

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Navy plan would give Trump his 350 ships

*Bloomberg*

The U.S. Navy says it needs as many as 355 ships, up from the current goal of 308, echoing a goal that President-elect Donald Trump set in his campaign.

The “Force Structure Assessment” released Friday calls for expanding the Navy from its current fleet of 272 during the next 30 years. That could mean increased sales for General Dynamics and Huntington Ingalls Industries, the nation’s primary makers of combat vessels, as well as Lockheed Martin, with its Aegis combat system, and Raytheon, which makes electronic combat systems and the new Air and Missile Defense Radar.

During the presidential campaign, Trump called for a 350-ship Navy. Now, the Navy

has done essentially the same, rebuffing a blunt warning from Defense Secretary Ash Carter to emphasize quality over quantity.

A 355-vessel fleet is “the level that balanced an acceptable level of war-fighting risk to our equipment and personnel against available resources and achieves a force size that can reasonably achieve success,” the Navy said in the report. A summary of the assessment was sent to Congress and was obtained by Bloomberg News.

Trump said in September that he adopted his goal from a bipartisan panel created by Congress to review the Pentagon’s 2014 quadrennial review of projected threats and U.S. responses. That report called for “somewhere between” 323 and 346 ships while cautioning

more may be needed to meet challenges such as China’s plan to have “close to” 350 vessels by 2020. The Navy’s force-structure goal is adjusted every few years and has been in the range of 306 to 328 ships since 2006, according to the Congressional Research Service.

“While continuing the counterterrorism fight and appropriately competing with a growing China and resurgent Russia, our Navy must continue to grow,” Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus said in a statement. “All of the analysis done to date, inside and outside of the Navy, recognizes, as we have for nearly the last eight years, the need for a larger fleet.”

The new goals would boost by 16 the number of “large surface combatants” — destroyers, cruisers or both. It would

add one aircraft carrier in addition to the 11 mandated by law today, 18 more attack submarines and as many as four new amphibious warfare ships.

Cost remains the biggest impediment. The nonpartisan Congressional Research Service estimates a 350-ship Navy would cost an average \$4 billion extra annually over the current forecast of about \$16.3 billion per year for new ship construction through 2021. The current budget calls for eight new vessels in fiscal 2018, seven in 2019 and eight in 2020 and 2021.

Defense budget caps that remain in place for fiscal 2018 to 2021 would constrain a naval buildup. The Pentagon faces about \$106.6 billion in potential cuts from its current budget projections — starting with \$33.6 billion in fiscal 2018.

## Navy aims to make health services more convenient

*The (Norfolk) Virginian-Pilot*

PORTSMOUTH, Va. — The Navy’s top doctor wants more sailors, Marines and their families to get their health care from the military so its medical personnel will be well-trained for the next conflict, and he’s eyeing private-sector methods to achieve his goal.

Vice Adm. Forrest Faison, the service’s surgeon general, said in a recent interview at Portsmouth Naval Medical Center that he’s working to make access to care more convenient, improve patient experiences and leverage technology to appeal to young people.

He noted that about three of every four sailors were born after 1986, making them digital natives who are changing expectations of how health care should be delivered.

“We’ve got to adapt to that,”

Faison said, mentioning videoconferencing and mobile apps.

Sailors, Marines and their family members are allowed to use the federally subsidized Tricare health program to seek treatment from private providers, and Faison is on a quest to recapture some of those patients.

Throughout the Defense Department, military facilities saw 250,000 inpatient admissions in the 2015 fiscal year; private facilities in the care network had more than three times as many — 795,000.

Faison said the Navy needs a variety of patients at home so its doctors, nurses and hospital corpsmen are prepared for anything that comes up during a deployment.

The military has achieved a 97 percent survival rate for injured personnel during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and he

doesn’t want to see those numbers drop in future conflicts. By comparison, the survival rate was about 80 percent in World Wars I and II, and about 84 percent during the Vietnam War, according to various studies cited by the Navy.

But first, Faison needs patients at places such as Portsmouth Naval Medical Center to give his sailors and Marines experience.

“If you’re a Navy doctor, you may be the only doctor for a couple thousand miles, so I want to make sure you’re well-trained,” said Faison, a Norfolk native.

Faison said many sailors and Marines are choosing to receive treatments at urgent care and other retail clinics because it’s more convenient than coming on base. He noted that most sailors live within 10 miles of a Wal-Mart, which is putting health care clinics in its stores.

Faison said that’s a problem if that option becomes popular. His corpsmen aren’t gaining experience working on those patients, the patients’ care becomes fragmented because they may go to many different clinics, and he loses knowledge about sailors and Marines’ health if their commanding officer needs to know it.

To address that issue, he’s planning to launch a pilot program in Jacksonville, Fla., to place a health care clinic in a Defense Department commissary, although no opening date has been set.

Faison said he’s also focused on developing mobile applications like those the private sector uses that would help patients spend less time in a hospital for routine appointments such as getting a prescription filled.

# Guard bonus probe finds lack of oversight

By TRAVIS J. TRITTEN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The recent investigation into massive fraud involving California National Guard bonuses revealed a lack of oversight in how the incentives were spent in California and elsewhere. During the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, some Army National Guard state bureaus were paying incentives without confirming whether soldiers were eligible, according to Army audits.

“Before 2012, you could actually give away the money without having all the documentation in place to prove that the people were entitled to it. That’s not possible anymore,” Gen. Joseph Lengyel, chief of the National Guard Bureau, told *Stars and Stripes* in October.

