

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## Train derailment near Seattle kills 6

*The Seattle Times*

At least six people were reported killed after an Amtrak train derailed and fell off a bridge over an interstate south of Seattle on Monday.

Pierce County Sheriff's spokesman Ed Troyer told news media that there were fatalities on the train and that motorists had been injured but not killed. The extent of the injuries is not yet known. There were 78 passengers and five crewmembers on the train when it derailed, according to Amtrak. The southbound lanes of Interstate 5 were blocked by the train.

Chris Thomas, spokesman for Providence St. Peter Hospital in Olympia, said his facility had received about a dozen patients as of 9:25 a.m. "We've had three critical patients out of about a dozen that we've received so far," Thomas said. The wreck occurred between Olympia and Tacoma, so emergency medical responders were transporting patients to various

area hospitals, he said.

Madigan Army Medical Center was serving as the primary hospital receiving patients from the train wreck, a spokeswoman said, although as of 9 a.m., the army hospital had not released information on the number of patients received.

Amtrak tweeted that it was train No. 501 on an inaugural run that derailed; it left Seattle for Portland at 6 a.m.

According to WSDOT, the train was running down a new bypass created to avoid slow curves and "single-track tunnels on the BNSF Railway mainline tracks near Point Defiance and along southern Puget Sound."

The project rerouted passenger trains to an inland route on an existing rail line that runs along the west side of I-5 through south Tacoma, Lakewood and DuPont and then reconnects back to the BNSF Railway mainline near Nisqually.

Monday morning was the first time Amtrak trains used

the new Point Defiance Bypass route. It was the culmination of a \$181 million project that began in 2010.

A new Amtrak station also opened in Tacoma. The change would reduce the length of the trip by 10 minutes and separate Amtrak trains from freight lines that frequently cause delays on the Point Defiance route.

Last week, Joint Base Lewis-McChord posted a warning on Twitter saying, "trains traveling about 80 miles per hour begin running on the tracks along the JBLM I-5 corridor on Dec. 18."

WSDOT doesn't have any theory yet about what caused the derailment, said Janet Matkin, spokeswoman for the WSDOT's rail division. There are no switches or road crossings in the immediate area, she said. However, the corridor in general passes through many neighborhoods and roads.

"We're still trying to figure out the cause," Matkin said. According to The Associated

Press, a U.S. official said there may have been an obstruction on the track.

Chris Karnes, a transit and train advocate from Tacoma, was heading to Portland to do some Christmas shopping with his boyfriend. He said he was in the train's third or fourth car.

Karnes said the train seemed to be traveling normally at about 79 mph, the operational speed along that stretch of track. Then he felt the train track.

"It was a split second between that and being launched into the seats in front of us. Those really cushioned the blow for us," he said.

During the collision, Karnes' train car "careened off an embankment," he said. "We could hear crumpling and crashing and screaming from people. The lights went out," he said.

Karnes said he and other passengers had to kick out a window to get out of the train.

## Holiday travel chaos ahead after Atlanta airport outage

*Associated Press*

ATLANTA — Ticketing and baggage areas were a bit backed up, but security lines were moving quickly in Atlanta on Monday morning as the world's busiest airport recovered from a crippling power outage.

Thousands remained stranded a day after the outage at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, where more than 1,000 flights were grounded just days before the start of the Christmas travel rush.

A sudden power outage that Georgia Power said was caused by a fire in an underground electrical facility brought the

airport to a standstill Sunday at about 1 p.m.

All outgoing flights were halted, and arriving planes were held on the ground at their point of departure. International flights were diverted, officials said.

Delta Air Lines, with its biggest hub in Atlanta, was hardest hit. By Sunday evening, Delta had already canceled nearly 900 flights and another 300 Monday, nearly all of them in Atlanta, according to tracking service flightaware.com.

Robert Mann, an aviation consultant and former American Airlines executive, said it likely will be Tuesday before Delta's

operations in Atlanta return to normal, and for passengers, "it could be most of the week" because there aren't many open seats on other flights in the last week before Christmas.

One bit of good news, according to Mann: Delta has more spare planes and available crews in Atlanta than anywhere else, which should help it to recover.

