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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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China flies military aircraft near Taiwan after Trump call

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND CHIYOMI SUMIDA
Stars and Stripes

Tensions are mounting following reports that China flew long-range military aircraft near Taiwan and over disputed parts of the South China Sea at a time when President-elect Donald Trump has questioned a long-standing diplomatic agreement between Washington and Beijing.

The flights came shortly after Trump broke decades of U.S. practice earlier this month by accepting a phone call from Taiwan's president, but before Trump questioned the "One-China" policy that has heavily

influenced relations between the U.S., Taiwan and China since the 1970s.

Although differing from China's "One-China" principle, the U.S. stance allows arms sales to Taiwan without recognizing Taiwan as a sovereign state.

China considers Taiwan a breakaway province that must eventually be reunified with the mainland.

Trump said on "Fox News Sunday" that he doesn't feel "bound by a 'One-China' policy unless we make a deal with China having to do with other things, including trade."

Geng Shuang, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, said Monday that Trump's comments raised the possibility

that U.S.-China relations would be "badly affected," according to The Associated Press.

Geng said the "One-China" policy was the "political foundation" of any Sino-American ties, according to the AP.

Trump's phone call with President Tsai Ing-wen is believed to be the first of its kind since the late 1970s, when the U.S. closed its Taiwan embassy and removed U.S. troops from the island.

The phone call spurred the flights as a show of force, said Toshiyuki Shikata, a retired lieutenant general in Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force and a professor at Teikyo University.

Coalition attacked on civilian death toll

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — A report released Monday by Airwars, a London-based project aimed at tracking the U.S.-led coalition's airstrikes targeting the Islamic State group, criticized the coalition's lack of transparency when assessing civilian casualties.

Coalition airstrikes have been critical in the fight against the Islamic State group in Iraq, where Iraqi forces are currently trying to push the militant group out of Mosul.

While U.S. officials have acknowledged that 173 civilians have died in coalition airstrikes since the launch of the campaign against the Islamic State group in the summer of 2014, Airwars says the number of civilian casualties is much greater — at least 1,500.

The Airwars project said the discrepancy in the numbers of acknowledged civilian casualties is partially due to how civilian deaths are investigated. Assessments carried out by the coalition are "opaque, ad hoc, and significantly biased towards internal military reporting," the group said.

In Mosul, Iraqi forces continue a slow advance on the city's eastern front. During meetings with Iraqi military commanders south of Mosul on Monday, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi emphasized the operation is being waged in an effort to reduce casualties among Iraqi troops and civilians, according to a written statement released by his office.

Syria: All but sliver of Aleppo held by military

Associated Press

BEIRUT — The Syrian military said Monday it has gained control of 98 percent of eastern Aleppo, previously a rebel-held enclave, reducing the rebel territory to a small sliver packed with civilians and fighters squeezed under fire.

A Syrian rebel spokesman said opposition fighters are retreating in eastern Aleppo under intense government fire that is putting thousands of civilians at risk, calling the collapse "terrifying."

The military statement came hours after Syrian forces, aided by Shiite militias from Lebanon, Iraq and Iran, took Sheik Saeed, one of the largest neighborhoods in the southern part of the rebel territory, tightening the noose on the enclave.

The military also said its multipronged ground push on Monday captured the al-Fardous neighborhood, one of the most populated districts to the north of Sheik Saeed. Rami Abdurrahman, the head of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said the district remains under fire, and fighting continues there. He estimated that about 7 percent of the enclave remains under rebel control.

"The situation is very, very critical," said Ibrahim al-Haj, a member of the Syrian Civil Defense. "The military took many areas, and we are now squeezed."

Al-Haj had been on the move to find a place to keep him and his family away from the clashes and possible government capture.

Bassam Haj Mustafa, a senior member of the rebel Nour el-Din el-Zinki group who is in contact with fighters inside the city, said Monday the fighters are doing "their best to defend what is left."

"The collapse is terrifying," he said in a message to reporters.

Tens of thousands of civilians have fled to government-held western Aleppo since the offensive began last month. But tens of thousands remain trapped in the ever-shrinking eastern enclave.

A rebel fighter from inside Aleppo, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals, said the fall of Sheik Saeed means the fall of the enclave's only mill and grains warehouse, which leaves the territory without access to bread or flour.

Veteran's body left in shower for 9 hours

The Washington Post

First they moved the dead body into a hallway. Then they took it into a shower room.

There it remained, ignored, for more than nine hours. No one showed up to take it to the morgue because no one called the dispatchers.

Not much is known about the unidentified veteran who died in hospice care at the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System outside St. Petersburg, Fla. But a hospital investigation made public Friday by the Tampa Bay Times criticizes staff members for leaving the veteran's body unattended for such a long time and then trying to cover up their mistake.

The veteran died in February, and the Times obtained the report from the hospital's Administrative Investigation Board through a Freedom of Information Act request. Investigators interviewed more than 30 witnesses, the Times reported, finding that hospice staff members "demonstrated

a lack of concern, attention and respect" for the veteran.

According to the heavily redacted report, the veteran died while receiving treatment in the hospice unit. When staff members learned the veteran had died, the report said, they asked a transporter to carry the body to a morgue. The transporter allegedly told them to contact dispatchers instead.