About 17,000 California incentives doled out before 2011 are being examined by a specially appointed Pentagon team in a review that could last until next summer. Congress passed legislation this month to offer relief to soldiers in the state who were asked to repay the money.

Spending on incentives ramped up during the wars in an effort to boost troop numbers. From 2005 to 2010, the Army National Guard spent \$3.2 billion for its Selected Reserve Incentive Program, which includes enlistment and re-enlistment bonuses and student loan repayments, according to Defense Department budget records.

The money paid to recruit and retain soldiers nationwide reached a high point of \$812 million in 2008 and 2009, just before federal criminal investigations exposed the scandal in California.

## Rampant fraud

Reports in 2010 of rampant fraud in California triggered an investigation by the Army Criminal Investigative Command, the FBI and the Defense Criminal Investigative Services, which is part of the Defense Department inspector general’s office.

The incentives program manager for the California National Guard, retired Master Sgt. Toni Jaffe, was sentenced to 30 months in federal prison in 2012 for submitting \$15.2 million in false and fraudulent incentive claims.

National Guard bureaus were under pressure to recruit and retain soldiers during crucial stages of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bonuses and loan repayments were quickly paid to meet those requirements. In California, the effort was a “high-speed assembly line” that had Jaffe processing about 25 per day — 8,600 payments in 2007 and 2008, according to an investigation by the Sacramento Bee news-

paper that uncovered the fraud.

As Jaffe’s case was unfolding, the Army and the National Guard Bureau began looking into oversight of the Selected Reserve Incentive Program. The program is federally funded but is administered by state Guard bureaus across the country and in U.S. territories.

## ‘Internal control problems’

The bureau ordered all states and territories to review their incentives in 2010 and took a nationwide sample of 9,641 cases, according to Maj. Shannon Thomas, a spokeswoman for the National Guard Bureau.

“The issues found were administrative in nature and rapidly remedied by the state, leaving no backlog of cases requiring remediation,” Thomas wrote in an email.

The Pentagon did not provide a breakdown of the results and said no official report on the sample was issued.

Earlier this month, the Defense Department official heading up the review of the California incentives cases, Peter Levine, testified to Congress that the nationwide sample found “some internal control problems” but no evidence of the type of fraud committed by Jaffe in California.

Soon afterward, a series of Army audits detailed problems in the system — but remedies would take another few years.

## ‘Little to no oversight’

The Army Audit Agency examined a handful of state Guard bureaus between 2011 and 2013, looking specifically at how incentives were being managed. The review came about after the agency was contacted by the Army Criminal Investigative Command.

The agency discovered systemic oversight and administrative problems that led to improper payments to ineligible soldiers in California, Indiana, Pennsylvania and Kentucky.

“Controls over the manpower incentive program in the [Army National Guard] were not sufficient to ensure that recipients met all eligibility requirements,” according to an Army Audit Agency report in January 2012.

Also, appropriate checks were not in place to ensure that the bonuses and loan repayments — once granted — were being properly managed and paid, the agency found.

In Indiana, auditors found “little to no oversight” of the Guard’s student loan-repayment program between 2005 and 2009. In some cases, managers who performed the same job duties as Jaffe were able to initiate student loan repayments without verifying whether a person was a

member of the service.

The same problem was uncovered in California.

## Improperly paid

The California Guard struggled for years to complete a full review of its incentives cases but had not finished the work by the time Defense Secretary Ash Carter ordered a special Pentagon review in October.

In 2011, the Army Audit Agency had taken a more limited look at the handling of incentives by state bureaus.

It examined small numbers of troops in each state where auditors thought problems could exist, a method called judgmental sampling, and looked for incentives that were paid improperly for any reason.

The audits were aimed at ferreting out any oversight and administrative problems. Unlike random sampling, what it found could not be used to determine how many improper payments were made by the state bureaus nor how much money might have been wasted during the wars.

The auditing discovered that the California Guard improperly paid \$645,876 out of \$1.2 million — 55 percent of the total spent — in a sample of 95 cases from 2005 to 2010.

In Indiana, the agency found that 42 percent of 102 examined incentives from 2005 to 2010 were paid to soldiers who were ineligible, lost eligibility or were overpaid. It recommended reclaiming \$284,652.

Nearly \$79,000 in student loan repayments — six out of 13 examined cases — also was paid improperly by the Indiana Guard during that same period — when there was little or no oversight of the program, according to auditors.

Among the states audited, Pennsylvania was the only one with few problems. Army auditors found that only 7 percent of the 60 cases they looked at involved payments that should not have been made.

A follow-up audit in 2013 of 61 cases from the Missouri Guard bureau found that 30 percent of bonuses and 70 percent of loan repayments were made to ineligible soldiers or were not properly processed.

The Army’s audit results could indicate that money was paid improperly in other states, said John Furutani, a former auditor with the DOD inspector general and the Defense Contract Audit Agency, who is now retired. Furutani raised concerns to Congress about auditing practices at the IG when he worked there.

“The fact that they found all of these problems with just the judgmental sample is very significant,” he said. “It could mean that the problems are even worse across all 50 states.”

## US, Japan forge deal on civilian workers' status

BY ERIK SLAVIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOHAMA, Japan — The United States and Japan have nearly finalized a deal that could alter the rights of some civilian base workers in Japan, a move spurred by high-profile arrests of base employees in recent years.

"I am pleased that the United States and Japanese negotiators have successfully reached an agreement in principle that clarifies the scope of the civilian component of the U.S. Armed Forces in Japan," Defense Secretary Ash Carter said in a statement Monday, when most U.S. personnel in Japan were on holiday.