Delta customers flying to or from Atlanta can make a one-time change to travel plans without incurring a \$200 change fee. The airline also encouraged travelers not to pick up their bags Monday because of anticipated congestion at the airport.

Still, when flights at Atlanta were grounded for most of one day last spring, it took Delta five days — and about 4,000 canceled flights — before it fully recovered.

Other airlines also canceled flights for the rest of Sunday. American Airlines canceled 24 departures and an equal number of arrivals, said spokesman Ross Feinstein. The airline also diverted three planes that were headed to Atlanta when the outage struck.

The city of Atlanta provided shuttle service to the Georgia Convention Center on Sunday for travelers needing a place to stay.

# US strike in Somalia kills 8 al-Shabab militants

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A U.S. airstrike in southern Somalia on Friday killed eight al-Qaida-linked militants, U.S. Africa Command announced Monday.

The strike against al-Shabab militants about 30 miles northwest of the coastal city of Kismayo also destroyed a vehicle, according to an AFRICOM statement.

The strike was the U.S.'s 33rd in Somalia in 2017, primarily targeting al-Shabab fighters as well as a small contingent of Islamic State-linked militants. It marks a

dramatic increase over the 14 airstrikes that U.S. forces conducted in the east African nation in 2016, which marked the busiest year for the U.S. military during former President Barack Obama's administration.

"U.S. forces will continue to use all authorized and appropriate measure(s) to protect U.S. citizens and to disable terrorist threats," according to the AFRICOM statement.

President Donald Trump in April expanded AFRICOM's authorities to conduct strikes in Somalia. In recent months, the U.S. also has increased its force strength in the nation, where it now has roughly 500

troops, the most it has deployed there since the early 1990s.

No civilians were killed in the strike Friday, according to AFRICOM.

The Naval Criminal Investigation Service, at AFRICOM's request, is probing an Aug. 25 raid in Somalia in which U.S. troops are accused of killing civilians alongside Somali forces. AFRICOM officials have denied civilians were killed in that raid, contending a review by Special Operations Command Africa earlier this year concluded only armed combatants were killed in the operation.

## UFO claims put ex-Navy aviator in spotlight

*Boston Herald*

A former Navy fighter pilot from New Hampshire is in the national spotlight over his claims of an unexplained encounter with a suspected UFO over the Pacific Ocean more than a decade ago.

"It looked like a flying Tic Tac with incredible capabilities," retired Cmdr. David Fravor of Windham, N.H., told the Herald on Sunday of his mysterious encounter in 2004. "I'd say I doubt it was something we developed — Earthlings, people of this planet."

Except for military and intelligence debriefs, Fravor kept his bizarre experience largely to himself since that day.

But the calls started flooding in after Fravor's real-life "X-Files" episode was featured in Sunday's New York Times. He's been contacted by ABC News and the Daily Mail of London — and fielded plenty of good-natured ribbing from friends. He was asked to be on "Good Morning America" on Monday.

"I honestly don't think they'll ever get to the bottom of what we saw," Fravor said. "I think they should put an effort into it. We'd be foolish not to, honestly. To think of an infinite universe with multiple galaxies and we're the only ones out there? That's a pretty lonely place, isn't it?"

It was Nov. 14, 2004, sometime between noon and 2 p.m., "not a cloud in the sky," Fravor recalled, when he and the other pilots in his squadron were diverted from a training mission to investigate a U.S. Navy cruiser's report of a strange craft at 80,000 feet suddenly dropping and hovering at 20,000 feet.

Fravor described a 40-foot-long oval object with no wings nor a plume from any engine — the "flying Tic Tac" — randomly moving around.

"It wasn't an airplane," said Fravor.

Fravor cut his F/A-18 across to approach the unidentified flying object, getting to within a mile.

"Then, all of a sudden, it just accelerates and — poof! — it's gone," Fravor said, adding that the otherworldly ship jammed their radar. "It accelerated beyond any airplane we have. I've seen just about everything and there's nothing I know of that we were making at that time that has that kind of performance."