"That request was never made, so those responsible for taking away the body never showed up," the Times reported.

The body sat in a hallway for an unspecified amount of time before staff members moved it into a shower room, according to the Times. They left it there for more than nine hours, investigators reportedly found.

Decomposition of the human body begins within minutes of death. The process, called autolysis, or self-digestion, begins when cells lose oxygen and tissues start to break down.

When the veteran's body was finally moved, Bay Pines staff

members "falsely documented" the incident and tried to blame their mistakes on a communication breakdown that never happened, according to the Times. Staff members also tried to pin blame on a lack of clerical staff in the hospital, and they failed to update an organizational chart.

A Bay Pines spokesman called the report's findings "unacceptable" and told the Times that the hospital was retraining staff members and changing its procedures in response.

"We feel that we have taken strong, appropriate and expeditious steps to strengthen and improve our existing systems and processes within the unit," hospital spokesman Jason Dangel told the Times, declining to say whether any workers had been fired. "It is our expectation that each veteran is transported to their final resting place in the timely, respectful and honorable manner. America's heroes deserve nothing less."

Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Fla., criticized the Department of

Veterans Affairs for the way the hospital handled the veteran's death.

"I am deeply disturbed by the incident that occurred at the Bay Pines VA hospital, and even more distressed to learn that staff attempted to cover it up," Bilirakis said in a Facebook post Friday. "Unsurprisingly, not a single VA employee has been fired following this incident, despite a clear lack of concern and respect for the Veteran."

At least two other veterans care facilities have come under fire this month amid claims that they failed to properly care for patients. In Oklahoma, a physician assistant and three nurses resigned from a state veterans affairs facility after a veteran who had a wound infested with maggots died in October, the Tulsa World reported. In Wisconsin, a dentist resigned from a state veterans affairs hospital after being accused of treating hundreds of patients with equipment that had not been properly cleaned, according to The Associated Press.

Trump pressured to keep VA secretary

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump has come under pressure from veterans organizations to keep current Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald in the job amid increasing opposition to the leading candidates to replace him.

Trump was harshly critical of the VA on the campaign trail, calling it "the most corrupt agency" in the country.

Keeping McDonald, 63, would run counter to Trump's assertion he would upend the status quo to provide better care for veterans.

Several powerful veterans groups are supportive of McDonald, a registered Republican, and argue he has made improvements at the agency

since he was chosen by President Barack Obama 30 months ago to lead the VA after a scandal over patient care.

On Friday, leaders of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans of America and American Veterans told top transition officials they could not support the two candidates now on the short list to lead the agency: Pete Hegseth, former chief executive of Concerned Veterans for America, and former Sen. Scott Brown, R-Mass.

Hegseth and Brown have each said they would make it easier to fire incompetent or corrupt employees and press to significantly increase the use of private doctors.

"We all made it clear that we

need someone like Bob, who knows how to run a very large organization and is committed to changing the culture," said Rick Weidman, executive director for policy and government affairs at Vietnam Veterans of America.

"None of the other people being mentioned are viable," he said.

The traditional veterans groups have long held clout in Washington. Whether they can sway Trump, though, will test whether the power center for veterans has shifted, from old-line organizations to new, smaller groups such as CVA.

McDonald has told VA officials and leaders of veterans groups he would continue in the Trump administration.

McDonald, confirmed in July 2014, is a West Point graduate

and Army veteran who came out of retirement to lead the VA after Secretary Eric Shinseki was forced.

McDonald is credited with making the VA more customer-friendly, bringing health and benefit records online and reducing the long wait lists for medical appointments.

Several lawmakers, including Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., have publicly urged Trump to keep McDonald.

But critics charge that McDonald has been too slow to address the agency's long backlog in appeals of disability benefits and to roll out a new program that allows veterans to see outside doctors, with restrictions. They also say he has failed to discipline or fire poor-performing employees enough.

Israel to receive initial 2 F-35 jets

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter was visiting Israel on Monday as it prepared to receive the first two next-generation F-35 fighter jets that will help preserve the country's military edge in the Middle East.

The F-35 is the Pentagon's most expensive weapons program, with an estimated cost of nearly \$400 billion. Israel is among a small number of allies to get the plane.

Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman said the fighter jets "present another component in maintaining air superiority in our region" and expressed gratitude to Carter, who was welcomed with a military honor guard at a Tel Aviv army base.

The jets were supposed to touch down in Israel in the early afternoon, but the Israeli military said their arrival was delayed due to bad weather in Italy. Neither U.S. nor Israeli officials provided more details.

The deputy commander of the Nevatim air base in southern Israel said the fighters will give Israel an upper hand over

its neighbors for years to come.

"We are going to be very strong for a long time, having these airplanes. And Israel has to be strong in this region for its existence," said Col. Asaf, who could be identified only by his first name in line with military regulations. "It's a message for everybody that Israel will keep on holding the high-end technology in this area."

The purchase of the F-35 elevates the entire Israeli air force to a higher level, the colonel said, adding that four Israeli pilots have been trained to fly the planes and that more will be shown how to use them.

In November, a senior Israeli air force official speaking on condition of anonymity described the arrival of the F-35 as a game-changer, citing its various cutting-edge systems, which would preserve Israel's ability to act freely in hostile airspace.