Carter said he expected the agreement to be finalized soon.

No details were released, but the pact is expected to exclude some workers from protection under the Status of Forces Agreement, which spells out rights and responsibilities for military and civilian personnel stationed in Japan.

The SOFA has been criticized by some in Japan for appearing to allow U.S. personnel to evade prosecution, though military officials dispute such characterizations.

The agreement gained attention earlier this year fol-

lowing the arrest of Kenneth Franklin Gadson, a Kadena Air Base cable company employee and former Marine, who was charged in June with raping and killing an Okinawan woman.

During a visit to Okinawa, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called it "questionable" that employees like Gadson were SOFA-sponsored.

The SOFA grants primary jurisdiction to Japan in most cases but allows accused personnel in U.S. custody to remain on base prior to being charged. The military then makes the suspect available for questioning by Japanese authorities.

Japan can request early custody in suspected cases of "heinous crimes," such as murder and rape.

Suspects in Japanese custody can be held by local authorities for more than three weeks without being charged, according to a U.S. Forces Japan instruction.

Last summer, the two sides agreed to exclude workers from the SOFA who already have Japanese residency visas.

The SOFA procedural changes are not a revision of the bilateral treaty, which was signed in 1960.

## Chinese carrier sails into South China Sea

*Associated Press*

BEIJING — China's first aircraft carrier and five other warships passed by Taiwan and sailed into the contested South China Sea on Monday, Taiwan's Defense Ministry said.

The ships, led by the Liaoning, sailed past the Pratas Islands, also known as the Dongsha Islands, a Taiwan-controlled atoll in the northern part of the South China Sea, according to the ministry.

China's Defense Ministry said Saturday that the Liaoning had set off for a routine open-sea exercise in the Western Pacific as part of its annual training. But its entering into the politically sensitive South China Sea follows rising tensions between Beijing and Taipei over the status of the self-ruled island.

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen has refused to endorse Beijing's concept that Taiwan is a part of China. Beijing claims the self-governing island as its own territory and says failing to endorse the "One China" principle would destabilize relations.

The Taiwanese ministry said the Liaoning and warships had sailed 90 nautical miles south of Taiwan in the Bashi Channel, a

waterway between Taiwan and the Philippines, on Sunday.

Tensions have mounted in the South China Sea, where the U.S. and China accuse each other of engaging in a dangerous military buildup. China claims nearly all of the sea and is pitted against smaller neighbors in multiple disputes over islands, coral reefs and lagoons.

The U.S.-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative think tank said this month that satellite imagery showed China building large anti-aircraft guns on artificial islands in the contested waters, where China also has laid airstrips, has built communications facilities and has deployed suspected missiles.

China has characterized its moves as defensive in nature and has accused U.S. warships of making provocative passes through the region.

The Liaoning, commissioned by the Chinese navy in 2012, first sailed to the South China Sea in 2013, when it docked at a navy base near the Chinese holiday resort of Sanya. At the time, the vessel was not outfitted with a full complement of aircraft.

## Obama gives final Christmas tribute to troops he's led

*Associated Press*

KANEHOE BAY, Hawaii — For eight years, Barack Obama has led a military fighting in multiple theaters overseas, becoming the only president in U.S. history to serve full two terms with the nation at war. On Sunday, he sought to pay tribute to the men and women who sacrificed along the way in battles that will continue even after his presidency comes to a close.

There was a tinge of nostalgia as Obama visited U.S. troops on Christmas for the last time, and some solemnity, too. The

president, who spent Christmas Eve calling troops serving overseas, pointed out that as Americans celebrate the holidays, U.S. troops are serving in dangerous, remote places like Iraq and Afghanistan.

He said some were carrying out missions against the Islamic State group even on Christmas Day.

"As tough as it is to be deployed, the people here in America, back home, understand that every single day you serve, you're fighting for our freedom," the president said, with first lady Michelle Obama at his side.

Obama has made it a tradition to spend some time on Christmas at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, not far from the rented house that he and his family have made their winter home away from home. As Obama spoke, a few hundred troops sat around tables in uniforms, many with their families, in a mess hall hosting their Christmas meal.

"I just want all of you to know that it has been the privilege of my life to serve as your commander in chief," Obama said.

He said even though he wouldn't be addressing them again as president, he wanted

to convey that as a private citizen, "my gratitude to you will remain." He said his wife felt the same way.

"Our commitment to standing by you every step of the way — that won't stop," Obama said.

Yet as he bid farewell to troops in Hawaii, Obama ended on a lighter note, pointing out that it might not be his final goodbye.

"I understand that I still have a little bit of rank as ex-president," Obama said. "So I still get to use the gym on base and, of course, the golf course."

# Russians don't believe terrorism caused crash

Associated Press

SOCHI, Russia — A pilot error or a technical fault — not terrorism — is likely to be the cause of the plane crash into the Black Sea, Russia's transport minister said Monday as the nation held a day of mourning for the victims.

All 84 passengers and eight crewmembers on the Russian military's Tu-154 plane are believed to have died Sunday morning when it crashed two minutes after taking off from the southern city of Sochi. The passengers included dozens of singers in Russia's world-famous military choir, nine Russian journalists and a Russian doctor known for her charity work in war zones.

On Monday, the search operation involved more than 3,500 people on 45 ships — including 135 divers flown in from across Russia — sweeping a vast crash site at sea and along the shore, according to the Defense

Ministry.