Experts remained skeptical Sunday that Fravor's encounter provides any evidence of the existence of aliens. One astrophysicist contacted by the Herald declined to comment, saying he "would rather not contribute to spreading these silly stories."

## ISIS claims attack on Afghan intelligence agency

BY CHAD GARLAND  
AND ZUBAIR BABAKARKHAIL  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — Islamic State claimed responsibility for an attack in Kabul on Monday that led to prolonged clashes between gunmen and Afghan security forces near a compound belonging to the country's main intelligence agency.

Nasrat Rahimi, deputy spokesman for the interior ministry, said three attackers dressed in police uniforms seized a building under construction near a National Directorate of Security, or NDS, training center and fired small arms and rocket-propelled grenades at the center.

Security forces quickly surrounded the building and killed the attackers "one by one" over the course of the hourslong standoff, Rahimi said. Three members of the crisis response unit were wounded, but there were no other casualties at the center or in surrounding neighborhoods.

No U.S. or NATO advisers were involved in the attack or the security response to it, said Navy Capt. Tom Gresback, a spokesman for the coalition mission to train, advise and assist Afghan government forces.

Hassamudin Safi, a police

officer in Kabul's Police District 5, said the standoff ended after several hours about 3 p.m. and clearance operations were ongoing.

"It took so long to kill the attackers because there are a lot of houses nearby the scene of the attack," Safi said. "Our forces were careful that civilians were not harmed during their clearance operation."

ISIS claimed in a statement that two of its fighters had carried out the attack. The group's local affiliate, known as Islamic State-Khorasan province, or ISIS-K, sprang up in eastern Afghanistan in early 2015 and has carried out multiple high-profile attacks in the Afghan capital this year.

The U.S. has been backing Afghan troops battling the group in its stronghold in Nangarhar province near the border with Pakistan since early last year. U.S. officials said last week the group has about 1,000 fighters in Afghanistan, up from about 700 in March, despite U.S. claims to have removed some 1,600 from the battlefield since the spring.

U.S. and Afghan special operations forces also are preparing to launch a campaign against the group in northwestern Faryab and Jowzjan provinces, where it has gained a foothold, officials said.



## In S. Korea, GIs use new gear to clear tunnels

By MARCUS FICHTL  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP STANLEY, South Korea — Soldiers recently used high-tech communications and night-vision gear to infiltrate a bunker standing in for a chemical weapons lab at a semi-abandoned base north of Seoul, South Korea.

On Friday, the Texas-based “Black Knights” from the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, air-assaulted from Black Hawk helicopters to Camp Stanley in predawn darkness, linked up with South Korean forces and entered the bunker in an exercise dubbed Warrior Strike. The soldiers negotiated a half-mile-long, horseshoe-shaped tunnel and numerous alcoves that look like the sort of place an enemy might hide chemical weapons.

North Korea’s affinity for digging is clear to anyone who has visited the third infiltration tunnel near the Demilitarized Zone that marks the border between the Koreas. Now a tourist attraction, it’s one of several discovered in the area. It’s estimated that these tunnels could have moved tens of thousands of North Korean troops under the border each hour during an invasion. South Korea’s defense ministry estimates there are 6,000 to 8,000 underground facilities in the North, ranging from shelters to storage sites for artillery and nuclear weapons.

During the Camp Stanley training, troops were equipped with gear that the South Korea-based 2nd Infantry Division has on hand to boost tunnel-warfare capabilities. These include a new radio device — the Mobile Ad Hoc Networking Unit, or MPU5 — which acts as a Wi-Fi node and creates a peer-to-peer radio relay, allowing the transmission of text and imagery between troops in the tunnel and to a commander on the surface.

First Lt. Norman Holcomb, a Company B platoon leader, said the device outperformed the radio system currently in use.

# Many sailors unfazed by end of Navy’s ‘early out’ program

By TYLER HLAVAC  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Sailors in Japan seem unfazed by the cancellation of a Navy program that allowed some to leave the service up to two years prior to their scheduled separation dates.

The Enlisted Early Transition Program, launched by the Navy in 2014, allowed some servicemembers in noncritical jobs to apply for early releases. It was touted as a way of cutting down on involuntary separations.