The Pentagon's F-35 program has been criticized by members of Congress over testing problems, delays and cost overruns. International buyers include Britain, South Korea, Israel, Italy, Australia, Canada, Turkey and Japan.

PHIBLEX 2017 canceled

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. and the Philippines have canceled next year's PHIBLEX amphibious landing exercise — a move that has been in the cards since Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte called for an end to the maneuvers in September.

"In 2017, PHIBLEX will not be executed," Marine Capt. Rachel Nolan, a liaison officer at the U.S. Embassy in Manila said in an email Monday.

This year's PHIBLEX (Philippine Amphibious Landing Exercise) brought 1,400 Marines from Okinawa's 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade to the Philippines to practice amphibious landings and complete live-fire training alongside 500 Philippine troops. However, the October exercise was conducted under a cloud after Duterte made negative comments about the U.S. soon after taking office in June.

With a reputation as a tough-talking maverick, Duterte has generated public admiration for bluntly — and often profanely — telling the U.S. and other world powers to butt out of his brutal war on drugs while leaving his spokesman and Cabinet ministers to clean up the mess.

In September, he called for U.S. special operators assisting in the archipelago's fight against Islamic extremists to leave Mindanao island, and

said he won't allow his navy to conduct joint patrols with foreign powers near the South China Sea, apparently scrapping an agreement his predecessor reached with the U.S.

Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana now says the country will not allow its territory to be used as a staging ground for U.S. patrols, according to The Associated Press.

U.S. ships and planes can use Guam or Okinawa for South China Sea missions. Lorenzana said they will be allowed to refuel and resupply in the Philippines after conducting such maneuvers, but not before, AP reported.

There will still be bilateral training involving the two militaries next year, Nolan said.

"We reached a mutually agreed-upon plan for 2017, which ensures that U.S.-Philippine military training activities and engagement remain robust and substantial," she said.

Many of the past training activities, including Balikatan, will continue in 2017 and focus on Philippine military priorities and areas of mutual interest such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, cybersecurity, maritime security and counterterrorism, Nolan said. Instead of PHIBLEX, the forces will conduct training focused on amphibious operations in response to humanitarian crisis and disaster relief, she said.

S. Korea calls North's mock attack on Blue House 'childish'

BY KIM GAMEL

Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korean commandos reportedly staged a weekend military drill targeting a replica of the South's presidential palace, prompting a rebuke from South Korean officials Monday.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un watched the exercise involving the special operation battalion of the Korean People's Army Unit 525, the state-run Korean Central News Agency reported.

On Sunday, the official Rodong Sinmun newspaper

published more than two dozen photos of soldiers firing as the mock Cheong Wa Dae, known as the Blue House, was engulfed in flames and smoke.

No date or location was given, but the South Korean military said earlier this year that the North had built a fake Blue House at a firing range on the outskirts of the capital, Pyongyang. The publication of the news suggested the drill was held the day before.

South Korea's Unification Ministry denounced the exercise, which it called a "childish" effort to exploit the political crisis that has led to the im-

peachment of President Park Geun-hye.

"North Korea's move seems to be aimed at showing that the regime remains firm in contrast to our internal affairs," ministry spokesman Jeong Joon-hee told reporters Monday, according to a transcript of the briefing. "We strongly condemn Kim Jong Un's consecutive visits to troops since November and actions to raise tensions like this."

South Korea's interim leader and other officials have called for heightened vigilance against North Korea, warning it could try to take advantage

of any political vacuum and uncertainty.

Tensions have risen sharply on the divided peninsula this year as the North has conducted two nuclear tests and several missile launches since January despite international condemnation and punishing U.N. Security Council sanctions.

On Monday, South Korea's Ministry of National Defense said in a parliamentary report that it has asked the U.S. to send more surveillance and reconnaissance assets to counter the growing threat from North Korea, the Yonhap news agency reported.

Top GOP leader says Senate will probe reports of hacking

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The top Senate Republican said Monday that Congress will investigate a CIA assessment that Russia interfered in the November election on behalf of Donald Trump, an intelligence conclusion that the incoming commander in chief has called “ridiculous.”

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell told reporters that an inquiry would be conducted by the Senate intelligence panel. Two key Senate Republicans — John McCain, of Arizona, and Lindsey Graham, of South Carolina, a leading Trump critic — have joined with two Democrats in seeking a bipartisan investigation into the Kremlin’s activities during the election.

After McConnell spoke, House Speaker Paul Ryan released a written statement saying a House Intelligence Committee probe of cyberthreats by other countries and terrorist groups “will continue and has my support.”

Ryan, R-Wis., said foreign

interference in U.S. elections is “entirely unacceptable” and said Russia under President Vladimir Putin “has been an aggressor that consistently undermines American interests.”

Unlike Trump, who has expressed admiration for Putin, McConnell said flatly, “The Russians are not our friends. Obviously, any foreign breach of our cybersecurity measures is disturbing, and I strongly condemn any such efforts,” he said.

Asked about McConnell’s support for a congressional probe, Trump spokesman Jason Miller said the focus on Russian interference in the election is “an attempt to delegitimize President-elect Trump’s win.”

Trump said Sunday the recent CIA assertion that Russian hacking had sought to help his candidacy was “ridiculous,” and he praised ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson, who has emerged as the leading contender to lead the State Department.