Five helicopters and drones were being used to help spot bodies and debris. Two deep-water submersibles arrived Monday in Sochi to aid the operation, which went on all through the night thanks to powerful searchlights.

The Black Sea search area — which covers about 4 square miles — is plagued by underwater currents that can carry debris and body fragments into the open sea.

The search party has not yet found the plane's black boxes, Emergency Situations Minister Vladimir Puchkov told Russian news agencies. Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov said earlier that the plane's flight recorders did not have radio beacons, so locating them on the seabed was going to be challenging.

Speaking on television Monday, Sokolov said terrorism was not among the main theories for the crash cause, and that

authorities were looking into a possible technical fault or a pilot error.

Still, several aviation experts noted factors that could suggest a terrorist attack, such as the crew's failure to report any malfunction and the fact that debris from the plane was scattered over a wide area.

The plane was taking the Defense Ministry's choir, the Alexandrov Ensemble, to perform at a New Year's concert at Hemeimeem air base in Syria's coastal province of Latakia. It had originated from Moscow's military airport of Chkalovsky and stopped in Sochi for refueling.

By Monday morning, rescue teams had recovered 11 bodies as well as body fragments. All were flown to Moscow, where the remains will be identified. Local governor Veniamin Kondratyev told Russian state television that most of the bodies could still be inside the fuselage.

## Mass graves are found in sweep of Aleppo

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Russia's Defense Ministry said Monday that its troops had found mass graves in Syria's Aleppo with bodies showing signs of torture and mutilation.

Dozens of bodies have been uncovered, according to Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov. He said some bore gunshot wounds.

While the Syrian war is now largely fought with mortars, tanks and air power, death has come at close quarters as well. Human rights observers and the media have recorded numerous examples of massacres and organized torture, perpetrated by the government, the opposition and the Islamic State group.

The Russian air force has helped Syrian President Bashar Assad capture Aleppo, Syria's largest city, after weeks of a siege.

Konashenkov also accused rebels, who controlled eastern Aleppo before they were pushed out earlier this month, of laying multiple booby traps and mines across town, endangering the civilian population.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which gathers information on the conflict through local contacts, said Sunday that at least 63 Syrian soldiers and militiamen had been killed by such booby traps in eastern Aleppo since the government took control of it from rebels Thursday. The Observatory said the victims were a mix of de-mining personnel and soldiers or militiamen looting the districts.

As Russian and Syrian forces secured and consolidated eastern Aleppo, Syrian President Bashar Assad was showing signs of increasing confidence in his position.

On Sunday, Assad visited a Christian orphanage near the capital Damascus to mark Christmas.

## Blizzards, ice wreak havoc in Plains

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Travel conditions remained hazardous as a winter storm swept across much of the northern Great Plains on Monday, with blowing and drifting snow creating near-zero visibility on some roads.

The combination of freezing rain, snow and high winds that forced the shutdown Sunday of vast stretches of highways in the Dakotas continued into Monday morning, and authorities issued no-travel warnings for much of North Dakota.

The storm also has caused widespread power outages in the Dakotas, Nebraska and western Iowa.

The South Dakota Rural Electric Association said more

than 12,000 of its customers were without power Monday morning. In Nebraska, high winds were cited for hundreds of power outages in central and eastern portions of the state.

"Between the ice and snow, and winds howling like crazy, there will be nothing moving" until late afternoon Monday, said National Weather Service meteorologist Greg Gust in Grand Forks, N.D. "Then it's dig-out time."

Gust's advice to travelers: "Stay put."

The weather service office in Bismarck, N.D., predicted snow accumulations of 8 to 15 inches in western parts of the state and thunderstorms in the central region.

The North Dakota Transportation Department closed most of a 240-mile stretch of Interstate 94 on Sunday night, from the Montana border to Jamestown. That stretch remained closed Monday morning. Portions of U.S. Highways 2, 52 and 281 were also closed because of snow, ice and "near zero visibility." Motorists who drive past roadblocks could be fined up to \$250.

Authorities in South Dakota shut down Interstate 90 from the Wyoming border to Chamberlain — a distance of about 260 miles. And the Rapid City Fire Department sent out its special tracked vehicle for the first time this season to help stranded motorists east of Rapid City.

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Boy walks to school on Saturday; dad charged

**PA** BERWICK — A man faces a child endangerment charge after his 5-year-old son walked nearly 2 miles to school in near-freezing temperatures — on a Saturday morning.

Jeffrey Wagner, 43, told the (Bloomsburg) Press Enterprise his son, Mitchell, woke him about 7 a.m. and said he needed to get ready for school. Wagner said he explained to his son he didn't have school that day and told him to go back to bed. Wagner said he then fell asleep again.

Undeterred, Mitchell got himself ready, walked a block to the bus stop and when the bus didn't show up, set off for school.

The newspaper reported a motorist spotted him and called police, who picked up the boy.

## Police: Sandwich links man to burglaries

**WY** CHEYENNE — A half-eaten peanut butter and jelly sandwich found at the scene led Wyoming police to arrest a burglary suspect.

The Wyoming Tribune Eagle reported that Zachery Munoz has pleaded not guilty to three counts of burglary.

Cheyenne police said someone on three separate occasions in September stole power tools and equipment from a business. In the first case, police said they found a half-eaten peanut butter and jelly sandwich at the scene. They dubbed the suspect the "PB&J burglar."

Police said subsequent DNA testing done at the Wyoming State Crime Lab linked Munoz, 26, to the sandwich.

He entered a plea earlier this month and his trial is scheduled for February.