Two other programs — one through which senior officers could retire early and another that allowed sailors to request early separation because of family or personal hardships — also are being canceled.

Vice Adm. Robert Burke, chief of Naval Personnel, announced the termination of the programs Wednesday, citing the needs of the “growing Navy” as the reason for the changes.

“This requires more people, at a time when we are still working our way back to desired sea duty manning levels, and when

the competition for talent is especially keen,” he said in a Navy administrative message. “We will certainly recruit and train many more sailors to help meet these demands, but that will not be enough.”

Sailors at Yokosuka Naval Base told Stars and Stripes on Monday they didn’t foresee much grumbling over the program’s demise.

“Early out? I haven’t heard anyone talk about it,” said Petty Officer 2nd Class Joseph Layden, a boatswain’s mate aboard the USS Barry. “Doesn’t mean much to me because if I was going to get out, I would just get out at the end of my contract. I haven’t heard anyone talk about it. I don’t know anyone who is trying to get out early.”

Chief Petty Officer Christopher Graham, an information systems technician aboard the USS Fitzgerald, said sailors are more concerned about being involuntarily separated than being denied early exits.

“I have three more years and I retire, so it wasn’t an option for me,” said Graham, referring to the early-separation program.

“I can’t recall anyone I know of using it. I think people come to realize it’s a little rougher when you don’t have the military. There (are) a lot of protections and services provided.”

The cancellation of the program is one of many steps the Navy has taken to rebalance the force.

Earlier this year, the Navy increased the high-year tenure limits for sailors of ranks E-4 through E-6 by two years for each pay grade in another attempt to improve retention. On Thursday, it announced a high-year tenure increase from five to six years for E-3 sailors.

In August, the service announced it would shift more than 1,100 senior enlisted sailors from certain shore billets to fill about 3,000 “gaps” in operations at sea.

Burke said in the message that sailors can expect more policy changes soon.

The Navy has a long-term goal of expanding to about 350,000 sailors to meet President Donald Trump’s 355-ship goal. The service now has 322,000 sailors and 277 commissioned ships.

## MOH recipient helping vets, at-risk kids

*The (San Luis Obispo, Calif.) Tribune*

When retired U.S. Army Master Sgt. Leroy Petry, a recipient of the Medal of Honor, looked out over the dozens of Grizzly Youth Academy graduates Thursday, he saw something of himself in them.

“Like many of them, I was a high school student at risk,” Petry said.

The former Army Ranger was in San Luis Obispo last week for several events, including the graduation of the latest group of Grizzly cadets.

“It’s been pretty eventful,” Petry said.

And he would know. He may

be retired from the Army, but Petry spends a considerable amount of his time traveling.

Prior to visiting San Luis Obispo, Petry said he was in Afghanistan. It there, in May 2008, where Petry lost his hand. He was leading a platoon during a daylight raid to capture a high-value target. While taking enemy fire, Petry and two other soldiers were sheltering behind a chicken coop. That was when the grenades started flying. The first one landed about 10 meters away, knocking the soldiers off their feet. The second grenade landed just a few feet from where they lay.

“It was almost instinct — off

training,” Petry said in an article from the U.S. Army. “It was probably going to kill all three of us. I had time to visually see the hand grenade. And I figure it’s got about a 4½-second fuse. ... I figure if you have time to see it, you have time to kick it, throw it, just get it out there.”

Petry saved his men, but lost his right hand at the wrist.

In 2011, then-President Barack Obama awarded Petry the Medal of Honor. Now, he helps veterans with education and employment programs.

“I tell people I’m in Phase 2 of the Army, which is taking care of our military people and our veterans,” he said.

# Marines: Window fell from helo on Okinawa due to human error

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
AND HANA KUSUMOTO  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Marine Corps says human error caused a helicopter window to fall onto the grounds of a crowded elementary school last week on Okinawa.

The incident occurred Wednesday morning when a CH-53E Super Stallion's window inexplicably became separated from the aircraft and landed on Futenma Daini Elementary School's sports field, which is adjacent to Marine Corps Air Station Futenma's fence line. More than 50 schoolchildren were playing at the time, and one boy was slightly injured

from a pebble that flew up during impact.