“It’s a matter of concern to me that he has such a close per-

sonal relationship with Vladimir Putin,” McCain said of Tillerson.

Sen. Chuck Schumer, of New York, the incoming Democratic leader, on Monday welcomed McConnell’s endorsement of an inquiry, which he said must be bipartisan and encompass “all of the relevant intelligence.”

Meanwhile, Trump’s transition team announced Monday that his choice to head the Department of Homeland Security is, as expected, Gen. John Kelly. Kelly is a former commander of U.S. Southern Command with “unique insight into some of the challenges the United States faces at its southern border,” the announcement said.

Trump had meetings scheduled Monday with former-Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina; former Texas Gov. Rick Perry; Rep. Raul Labrador, of Idaho; Rep. Ryan Zinke, of Montana; and Rep. Cathy McMorris Rogers, of Washington State, as well as Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin, of West Virginia.

Wintry weather is pushing east in US

Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. — Snow, freezing rain and regular rain made for a messy commute and closed hundreds of schools Monday as a winter storm pushed eastward.

The National Weather Service issued winter storm warnings and winter weather advisories for parts of the Great Lakes and the Northeast.

Snow fell throughout northern New England, with speeds reduced on snow-packed roads and numerous schools canceled or delayed.

Pats Peak Ski Area in Henninger, N.H., had received 6 to 8 inches of snow by midmorning, and spokeswoman Lori Rowell said the ski area that opened Saturday with about half its trails available saw an increase in children who didn’t have school on Monday due to the weather.

The National Weather Service forecast snow across Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, with up to a foot of snow forecast for parts of southern Vermont. At least several inches were on the ground in parts of the region by Monday morning. Some rain was expected to mix with the snow in southern New Hampshire.

Into early Monday, the storm had dumped more than a half-foot on several states in the Midwest and Great Lakes regions, causing dangerous travel conditions.

Hundreds of Michigan schools closed Monday as the state dug out from more than 10 inches of snow that fell over the weekend.

Temperatures 15 to 30 degrees below average will follow the cold rain and snow in the coming days through much of the Midwest and East.

Accused shooter had list of other churches

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. — When he was arrested, the man accused of killing nine people during a Bible study in a Charleston church had a list of other area black churches in his car, law enforcement officials testified on Monday.

During roughly two hours on the stand, former State Law Enforcement Division agent Brittany Burke testified that names of a handful of other churches and their addresses were found on a handwritten list in a backpack in Dylann Roof’s car.

Also on papers found in Roof’s car were phone numbers for the Statehouse complex in Columbia, as well as the name

of Denmark Vesey, one of the founders of Charleston’s Emanuel AME Church.

Burke is one of the state agents who processed evidence found in Roof’s car when he was arrested after the June 2015 shootings at the church known as Mother Emanuel. A jury began last week hearing testimony against Roof, 22, who is on trial on 33 federal charges, including hate crimes and obstruction of the practice of religion.

Roof has formally entered a not guilty plea to all the charges in federal court. But his attorneys have said he’s willing to change that to guilty if prosecutors agree not to seek the

death penalty against him.

In his videotaped, two-hour confession played for jurors last week, Roof told FBI agents he left bullets in a magazine so that he could kill himself after the slayings but changed his mind when he didn’t see any police immediately after the shooting.

Evidence shown in photographs introduced Monday showed Roof was essentially living in his car. Recovered from his black sedan were multiple items of clothing, food, beverages and an empty liquor bottle. There were also multiple travel brochures, a cellphone, laptop computer and a burned American flag.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Car nearly hits man in bed

NY NEW YORK — Police said a driver slammed through the brick wall of a Queens home, coming dangerously close to a man sitting in bed.

It happened Friday evening in a quiet neighborhood of Howard Beach.

Police said the driver apparently stepped on the accelerator instead of the brakes while attempting to avoid another car.

The owner of the house, Giacomo Terrana, said his son, Andrew, 34, was watching television in bed when the car came through his bedroom.

Andrew Terrana was evaluated at a hospital after suffering a bump to the head.

9 youths charged in flash-mob robbery

CT HARTFORD — Hartford police have charged nine juveniles in connection with a destructive flash-mob robbery of a convenience store last month and say more likely will be charged.

They were referred to juvenile court.

Deputy Chief Brian Foley said investigators have identified more than 25 youths who are suspected of ransacking a Shell station about 10 p.m. on Nov. 26.

As many as 40 youths who had just left a party caused an estimated \$4,000 in damage and stole snacks and candy. They ignored the clerk's shouts to stop and even pelted him with merchandise.

Police have used surveillance footage to identify some participants, but also have received cooperation from school officials and parents. Police said some parents even brought their children forward after hearing about the rampage.

Ex-senator says bear hunt is 'unforgiveable'

NJ FREDON — Former Democratic U.S. Sen. Robert Torricelli has joined opponents of New Jersey's bear hunt who say it is inhumane and blame it for the death of a wild bear who walked upright.

Torricelli told NJ.com outside a state weigh station Saturday that hunters are "slaughtering entire families of bears." He called the hunt "unforgiveable."

State wildlife officials believe the bipedal bear, popularly known as Pedals, was killed in an October hunt.

As of Friday, hunters killed a record 629 bears, up from the previous record of 592 in 2010.

