's done well though is play well. He's played well in practice, he's played well in preseason games, he's handled himself well, he's making good decisions, making good throws and that follows with how he prepares," Garrett said.

Pollard, who started in place of Elliott, finished with five rushes for 42 yards. Elliott, a two-time league rushing champion, missed his second preseason game while he continues his holdout.

Patriots 22, Titans 22: Jarrett Stidham threw a 23-yard touchdown pass to Dammoun Patterson with 4:12 left, rallying the

New England Patriots over the host Tennessee Titans.

Stidham picked up where he left off in his previous trip to Nashville's Nissan Stadium. Stidham had five TD passes here helping Auburn rout Purdue in the Music City Bowl last December, and this time the rookie was 14-for-19 for 193 yards helping the Patriots (2-0) come back from a 17-8 halftime deficit.

Two days of practices against the Titans was enough for Patriots coach Bill Belichick to let Tom Brady watch a second straight preseason game with New England's options at wide receiver thin because of injuries.

Marcus Mariota started for the Titans (1-1) and shook off a pair of three-and-outs before his best drive this preseason. He capped a 10-play, 87-yard drive with an 11-yard TD pass to his favorite target, three-time Pro Bowl tight end Delanie Walker, who broke his right ankle in the 2018 season opener.

Texans 30, Lions 23: Deshaun Watson looked sharp in directing a 75-yard drive, capped by a 4-yard touchdown pass to DeAndre Hopkins to help host Houston over Detroit.

Watson, who sat out in a loss to Green Bay last week, was 5-for-7 for 60 yards and scrambled once for 7 yards. After being sacked an NFL-high 62 times last season, the third-year player had plenty of time to throw while facing a Lions defense which opened the game with the bulk of its starters.

Hopkins, like Watson, making his preseason debut, had two receptions for 17 yards and shook off Detroit's Quandre Diggs to get open and make the TD catch that put Houston up 7-0. Hopkins, who had a career-high 1,572 yards receiving last season, was the only one of Houston's top

receivers to play. Will Fuller, who is healthy after tearing a knee ligament last season, sat out and the Texans were without Keke Coutee, who injured his ankle last week.

Steelers 17, Chiefs 7: Mason Rudolph guided a long first-half touchdown drive to perhaps nudge ahead of Josh Dobbs in the race to be the backup behind Ben Roethlisberger and host Pittsburgh beat Kansas City.

Rudolph finished 10-for-15 for 77 yards while Dobbs completed 6-for-11 for 95 yards with a red-zone interception on a night the Steelers (2-0) opted to keep several key starters on the sideline, from quarterback Roethlisberger to Pro Bowl offensive linemen David DeCastro and Maurkice Pouncey to rookie linebacker Devin Bush.

Patrick Mahomes, the reigning NFL MVP — who directed a touchdown in his lone drive in Kansas City's preseason opener last week — did little during two series of work following a thunderstorm that forced the opening kickoff to be pushed back nearly an hour.

Mahomes completed just 2 of 5 passes for 11 yards, a far cry from his previous visit to Heinz Field, when he threw for six touchdowns in a Week 2 win last September that served as a harbinger of the season to come.

Browns 21, Colts 18: Garrett Gilbert threw two touchdown passes in the first half and David Blough added another TD pass in the second half, leading Cleveland to a win at Indianapolis.

Cleveland (2-0) has won nine of its past 10 preseason games — this one with its top two quarterbacks sitting out and Kareem Hunt returned to the field for the first time in nearly nine months.

Hamlin's late pass denies DiBenedetto at Bristol

Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — The winner climbed from his car and immediately apologized for denying an underdog his first career victory. The runner-up, in tears over his near miss, was raucously embraced by the crowd for his oh-so-close effort.

Bristol Motor Speedway was a bizarre mix of emotions Saturday night after Denny Hamlin chased down Matt DiBenedetto to spoil a Saturday night upset. DiBenedetto learned this week that Leavine Family Racing won't bring him back for a second season, and he has no job lined up for 2020.

"I'm so sorry to Matt

DiBenedetto, (crew chief) Mike Wheeler. I hate it. I know what a win would mean to that team," Hamlin said as soon as he exited his car. "But I've got to give 110 percent."

Hamlin was the first Toyota and Joe Gibbs Racing driver to start from the pole this season but his race was a roller coaster that began when his car was

damaged when he bounced off of Jimmie Johnson. He later had a loose wheel, fell down a lap and seemed out of contention for his second career victory at Bristol.

At the same time, DiBenedetto was working his way toward the front and put his Toyota out front for a race-high 93 laps.