## Rabbi: Prison prevents inmates' observance

**MI** LANSING — A national humanitarian organization said Michigan's prison system kept Jewish inmates from celebrating Hanukkah because they are not allowed to use matches or lighters.

The Detroit News reported that the Surfside, Fla.-based Aleph Institute said prisoners were unable to light menorahs over the eight-day Hanukkah observance that started Saturday. Rabbi Menachem Katz said Corrections officials "should have a little compassion." Katz is director of prison and military outreach for the Aleph Institute.

Corrections spokesman Chris Gautz said inmates can light menorahs if prison staffers or volunteers hold the matches or lighters. Katz said staffers or volunteers would have to attend ceremonies each of the eight nights.

## Mumps could be tied to cheerleading contests

**TX** DALLAS — The Texas Department of State Health Services is sending a letter to attendees of four cheerleading competitions in North Texas, warning they may have been exposed to mumps.

KXAS reported that the department is warning attendees of competitions in November and December in Dallas, Frisco and Arlington that those contests could have been the originator of some of the cases in the state's worst outbreak of mumps in years.

The number of mumps cases in North Texas has jumped to more than 50 in recent weeks with cases reported in Johnson, Dallas, Collin, Denton and Tarrant counties.

## Eating toxic plant likely killed family of bears

**PA** WEST WYOMING — Game commission officials said a poisonous ornamental shrub likely killed a black bear and her three cubs found dead in a church parking lot in northeastern Pennsylvania.

The bears were found Dec. 6 on the lot of St. Monica's church in West Wyoming.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission said the bears ate the leaves and seeds of an English yew plant before they died. The plant is highly toxic to people and most animals if ingested.

Officials said the 300-pound sow and her cubs were known to frequent populated areas, where yew plants typically grow, and the bears likely were foraging for food.

## Man guilty in false report that delayed bus

**TN** MEMPHIS — A man pleaded guilty to making a false report about a shooting threat to delay the departure of a missed Megabus headed for Texas.

Prosecutors said Kirk Stuart pleaded guilty in federal court in Memphis to a charge of willfully and maliciously conveying false information. Stuart had called police in February 2015 to say a man on the bus was about to do "something for Allah, a Muslim thing for Allah."

Authorities searched the bus in Little Rock, Ark., and found no one meeting the caller's description. Stuart later admitted to investigators that he had placed the fake emergency call in hopes of delaying the Megabus long enough to make its departure to Dallas. The Austin, Texas, man faces a sentence of up to five years in prison.

## Officials: Kids punished with hot peppers

**FL** LAKE WORTH — Authorities said a 28-year-old Florida woman punished three young children by putting hot peppers into their mouths.

Palm Beach County sheriff's officials said Angelina Andres was arrested Tuesday on three counts of child abuse.

The Palm Beach Post reported a witness told investigators that Andres left bruises on one of the children after hitting her with a belt buckle and made her wear a sweater to school to hide the bruises.

The report said a child told them Andres put peppers into their mouths if they didn't listen or ate too much candy. When the children cried, Andres gave them water. The Department of Children and Families has temporary custody of the children.

Records don't specify her relationship to the children.

## E-cigarette explodes, injuring man on bus

**CA** FRESNO — Authorities said a man was taken to a California hospital last week after an e-cigarette exploded in his pocket while he was riding a bus.

The Fresno Bee reported that witnesses on the bus said the man was trying use the device when the driver told him to stop. Authorities said the man then put the device in his pocket where it malfunctioned and burst into flames.

Witnesses said the man jumped from his seat screaming for help, the newspaper reported.

Fresno Fire Department spokesman Hector Vasquez said the victim was conscious and alert at the hospital. His name and age were not released. No one else was injured.

From wire reports

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## Steelers rally, win division

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The clock ticking and a season filled with promise evaporating, Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger took the snap, turned to his left and put the AFC North title into the hands of Antonio Brown.

The star wide receiver caught the ball at the Baltimore 1 and waited for the hit he knew was coming. When it arrived from Ravens safety Eric Weddle and linebacker C.J. Mosley, Brown ducked his head and stretched the ball across the goal line for a playoff-clinching touchdown that symbolized his team's considerable resilience.

Reeling in November. Heck, reeling early in the fourth quarter at home on Christmas against an archrival that's more than had their number in recent years, the Steelers are heading to the playoffs anyway.

Brown's lunging, 4-yard score with 9 seconds left lifted Pittsburgh to a gripping 31-27 victory and a second division title in three years, delivering just as Steelers running back Le'Veon Bell predicted Brown would.

"Over there by the heaters before the final drive, he said 'AB, you got to go down there and get the game winner,'" Brown said.

It was a play Brown's teammates have seen many times, just never with so much on the line.

"That's AB," wide receiver Damarcus Ayers said. "He does it so much in practice, it doesn't 'wow' you in a game. In this particular moment it's like, 'he's done it again.'"

Baltimore (8-7) was eliminated from contention.

Roethlisberger shook off a pair of third-quarter interceptions to finish with 279 yards passing and three touchdowns. Bell ran for 122 yards and a score and hauled in another on an ad-libbed play by Roethlisberger as Pittsburgh rallied from a 10-point deficit to win its sixth straight.

## Chiefs eliminate defending champs

Associated Press

Ten months ago, confetti rained down on the Denver Broncos after they won the Super Bowl.

On Sunday night, the only thing coming down was rain.