The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing completed a "thorough" investigation into the incident and determined it was caused by human error, officials said a statement Monday evening.

The window, which was not properly secured before take-off, was designed to be removed so that the crew can evacuate during an emergency, the statement said.

Marine officials said they have conducted additional training for both air and maintenance crews to reinforce proper procedures. Also, all CH-53E aircraft have been thoroughly inspected and checked for mechanical or structural issues

with the windows.

Marine officials also vowed to conduct routine maintenance days and monthly safety meetings within their squadron-level safety program.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said he urged the U.S. not to fly aircraft over hospitals and schools near Futenma.

Officials from the elementary school said Monday that Marine Corps officials had visited the school and apologized during a closed-door meeting.

The Asahi Shimbun reported that the school asked Marine officials during the meeting not to fly overhead anymore and that Marine officials said they would try their best.

# Navy and Japan test response to carrier leak

BY LEON COOK  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Navy and Japanese officials have practiced the steps they'd take if a small amount of radiation were to escape from the Yokosuka-based USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier.

U.S. shipyard technicians teamed up with Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority on Friday and boarded a Japan coast guard cutter to collect water, air and sediment samples from points near the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, which recently returned to Yokosuka from its three-month fall patrol. The purpose was to practice joint radiological monitoring and data-sharing.

The drill simulated how they would respond if slightly radioactive coolant water were to leak from the carrier's reactor. In the scenario, the Ronald Reagan's crew responded quickly and shut a valve, halting the leak, but not before 300 liters spilled into the harbor.

"For perspective, the small amount of radioactivity that would be in this coolant water is less than the amount of radioactivity contained in two common household smoke detectors and would not adversely affect human health, marine life, or the quality of the environment," the Navy said.

If such a leak were to happen, the Navy would notify the Japanese government and city of Yokosuka before dispatching liaisons to a nearby emergency operations center to share news about the spill to officials and the media.

The Navy would also notify Yokosuka base workers that it's safe to continue their jobs.

Such an incident is unlikely due to the safety measures in U.S. nuclear-powered warships, said a statement from the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. Naval reactors have four barriers working to keep radioactivity inside the ship.

# Federal workers likely to take wage hit

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration's consideration of a wage freeze for federal employees is one piece of a renewed, multifront Republican push to shrink those workers' pay, benefits and workforce.

That effort has been around for years, but it now has an intellectual champion in the White House, and I don't mean President Donald Trump.

Confidential administration information released last week by Sen. Claire McCaskill, of Missouri, the leading Democrat on the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, revealed an administration proposal to freeze federal salaries in fiscal 2019. That is the third piece in a pattern that includes Trump's 2018 budget proposal to cut the employer contribution to retirement benefits and the House Republican plan to have retirees pay more out of pocket for their health insurance.

Congress did not approve the last two recommendations, and the pay freeze, which Trump can impose, is not beyond the leaked-document stage. Yet the proposals lurk, likely to re-emerge in future budget plans after having long percolated in conservative circles.

Now, with James Sherk — a chief proponent of the notion that federal workers are overpaid — serving as Trump's labor adviser, the proposals stand their best chance yet of becoming policies that dig deep into federal employees' pockets.

Sherk, a labor economist, joined Trump's team this year after working for the conservative Heritage Foundation. His co-authored report, "Why It Is Time to Reform Compensation for Federal Employees," was published by Heritage just days after the 2016 Republican National Convention nominated Trump. The bottom line: Feds would get less pay and benefits for more work.

"Our paper was intended to serve as a framework for any candidate or elected official who wants to improve the way the federal government operates and offer more competitive options to federal employees," Rachel Greszler, a Heritage economist who wrote the report with Sherk, said by email Friday.

"Reform" really does not convey the serious bite of their proposals. The central thesis is that federal workers are overcompensated compared with those in the private sector. They outlined a plan to cut those costs — a blueprint that Sherk can now follow from a position of influence in the White House — "to the extent that the administration is willing to take on the labor policies that Sherk has spent much of his career championing," Greszler said.