Briton flies to propose at 'Ghostbusters' site

NY NEW YORK — A British man flew his girlfriend to New York City so he could propose to her at the firehouse used in the "Ghostbusters" franchise.

Wearing a hard hat and a safety vest, Giles Baugh dropped to one knee at Ladder 8 in Tribeca and asked Melissa Ward to marry him. Ward, who said she's learned to embrace Baugh's "Ghostbusters" fandom, happily agreed.

A city employee persuaded the FDNY to go along with Baugh's stunt so long as the proper safety precautions were taken.

Store manager fired over racial profiling

AL OXFORD — Victoria's Secret has fired an Alabama employee after a customer went viral in a Facebook Live video in which she said she was racially profiled.

WBRC-TV reported travel-

ing nurse Kimberly Houzah said she and another black woman were asked to leave the store at Oxford's Quintard Mall on Wednesday.

Houzah said the store manager's request came after another black woman, whom Houzah said she didn't know, was accused of shoplifting. Houzah said she feels the manager discriminated against her because of race.

Houzah and a group of protesters returned Thursday, seeking an apology and calling for the manager's job. The manager on duty apologized and said the other manager had been fired.

Extreme cold frosts even Moscow Ballet

WY CASPER — It got so cold in Wyoming, even the Moscow Ballet couldn't move.

The traveling ballet group famous for performing "The Nutcracker" this time of year couldn't start their buses Thursday morning in Casper. The temperature in the central Wyoming city plunged to 31 degrees below zero overnight.

Moscow Ballet spokeswoman Sally Michael Keyes said the group's bus and equipment trucks had to be defrosted over several hours. The delay and worries about driving over snowy passes in Colorado prompted the troupe to cancel a performance Thursday night in Grand Junction, Colo.

The ballet's home town of Moscow is no stranger to cold and snow, but even Moscow's recent low of 18 degrees wasn't nearly as cold as Casper's.

Victim writes 'Contact 911' on package

MO FRANKLIN COUNTY — It was a routine pickup for a package

service driver here but an unusual package. "Contact 911" was written on the outside.

Police summoned as a result said they had a short confrontation with James Jordan, 33, of Robertsville, who then was charged with domestic assault, sodomy, felonious restraint, unlawful use of a weapon and endangering the welfare of a child.

The charges allege that Jordan had locked a 3-year-old child in a room for several hours while assaulting a woman in the home. His bail was set at \$100,000 cash.

The driver called for help after seeing the note on the package.

Realizing that Jordan had past assault arrests and may have had a .45-caliber handgun and access to rifles, the officers called for a SWAT team. Jordan surrendered before the team arrived.

Man gets 30 years in kidnapping, assault

UT LOGAN — A Preston, Idaho, man has been sentenced to 30 years in prison for holding a gun to a Utah woman's head and trying to stab her boyfriend after a period of stalking in 2014.

The Idaho State Journal reported that Andrew Lesky was originally charged with attempted murder. A jury in October found him guilty of aggravated kidnapping, aggravated assault and illegal possession of a firearm.

Police said Lesky went to the woman's home in Logan and, after a confrontation, he held a handgun to her head and pulled the trigger, but the gun misfired.

Lesky also tried to stab the woman's boyfriend. The knife cut the man's clothing but he wasn't hurt.

From wire reports

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Giants beat Dallas for second time

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Maybe instead of looking at what the Cowboys have been doing to the rest of the league, NFL teams should look at what the Giants did to the Cowboys this season.

And who knows, maybe what New York could do again should they meet in the playoffs.

Dallas' offense ripped through nearly every opponent during an 11-game winning streak that began after a 20-19 home loss to New York in the season opener. That string ended under the powerful pressure the Giants applied on defense Sunday night: a strong pass rush; sticky coverage of the Cowboys' star receivers, Dez Bryant and tight end Jason Witten; and three takeaways.

Tampa Bay, Detroit and Philadelphia, the Cowboys' final three opponents, surely will take note.

The Cowboys have put their stamp on victories all year by jumping to leads and

pounding opponents with sensational rookie running back Ezekiel Elliott. Dak Prescott has made all the right decisions and plenty of big plays. The defense has been far less dynamic, but not a liability.

That formula earned them the league's first playoff clinching last week and could have gotten them a first-round bye with a victory over the Giants at MetLife Stadium. Except the formula got squished by the Giants, 10-7.

While there's no reason to panic in Big D, the Cowboys' main public speaker, owner Jerry Jones, hoped the loss would provide a cautionary tale.

"As a team, we will react to this loss against a physical Giants team and get better," Jones said. "We're not going to let this do anything but improve us."

"I like our players' tools. We were inconsistent tonight. I'm giving the Giants the credit for creating that inconsistency."

Jones smiled when the inevitable question came of whether Tony Romo's role will change after Prescott struggled mightily

in the Meadowlands. Dallas went an abysmal 1-for-15 on third downs and gained a season-low 260 yards.

"No," he said with emphasis.

Although the Cowboys have a big lead in the NFC with three games remaining, Jones knows they are treading a thin line when relying on rookies as major contributors. Of course, Elliott and Prescott appear to be special rookies.

He was careful to praise the Giants and then emphasize the good elements he saw from his team. All of those, given the score, were on defense.