The Kansas City Chiefs dashed all Denver's remaining hopes of a repeat with a 33-10 rout at wet, sloppy Arrowhead Stadium that knocked the Broncos from postseason contention.

"We can't win all the time," Denver cornerback Chris Harris Jr. said. "We had a great run. Five straight AFC titles. I guess it's time for somebody else to win."

"It's frustrating, but I mean, the way we played today, we don't deserve to go in the playoffs."

It wasn't always that way for Denver.

The Broncos started the season 4-0 and went into their bye week with a 7-3 record. But in their ensuing game against Kansas City, they blew an 8-point lead with 3 minutes remaining, and the Chiefs wound up getting two field goals in overtime for the victory.

That loss sent the Broncos into a downward spiral, and they have lost four of their last five games.

"We're not playing well enough offensively," Broncos coach Gary Kubiak said. "I'm responsible for that. I've got to do a better job. Obviously we're not getting enough out of our opportunities. I take responsibility for that. We've all got to work on it, but I take responsibility for that."

The Broncos (8-7) aren't used to preparing for an off-season in December. They had played in five straight playoffs and reached two Super Bowls since the last time they were eliminated early.

Denver isn't used to losing to the Chiefs, either. The last time Kansas City won both games against its longtime divisional

rival was in 2000.

"It stinks," Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian said. "There's no other way to put it. It's frustrating right now, but this is part of the deal. We knew we had to win the next two to give ourselves a chance and we didn't get it done. Regroup this week and give it our best against Oakland."

In case you missed it, here's what else happened on the NFL's second-to-last weekend:

**Mixed emotions:** In one city, a win felt a lot like a loss. In another, the losers finally figured out how to win.

The Oakland Raiders stayed in the hunt for home-field advantage through the playoffs, but their 33-25 victory over the Colts came at a cost. Their quarterback, Derek Carr, was carted off the field with a broken right leg and is out for the rest of the season.

At the other end of the standings, the Cleveland Browns avoided going down in infamy; they beat the Chargers 20-17 for their first victory of the season and will not join the 2008 Detroit Lions as the second team to finish 0-16.

"I don't want that next to any of our names associated with this organization, and so we got that monkey off our back," coach Hue Jackson said.

Carr wasn't the only key quarterback to go down during Week 16 of the NFL season. And the Browns weren't the only bad team to pull out an unexpected win.

**Mariota out:** Joining Carr on the sideline for the rest of the season will be Titans quarterback Marcus Mariota, who, like Carr, was carted off the field Saturday with a broken right leg. Unlike the Raiders, though, the Titans lost their game. The 38-17 loss to the Jaguars, combined with Houston's 12-10, AFC South-clinching victory over Cincinnati, knocked Tennessee out of the playoff picture.

## Dolphins returning to playoffs

Associated Press

MIAMI — Now that the Miami Dolphins are in the playoffs for the first time in eight years, they'll try to end an even longer drought.

They haven't won a postseason game since 2000.

The Dolphins clinched an AFC wild-card berth Sunday night when Denver lost to Kansas City 33-10. The Broncos' defeat, coupled with Miami's 34-31 overtime victory at Buffalo on Saturday, assured the Dolphins (10-5) of no worse than the sixth and final seed in the conference playoffs.

The Dolphins had Sunday off. At least some players watched the late-night Denver-Kansas City finish.

"Playoffs I See You," receiver Jarvis Landry tweeted shortly before the Broncos' game ended.

"It's only the beginning," linebacker Jelani Jenkins tweeted.

Miami's playoff berth comes in Adam Gase's first year as a head coach. The Dolphins have changed coaches seven times since Dave Wannstedt led them to their most recent postseason win.

Miami's first-round game in the playoffs will be at AFC South champion Houston or at AFC North champion Pittsburgh.

The Dolphins conclude the regular season at home Sunday against AFC East champion New England. The Patriots (13-2) are still battling for home-field advantage.

Miami bounced back from a 1-4 start by winning nine of its past 10 games, including the last two with backup Matt Moore at quarterback.

The Dolphins are playoff-bound even though they have been outgained by 682 yards and have scored only four more points than their opponents this season. In games decided by a touchdown or less, they've won nine in a row, but they haven't beaten a team that's above .500 since Week 6.

# Raiders lose QB Carr in win over Colts

Associated Press

OAKLAND, California — As Derek Carr fell to the turf with a broken leg, a celebratory day in Oakland immediately turned somber. The Raiders had suffered their most significant loss of the season.

Carr broke a bone in his right leg in the fourth quarter of the Raiders' 33-25 victory over the Indianapolis Colts on Saturday, immediately throwing a dark cloud over a resurgent season in Oakland.

Carr got hurt with Oakland leading 33-14 early in the fourth quarter when he was sacked by Trent Cole. Carr stayed on the ground for several minutes in pain as trainers came out to treat him. With the crowd chanting "M-V-P! M-V-P!" Carr limped off the field without putting any pressure on his right leg. He will have surgery on Sunday.

Carr has led a revival in Oakland since arriving as a second-round pick in 2014. After losing his first 10 games as a rookie, Carr has been a big part of the turnaround that has the Raiders in the playoffs for the first time since 2002. He threw three TD passes Sunday to give him 28 on the season and his seven fourth-quarter comebacks are the biggest reason behind Oakland's success.

Now the team must prepare for a playoff run with Matt McGloin at quarterback. McGloin has not started a game since the end of the 2013 season with Carr starting all 47 games since he arrived.

Andrew Luck rallied the Colts (7-8) from 26 points down to just eight with 2:33 left.