Those policies face fierce opposition from Democrats and federal employee organizations.

The paper did not call for a pay freeze, but Greszler's email said that "without congressional action, it is the administration's only tool. While a freeze alone doesn't help achieve a more competitive pay structure ... it could serve as a bargaining tool for more comprehensive congressional action."



## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Ex-worker accused of sex with inmate

**WY** CASPER — A 24-year-old former corrections center employee in Wyoming has pleaded not guilty to charges that she had sex with an inmate.

Tosha Sheesley entered her pleas Friday in Natrona County District Court to two counts of second-degree sexual assault and one count of third-degree sexual assault.

Prosecutors said Sheesley had sex with an inmate while she was a resident manager at the Casper Re-Entry Center.

Court documents say the encounters took place away from the center.

Sheesley worked at the center from Nov. 28, 2016, through March 30.

### Oil change turns into unusual owl sighting

**NH** SALEM — A routine oil change has turned into an unusual owl sighting for one car owner.

The police department in Salem said Friday a mechanic popped the hood of a car and found an Eastern screech owl sitting on the engine. The department said the car owner had no idea how the owl got there. Police guessed he was either seeking warmth or chasing a mouse.

Police posted photos of the owl on Facebook. They named him Shazam and said he was very friendly.

Shazam was taken to a wildlife rehabilitation center for evaluation.

### Deputy apologizes for shocking trooper

**OR** PORTLAND — A sheriff's deputy in northeast Oregon sent an apol-

ogy cake to a state trooper after the deputy accidentally shot him with a Taser.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reported Oregon State Police on Monday posted a photo on Facebook of trooper Mitchell Goldman holding the cake with "sorry you got tased" written in blue icing.

Police say the Umatilla County deputy and Goldman both responded to a domestic violence call last week. Goldman arrived first and encountered a disruptive man.

Police said Goldman and the man were engaged in a scuffle as the deputy arrived. The deputy fired his Taser, with one prong hitting the trooper and the other striking the suspect. Both were shocked.

### Eat a cricket, get a ticket to theme park

**GA** VALDOSTA — A Georgia theme park is offering guests free tickets if they eat crickets.

The giveaway could bug some people. But Wild Adventures Theme Park in Valdosta was giving away a T-shirt and free admission Saturday to each of the first 100 guests to gobble up a roasted cricket.

The challenge was meant to promote the park's upcoming attraction called MEGABUGS! The Valdosta Daily Times reported the interactive insect attraction will open in March.

Exhibits will include giant replicas of insects including a 15-foot dragonfly, a 26-foot hissing cockroach and a 50-foot millipede.

### Officer cleared in Taser shooting, fire death

**OK** NORMAN — An Oklahoma police officer has been cleared in the death of a man who burst into flames and died after being

shot by a Taser as he was getting into his gasoline-soaked van.

District Attorney Greg Mashburn released a letter Friday stating that Lindsay Police Officer Brian Guthrie was "justified and appropriate" to deploy the Taser at Dana Dean Carrothers, 52. Carrothers died Nov. 7 after catching fire when he was shot with the Taser as re-entered his van near Lindsay, about 45 miles south of Oklahoma City.

Mashburn wrote that Carrothers did not respond to officers' commands and was attempting to re-enter his vehicle when Guthrie deployed his Taser. He said Carrothers' torso almost immediately burst into flames.

### Suspect's nickname based on film frenzy

**OR** PORTLAND — Authorities in Oregon are taking advantage of the frenzy around the opening day of the latest Star Wars movie to catch a bad guy of their own.

Police in Portland on Friday nicknamed a suspected bank robber the "Palpatine Bandit" because of the dark-colored hoodie he wears during bank hold-ups.

Emperor Sheev Palpatine, also known as the Darth Sidious in the Star Wars franchise, wears a dark, hooded cloak.

The next installment in the movie franchise, "Star Wars: The Last Jedi," opened in theaters Friday.

Police say this real-life robber held up a U.S. Bank branch on Thursday but was not armed, and got away with an undisclosed amount of cash.