"We played a well-coached team and effective team out there," Jones said. "A lot of the credit goes to the Giants for what we didn't do offensively like we needed to do. They had a good way to defense us, and they did."

"I thought our defense played as well as I have seen them play this year. That's encouraging as we go into these last few games."

Texans in driver's seat in AFC South

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The Houston Texans are heading home with a lot more than a second straight victory at Indianapolis.

They're atop the AFC South, again, and in control of their own postseason fate, again, if they keep finding ways to win games.

What they did Sunday to snap a three-game losing streak and position themselves for a second straight AFC South title was rely on a proven old-school formula — run efficiently, force turnovers and let the defense close it out.

"We have a mindset — every game is a playoff game," Lamar Miller said after rushing for 107 yards in the 22-17 victory. "When we came in (to practice) Monday, you could tell by the energy in the locker room."

Right now, everything seems lined up for Houston even though they're tied for the AFC South lead with Tennessee.

Of the three division teams

still in contention, Houston has the easiest schedule remaining. It also has a season sweep over the Titans and now its first season sweep of the Colts (6-7). Houston has won nine straight against division foes, tied with Kansas City for the longest active streak in the league.

But after snapping a three-game losing streak, the Texans know there's still not a lot of margin for error.

"It's what we talked about, coming here and winning the game," Jadeveon Clowney said after his strip-sack of Andrew Luck on third-and-goal from the 3-yard line snuffed out a scoring chance late in the third quarter. "We now control our own destiny."

The Colts, meanwhile, must rely on help after Luck was picked off twice, lost the fumble and couldn't put enough points on the board on a frustrating day that left players battered and their playoff hopes severely bruised.

Rodgers, Packers blow out Seattle

Associated Press

GREENBAY, Wis. — Packers receiver Jordy Nelson sounds as if he's running out of superlatives to describe quarterback Aaron Rodgers.

Nothing surprises Nelson anymore about Rodgers, not even when the two-time NFL MVP is playing with two sore legs.

Rodgers threw for 246 yards and three scores, including two to Nelson, and dissected Seattle's top-ranked defense in a 38-10 win on Sunday over the Seahawks.

Already playing with a sore left hamstring, Rodgers said he hurt his right calf while throwing a tone-setting, 66-yard touchdown pass to Davante Adams on the game's opening drive.

Rodgers' trademark mobility might be limited, but his arm is working just fine. He finished 18 of 23.

The Packers (7-6) won their third straight following a four-game losing streak to keep their

playoff hopes alive. They stayed two games back of first-place Detroit in the NFC North, with their final three regular-season games against divisional opponents.

Don't think for one minute that Rodgers plans to miss any time.

"That's football. You deal with injuries, you know. I'd like to talk about the win — you're talking about my injuries," Rodgers told reporters. "I'm not missing games, so ... we've won three in a row."

Seattle's defense looked terrible in its first game without former All-Pro safety Earl Thomas, who has a broken leg.

But Russell Wilson's career-high five interceptions might have been the most startling disappointment for the Seahawks (8-4-1). Wilson was 22 of 39 for 240 yards and one touchdown.

"There were just too many in there and we don't have to talk about each play," Wilson said. "Obviously, we can't turn the ball over and I put that on me."

Bell leads Steelers past Bills

Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Le'Veon Bell had no issues with traction in establishing the Pittsburgh Steelers' rushing record on a slick, snow-covered field.

Whether it was rushing to his left, right or up the middle, the Steelers running back scored three times and gained 236 yards rushing in a 27-20 win over the Buffalo Bills on Sunday.

For Bell, the wintry conditions were nothing more than what it was like growing up in suburban Columbus, Ohio.

"It was never a thing that bothered me, being cold or if there's snow. It never fazed me," Bell said, noting that goes for the cold-weather Steelers, too. "Our guys embrace playing in the snow."

The Steelers (8-5) overcame three interceptions thrown by Ben Roethlisberger to win their fourth straight and improve to 8-5 and keep pace in the AFC playoff race.

It's the Bills (6-7) who were unable to get a hand on Bell in having their playoff chances all but mathematically slip away. Buffalo is in jeopardy of extending the NFL's longest active playoff drought to 17 years — the longest since New Orleans ended a 20-year drought by reaching the postseason for their first time in 1987.

Buccaneers 16, Saints 11: Streaking Tampa Bay bolstered its playoff hopes by building an early lead and holding off Drew Brees and visiting New Orleans for its fifth straight victory.

Doug Martin scored on a 1-yard run, Roberto Aguayo kicked three field goals and an improving defense intercepted Brees three times while holding the NFL passing leader without a touchdown pass.

Brees began the day leading the league in completions, attempts, completion percentage, passing yards and TD passes, but failed to throw for a touchdown for the second straight week, the first time he's done that in consecutive games since 2009.

Panthers 26, Chargers 16: Host Carolina's defense forced five turnovers by Philip Rivers and had five sacks and a safety.

Cam Newton was a pedestrian 10-for-27 for 160 yards with one touchdown pass and one interception for Carolina (5-8), which snapped a two-game losing streak and kept its slim playoff hopes alive. Jonathan Stewart ran for 66 yards and a touchdown and Graham Gano had four field goals.

Dolphins 26, Cardinals 23: At Miami Gardens, Fla., Ryan Tannehill threw three touchdown passes before being sidelined with a knee injury, and Andrew Franks kicked a 21-yard field goal as time expired.