**Jaguars 38, Titans 17:** Blake Bortles' best game of the season helped host Jacksonville end a nine-game losing streak, and Tennessee quarterback Marcus Mariota broke his right leg in the third quarter.

Bortles threw for 325 yards and a touchdown, and was on the receiving end of a 20-yard trick play that sealed the win with 5:25 remaining. Rookie Jalen Ramsey returned an in-

terception 30 yards on the ensuing play to set off a raucous — and long-awaited — celebration in Jacksonville.

The Titans had won three in a row and seven of 10 entering the game. All they needed to do was beat reeling Jacksonville to set up an AFC South title game next week against Houston. Instead, they lost, and the Texans beat Cincinnati to clinch the division for the second straight year and eliminate Tennessee.

**Texans 12, Bengals 10:** Tom Savage threw for 176 yards for Houston in his first career start and visiting Cincinnati missed a field goal as time expired, giving the Texans their second straight AFC South title.

The Bengals converted a fourth down play to keep a drive alive, but four plays later, former Texan Randy Bullock's 43-yard attempt sailed wide right to secure Houston's victory.

**Browns 20, Chargers 17:** Cleveland is winless no more.

The host Browns avoided that fate Saturday by beating San Diego for its first victory in more than a year. San Diego's Josh Lambo missed a 45-yard field goal as time expired, giving the Browns (1-14) their first win in 377 days.

When the kick sailed right, Cleveland's small crowd erupted in celebration and Browns players poured off their sideline as if they had just won the Super Bowl.

The Browns avoided becoming the second team to go 0-15, and no longer have to worry about joining the 2008 Detroit Lions as the only teams to lose all 16 games.

**Cardinals 34, Seahawks 31:** Arizona continues to give Seattle headaches at home. This time, it will likely end up costing the Seahawks a first-round bye in the playoffs.

Chandler Catanzaro hit a 43-yard field goal on the final play.

Arizona (6-8-1) went 50 yards in the final minute and Catanzaro's kick was good, delivering a huge blow to Seattle's

chances at the No. 2 seed in the NFC.

**Falcons 33, Panthers 16:** Atlanta is back on top of the NFC South, beating host Carolina to capture its first division title since 2012.

Matt Ryan threw for 277 yards and two touchdowns, Tevin Coleman had 135 yards from scrimmage, including a pivotal 55-yard fourth-quarter TD run.

The Falcons then had to wait about 3½ hours to celebrate when the Saints defeated the Buccaneers to seal Atlanta's first playoff appearance in four years.

The Panthers (6-9) were officially eliminated from playoff contention after making the Super Bowl last season.

**Saints 31, Buccaneers 24:** At New Orleans, Mark Ingram rushed for two-touchdowns and a game-sealing first down in the final minutes.

The Buccaneers (8-7) needed a win to keep pace with Green Bay (9-6) for the final NFC wild-card spot, but couldn't keep up with the Saints' explosive offense. And their loss handed the NFC South to Atlanta, while giving the New York Giants a wild-card berth.

Now Tampa Bay must win the season finale and hope for losses by Washington and Green Bay next week. If that happens, a complicated tiebreaker based on strength of victories will decide the final playoff spot between the Bucs and Packers.

**Patriots 41, Jets 3:** Tom Brady passed for 214 yards and three touchdowns, and host New England moved a step closer to securing home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs.

Malcolm Butler added two interceptions and a fumble recovery, and LeGarrette Blount had a pair of 1-yard touchdown runs.

**Packers 38, Vikings 25:** Aaron Rodgers threw for 347 yards and four touchdowns, while Jordy Nelson shredded visiting Minnesota's secondary for 154 yards and two scores.

The Packers' fifth straight

win set up a winner-take-all showdown next week with Detroit for the NFC North title, while extinguishing the Vikings' faint postseason hopes.

**Redskins 41, Bears 21:** Kirk Cousins threw for a touchdown and ran for two more, and visiting Washington gave its fading playoff hopes a boost.

DeSean Jackson added 114 yards receiving, and Washington (8-6-1) intercepted Matt Barkley five times.

Eighth in the NFC behind Green Bay and Tampa Bay coming in, Washington scored 14 points in the first quarter after struggling early in recent games, and never really was threatened by the Bears (3-12).

Cousins, shaky against Carolina, was 18 of 29 for 270 yards. He threw a 17-yard touchdown to Chris Thompson in the first quarter and scored on a 9-yard run in the second. He also pushed in from the 1 late in the third to make it 31-14.

**49ers 22, Rams 21:** At Los Angeles, Colin Kaepernick threw a 10-yard touchdown pass with 31 seconds remaining and scrambled for a go-ahead 2-point conversion as the 49ers overcame a 14-point deficit to end a 13-game losing streak.

Kaepernick rolled to his right while looking for a receiver before tucking the ball and barreling into the end zone. That gave the 49ers a sweep in the renewal of the in-state rivalry with the Rams' return to Los Angeles this season.

Kaepernick threw for 257 yards, two touchdowns and one interception and rushed for a touchdown for the 49ers (2-13).

Kaepernick found Rod Streater on a slant pattern to cap a 10-play, 73-yard drive to make it 21-20.

Jared Goff was intercepted by Rashard Robinson with 16 seconds left as the Rams again squandered a late two-score lead for the second time in their past three home games.

Goff, the No. 1 overall draft pick, has lost all six of his starts for Los Angeles (4-11).