### Police: Woman mauled to death by pit bulls

**VA** GOOCHLAND — Police say a Glen Allen,

Va., woman was mauled to death by her two pit bulls.

The Richmond Times-Dispatch reported Bethany Lynn Stephens' body was found by Goochland County deputies about 8:18 p.m. Thursday in a wooded area.

Goodland County Sheriff James Agnew said her body was being guarded by two very large pit bulls.

Initial reports from the medical examiner's office said Stephens had a cause of death "consistent with being mauled by these dogs."

She had defensive wounds on her hands and arms. Agnew said it took deputies hours to wrangle the dogs, which he estimated weighed as much as Stephens.

Agnew said they were seeking to have the animals euthanized.

### Town comes together to rescue cat in tree

**NY** GREENPORT — A cat that scaled a tree on Long Island and became trapped for five days has been rescued following a townwide effort to save it.

Newsday reported the Shamrock Tree Co. and the North Fork Animal Welfare League finally were able to coax a stressed cat down from a tree in Greenport in Suffolk County last Tuesday. The freed feline ran away after it was saved.

Southold Animal Shelter manager Gabby Stroup said residents and town officials had worked to free the cat, to no avail. The cat ran farther up the large tree when a bucket truck was used to reach it.

Shamrock owner Jonathan Shipman said he has rescued cats and a red-tailed hawk with his 60-foot bucket truck. Shipman said the rescue only took a couple of minutes.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

# Pats ride Gronk to another East title

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Pittsburgh Steelers still can't figure out how to cover Rob Gronkowski. The AFC East still can't figure out how to catch up with the New England Patriots. Now any AFC team that wants to do it in the playoffs will likely have to do it in Foxborough.

Good luck with all that.

The defending Super Bowl champions remain a tough out regardless of circumstance. The proof came to life in a 27-24 victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers on Sunday in which they rallied from an eight-point deficit to score twice in the final 4 minutes to lock up their record ninth consecutive division title.

Six days removed from an ugly loss in Miami, the Patriots (11-3) ended Pittsburgh's eight-game winning streak with a late goal line stand and a dive into the NFL rule book by referee Tony Corrente that overturned Pittsburgh's apparent game-winning touchdown.

And no, New England head coach Bill Belichick insists, as the years pass and the Patriots remain above the fray, luck has nothing to do with it.

"Just keep competing,"

Belichick said. "Just keep competing for 60 minutes. That's what you do. Just keep competing."

Nobody does it better than the Patriots (11-3). Having Gronkowski helps. The superstar tight end continued his career-long domination of the Steelers. He came in averaging 99 yards receiving against Pittsburgh and was even better in front of the largest crowd to watch an NFL game at soggy Heinz Field, finishing with nine receptions for 168 yards, including three on New England's game-winning drive.

"I love getting in that zone," Gronkowski said. "It feels good. I wish I could be like that 24-7, every week and every day."

Pittsburgh safety Sean Davis spent New England's final possession lined up across from Gronkowski and nearly sealed the victory but let a potential game-clinching interception smack off his fingertips. Given a second chance, Brady just kept lobbing the ball to his tight end. Each time, Gronkowski, who has five inches and 60 pounds on Davis, came down with it.

"I battled that whole game with them," Davis said. "We came up short that last drive. That's pretty much it."

Some takeaways from what the Steelers hope is the first of two meetings with the Patriots this season:

**Surviving the ground:** The Steelers (11-3) haven't beaten New England since 2011 but appear to be much closer to the Patriots than they were a year ago when they fell to New England twice by an average of 15 points. Pittsburgh had a chance to win it late after a 69-yard catch-and-run by rookie wide receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster put the ball at the New England 10. Ben Roethlisberger found tight end Jesse James wide open over the middle and James caught the ball, put one knee on the ground and stretched across the goal line.

One problem: the ball moved when James' hands hit the ground and the score was overturned on replay.

"You have to survive the ground, which means you have to maintain control of the football," Corrente said.

Corrente also said James didn't do that. James begged to differ.

"I thought it was a touchdown for sure," James said.