Tannehill limped to the locker room late in the third quarter after being hit around the legs by defensive tackle Calais Campbell as he released a completion.

Redskins 27, Eagles 22: Chris Thompson's 25-yard touchdown run with 1:54 remaining lifted visiting Washington. Kirk Cousins threw two touchdown passes, including an 80-yard toss to DeSean Jackson, and had a pick-6.

The Eagles took a 22-21 lead when Caleb Sturgis hit a 41-yard field goal with 4:59 left after holder Donnie Jones got the high snap from third-string long snapper Trey Burton down in time.

Carson Wentz drove Philadelphia to the Redskins 14 in the final minute, but Ryan Kerrigan sacked him to force a fumble and seal the win for Washington (7-5-1), which remained in the middle of a jumbled playoff race.

Lions 20, Bears 17: At Detroit, Matthew Stafford ran for a go-ahead, 7-yard touchdown with 3:17 left after throwing two interceptions in the fourth quarter, one that was returned for a score on the previous possession.

Matt Barkley completed two passes that put the Bears in a position to at least attempt a tying field goal in the final minute, but both were negated by penalties, before Chicago turned over the ball on downs

from the Detroit 44.

Vikings 25, Jaguars 16: Matt Asiata scored on a short touchdown run, Kai Forbath kicked four field goals and visiting Minnesota won for just the second time in nine weeks.

The hapless Jaguars (2-11) dropped their eighth consecutive game and fell to 0-6 at EverBank Field this season.

Bengals 23, Browns 10: Robert Griffin III returned from injury but couldn't keep host Cleveland from falling closer to infamy as Cincinnati built a big early lead and held off the winless Browns in the snow.

Andy Dalton threw two touchdown passes to Tyler Eifert as the Bengals (5-7-1) kept their playoff chances alive for another week.

Falcons 42, Rams 14: Matt Ryan passed for 237 yards and three touchdowns and Atlanta forced five turnovers to beat host Los Angeles.

Deion Jones returned an interception 33 yards for a touchdown, and Vic Beasley forced a fumble by Jared Goff and returned it for another TD during Atlanta's comprehensive pummeling of the Rams (4-9), who have lost four straight and eight of nine in their increasingly miserable homecoming season.

Titans 13, Broncos 10: DeMarco Murray ran for 92 yards and a touchdown, and host Tennessee held on to and keep a piece of first place in the AFC South. With the win, the Titans (7-6) also climbed above .500 for the first time all season.

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Seattle wins MLS Cup in PK shootout

Associated Press

TORONTO — As homecomings go, the MLS Cup final is going to be hard to beat for Seattle's Stefan Frei.

Frei made critical saves in regulation and then again in the penalty-kick shootout to help the Sounders win their first championship with a 5-4 victory in the tiebreaker against Toronto FC on Saturday night.

The Swiss goalkeeper, who was drafted by Toronto in 2009 and spent five seasons with the club until he was traded in 2013, earned the game's MVP honors.

"This is what you want to be a part of," he said. "We've made Sounders history and for me it could have happened anywhere, I don't care as long as I'm with my team and my teammates."

Roman Torres scored in the sixth round of penalty kicks to clinch the trophy after 120 scoreless minutes. It was the first MLS Cup final to fail to produce a goal in regulation, setting the stage for a dramatic tiebreaker.

While Toronto's Michael Bradley and Alvaro Fernandez for Seattle had both seen their shots saved, the game went to sudden-death spot kicks. Toronto's Justin Morrow could only clatter his shot off the crossbar, setting the stage for Torres to win it with a high shot down the middle of the goal.

"You need a little bit of luck," Frei said. "Let's face it, PKs are not the prettiest thing to decide a game, and actually Roman missed a penalty in training yesterday. I'm glad he missed yesterday and not today."

Seattle became the first team in MLS Cup final history to fail to produce a shot on target throughout the game. Additionally, the Sounders' three shots overall were the fewest in an MLS title game, the first to feature two expansion franchises. Toronto was the first Canadian MLS Cup finalist.

OKC gets by Boston

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Russell Westbrook's triple-double streak ended at seven games, but he scored 23 of his 37 points in the second half to help the Oklahoma City defeat Boston 99-96 on Sunday.

Westbrook had 12 rebounds, but just six assists. His triple-double run was the longest since Michael Jordan had seven straight in 1989. The NBA record is nine in a row by Philadelphia's Wilt Chamberlain in March 1968.

Steven Adams scored 16 points and Enes Kanter added 14 for the Thunder, who have won seven of eight.

Al Horford scored 19 points, and Jae Crowder and Avery Bradley each added 18 for the Celtics.

Warriors 116, Timberwolves 108: Klay Thompson scored 30 points and Golden State roared back to beat host Minnesota and avoid its first set of consecutive regular-season losses since 2015.

Stephen Curry had 22 points and nine assists, and the Warriors extended their NBA-record streak to 111 regular-season games without losing two in a row.

76ers 97, Pistons 79: Robert Covington had 16 points and visiting Philadelphia beat Detroit for its second consecutive road victory after going nearly a year without one.

Ersan Ilyasova added 15 points for the 76ers, who had matched a franchise record by losing 23 straight games away from home before beating New Orleans last Thursday night.