# Cavaliers rally to beat Warriors

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Kyrie Irving dropped a fadeaway jumper over Klay Thompson with 3.4 seconds left as the Cleveland Cavaliers came back to beat Golden State just as they did last June in the NBA Finals, 109-108 on Sunday.

The Cavs trailed 94-80 early in the fourth quarter before rallying before a rowdy Christmas crowd. Irving made the biggest basket, as was the case in the Finals when he hit a late three-pointer in Game 7.

Golden State had one last chance but Kevin Durant was tripped coming off a screen and couldn't get off a shot as time expired.

LeBron James had 31 points, and Irving added 25 for the Cavs. They were down 3-1 in the finals before winning three straight and the championship — the first for a Cleveland team since 1964.

Durant had 36 points in his first appearance in the league's hottest rivalry.

**Thunder 112, Timberwolves 100:** Russell Westbrook had 31 points and 15 assists in Oklahoma City's victory over visiting

Minnesota.

Westbrook had 10 assists in the second half, but fell short of becoming the first Thunder player to score at least 40 points in four straight games.

Steven Adams added 22 points, and Enes Kanter had 20. Karl-Anthony Towns led Minnesota with 26 points, and Andrew Wiggins had 23.

**Lakers 111, Clippers 102:** At Los Angeles, Nick Young and Timofey Mozgov scored 19 points apiece as the Lakers snapped their 11-game losing streak in their rivalry with the Clippers.

Lou Williams and D'Angelo Russell added 14 points each for the Lakers, who hadn't beaten their Staples Center co-tenants since opening night of 2013-14. The streak was tied for the Lakers' longest against any team since moving to Los Angeles a half-century ago, and it was the Clippers' longest active winning streak against any opponent.

But with Clippers cornerstones Blake Griffin and Chris Paul sidelined by injuries, the Lakers had a season-high seven scorers in double digits. They surged from

a halftime deficit to an 18-point lead during a dynamite third quarter for their second win in 14 games.

**Celtics 119, Knicks 114:** Isaiah Thomas scored 27 points, Marcus Smart made a tiebreaking three-pointer with 47 seconds left after visiting Boston blew a late lead, and the Celtics beat New York.

The Knicks wiped out a late nine-point deficit with an out-of-nowhere 11-2 run in a little more than a minute, but Smart answered with his shot and Avery Bradley and Al Horford also made big defensive plays.

Jae Crowder and Kelly Olynyk each had 16 points to help the Celtics win for the fifth time in six games.

**Spurs 119, Bulls 100:** LaMarcus Aldridge had a season-high 33 points and host San Antonio beat Chicago.

Kawhi Leonard added 25 points and 10 rebounds, and Tony Parker had 13 points and eight assists.

Chicago rallied from a 20-point deficit to lead by three points midway through the third quarter but could not sustain the push, taking its third straight loss.

## Army, North Texas in rare bowl rematch

Associated Press

DALLAS — Army had already accepted an invitation to play in the Heart of Dallas Bowl before its biggest victory.

Now after beating archrival Navy for the first time in 15 years, the Black Knights (7-5) have a chance to avenge a turnover-plagued loss from two months ago. Army plays North Texas on Tuesday in the only bowl game that is a regular-season rematch.

"We didn't play near as well as we wanted to the first time we came out. I think we did some good things, but we just shot ourselves in the foot so many times and we left (with) a sour taste in our mouth," Army linebacker Jeremy Timpf said. "You don't get very many second chances and we definitely got one now."

The Black Knights are in their first bowl since 2010. The last bowl for North Texas (5-7) was a win over UNLV in the Heart of Dallas Bowl three years ago, the Mean Green's only other

bowl appearance since 2004.

North Texas has lost four of its five games since winning 35-18 at West Point on Oct. 22, when Army had seven turnovers (three lost fumbles, four interceptions).

Even after giving up an average of 43 points in those losses, the Mean Green got to play in another game based on their high NCAA Academic Progress Rate score because there weren't enough bowl-eligible teams to fill all the spots.

"This bowl game was key to us," first-year North Texas coach Seth Littrell said. "Not only to let our seniors go out the right way ... but for the simple fact that we get extra practices to get better and build momentum to go into spring ball."

Some other things to know about the game:

### Ready to run

North Texas RB Jeffrey Wilson, whose 160 yards rushing in October were the most

against Army this season, had only one carry the past three games while nursing a knee injury. But the extended break since the regular season has helped. "I don't know if he's 100 percent, but he's been running the ball well and he's back at full go," Littrell said.

### Coaching Cadets

Army coach Jeff Monken described his players this way: "They are very unselfish and play as a team. We don't have any guys on our team that are all-star, just knock-your-socks-off, great players. We've just got a bunch of good, tough, hard-nosed guys that try real hard and play well together."

### Past Tide

Alec Morris threw only one pass while at Alabama for two national titles in four years. The graduate transfer, who was a Texas prep standout, ends his collegiate career starting at QB for North Texas in a bowl.

Freshman starter Mason Fine missed the last two games with a shoulder injury.

### Academy trio

Army's appearance in the Armed Forces Bowl gives the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex a rare trifecta. All three service academies will have played in the area this season. Navy won its regular-season finale at SMU in Dallas last month and then lost to Louisiana Tech in the Armed Forces Bowl on Friday in Fort Worth. Air Force lost to New Mexico in Cotton Bowl Stadium in mid-October.

### Black Knights' return

With at least six wins in 2017, Army is guaranteed another bowl in North Texas. They have a conditional agreement already to play in the next Armed Forces Bowl in Fort Worth. Army played in that game in 2010, its only other bowl since 1996.