Pelicans 120, Suns 119 (OT): Tim Frazier got his first career triple-double and New Orleans rallied from a 15-point second-half deficit to beat Phoenix in overtime, snapping a five-game losing streak.

Knicks 118, Lakers 112: Kristaps Porzingis had 26 points and 12 rebounds, Derrick Rose scored 25 in his return from injury and New York held off Los Angeles for its sixth win in seven games.

Schenn, Flyers win 9th straight

Associated Press

DETROIT — Brayden Schenn completed an outstanding weekend and helped the Philadelphia Flyers reach their longest winning streak in over two decades.

Schenn scored in overtime and Anthony Stolarz got his first shutout in his second NHL start, lifting the Flyers over the Detroit Red Wings 1-0 on Sunday night for their ninth straight win.

It's Philadelphia's longest streak since winning nine straight in April 1995.

Schenn had three power-play goals in a 4-2 win over Dallas on Saturday, then scored 2:44 into OT against Detroit for his eighth goal of the season.

Oilers 3, Jets 2: Patrik Laine shot the puck into his own net midway through the third period, costing visiting Winnipeg.

Edmonton's Mark Letestu was credited with his second goal of the game when Laine fired the rebound of Letestu's slap shot directly into his own wide-open goal.

Avalanche 3, Maple Leafs

1: Semyon Varlamov made 51 saves, helping visiting Colorado rebound from a miserable loss with a victory over Toronto.

The Avs lost 10-1 to Montreal on Saturday night but rebounded on the back of their Russian goaltender. Mikko Rantanen, Nathan MacKinnon and Blake Comeau scored, helping last-place Colorado get its second win in nine games.

Rangers 5, Devils 0: J.T. Miller and Brady Skjei scored 3:50 apart late in the second period, Antti Raanta stopped 19 shots for his second straight shutout and host New York beat New Jersey.

Chris Kreider had a goal and an assist, and Brandon Pirri and Jimmy Vesey also scored to give the Rangers their first three-game winning streak since Nov. 12-15.

Blackhawks 3, Stars 1: Marian Hossa, Artem Anisimov and Artemi Panarin scored to lead Central Division-leading Chicago over visiting Dallas.

Chicago's Scott Darling made 23 saves in his fifth straight start while No. 1 goalie Corey Crawford recovers from an ap-

pendectomy. Darling has permitted just seven goals during the stretch, but the Blackhawks have scored only nine while going 2-2-1.

Capitals 3, Canucks 0: Alex Ovechkin scored a power-play goal in the first period and Braden Holtby made it stand up, stopping 20 shots to help host Washington beat weary Vancouver.

Washington nursed a 1-0 lead until Ovechkin earned an assist on a goal by Justin Williams with just under 15 minutes left.

Holtby was rarely tested in his 25th career shutout, the second this season.

Wild 3, Blues 1: Matt Dumba, Nino Niederreiter and Mikael Granlund scored, Devan Dubnyk made 22 saves and host Minnesota held on to beat St. Louis for its fourth straight win.

Ducks 5, Senators 1: Antoine Vermette and Corey Perry each had a goal and an assist and host Anaheim scored a season-high three power-play goals to beat Ottawa.

Florida State upsets No. 21 Gators

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — A young but talented Florida State hopes its 83-78 victory Sunday over No. 21 Florida is the first of many big wins with Atlantic Coast Conference play set to start in two weeks.

"Tonight we showed the world what we can become and what we have in hold for the future," said Dwayne Bacon, who scored a season-high 24 points.

It is the Seminoles' first victory over a ranked nonconference team at home since they beat the Gators on Dec. 7, 2008.

Coach Leonard Hamilton was even a little leery about what to expect going into the game. Florida had already faced some good tests in Miami, Gonzaga and Duke but Florida State was not as tested and had won its past three games by an average

of 41 points.

FSU (10-1) struggled for the first 10 minutes, committing seven turnovers as Florida (7-3) scored 15 of its first 19 points off turnovers. The Gators would lead by as many as five before the Seminoles started to settle down and take a 36-34 lead at halftime.

In the second half, Bacon took over. The sophomore guard scored nine points during a 15-4 run early in the second half that helped the Seminoles take control after it was tied at 38.

No. 6 Kentucky 96, Hofstra 73: Malik Monk scored 20 points, Isaiah Briscoe had 19 and the Wildcats took control with a 26-3 run spanning half-time in a 96-73 victory over the Pride on Sunday in the Brooklyn Hoops Winter Festival at Barclays Center.

No. 7 North Carolina 73, Tennessee 71: Justin Jackson scored the go-ahead basket with 2:14 left to help the host Tar Heels rally from 15 down to beat the Vols.

No. 12 Saint Mary's 84, UC Irvine 53: At Moraga, Calif., Jock Landale had 15 points and seven rebounds, Evan Fitzner added a season-high 12 points and the Gaels bounced back from their first loss of the season.

No. 24 Oregon 63, Alabama 56: Tyler Dorsey scored 19 points and Dylan Ennis hit the tiebreaking three-pointer as the shot clock expired to help Oregon beat visiting Alabama.

Dillon Brooks and Chris Boucher added 10 points each for the Ducks (8-2). They won their sixth consecutive game and 31st in a row at home.