**Hurting:** The Steelers lost wide receiver Antonio Brown to a left calf injury in the first

half. The NFL's leading receiver was attempting to haul in a catch in the end zone when his feet became tangled up with a pair of New England defenders. He didn't put any weight on the leg as he was helped off the field and later went to the hospital for further evaluation.

Pittsburgh's offense thrived anyway, with Martavis Bryant and Eli Rogers scoring touchdowns and Smith-Schuster racking up 116 yards.

"I thought a lot of guys did some good things," Roethlisberger said. "But that's what we expect."

**Here for it:** Roethlisberger attempted a fake spike on Pittsburgh's last snap. Rather than clock it to set up a field goal, he tried to hit Rogers in the end zone. The Patriots were right on top of it. Roethlisberger's pass caromed into the hands of New England safety Duron Harmon on a play New England practices at least a half-dozen times a season.

"We seen it before, everybody didn't panic," Harmon said. "Nobody was out there acting like they didn't know what to do. We just played our roles, played good football and it turned into a big play for us."

# Rams in control after routing Seahawks

Associated Press

SEATTLE — In the span of a week, the Los Angeles Rams changed the conversation from not being ready for the big games to now appearing ready and dangerous for the playoffs.

The Rams aren't in the postseason yet. But the biggest step they've taken toward a playoff return came Sunday in their 42-7 blowout of the Seattle Seahawks. It was a big game on a big stage with postseason implications, and the Rams made the Seahawks look hapless with a dominating performance.

There is one more step for the Rams to take in order to wrap up that postseason berth, but any question about their playoff potential was put to rest.

"We're very pleased with what we did today and now we'll see if we can follow it

up with a good performance next week," Rams coach Sean McVay said. "Seattle has been in the playoffs a handful of years in a row now. They have won the division three of the last four years now. We came in here and took advantage of that today."

There was a rightful bit of skepticism about the Rams (10-4) coming into Sunday. They had stumbled this season against Seattle and Minnesota.

Just a week ago, the Rams couldn't close out Philadelphia and lost 43-35 at home to the NFC-leading Eagles.

They took full advantage of a banged-up Seattle defense and flustered Russell Wilson to where his greatest contribution was making sure the Seahawks (8-6) didn't get shut out.

Todd Gurley was fantastic as a ball carrier with 152 yards rushing and three TDs on the ground, and his TD reception in the

third quarter that gave the Rams a 40-0 lead. Los Angeles won on special teams, in field position and sacked Wilson seven times. Seattle's playmakers were spectators and the Seahawks looked closer to the end of an era than being worthy playoff contenders.

"We didn't handle Todd Gurley very well, he was on fire. But schematically, we let some things go. We made some mistakes, too, that got the ball out there," Seattle coach Pete Carroll said. "It's really hard for me to explain to you because this is something that I haven't seen us do, and play that far off."

Gurley was the star, averaging 7.2 yards per carry. He had 144 yards rushing at halftime, including a 57-yard TD sprint in the final minute of the first half to give the Rams a 34-0 lead at the break.



# Jaguars clinch playoff berth

BY MARK LONG  
Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — With another victory in hand and the playoffs in sight, the sellout crowd at EverBank Field started the wave.

Yes, the wave.

Forgive those in Jacksonville for going a little old school. After all, they haven't seen anything like this in a decade.

Blake Bortles threw three touchdown passes, including two to seldom-used backup Jaydon Mickens, and the Jaguars clinched a playoff spot with a 45-7 drubbing of AFC South rival Houston on Sunday. Jacksonville's seventh victory in its past eight games locked

up the franchise's first postseason berth since 2007.

If things go as planned, the Jaguars (10-4) will earn a postseason game at home. Jacksonville can clinch the AFC South and a home date with a victory next week at San Francisco. The Jags also would clinch the division if Tennessee loses to the Los Angeles Rams.

"I think it is awesome," Bortles said. "To be a part of the team that is changing the culture, it is tough to put into words. It's special. Unbelievably proud to be a part of this group and play for this organization."

Finishing with double-digit losses the past six seasons, the Jaguars now have double-digit wins for the first time

since their last postseason appearance.

The injury-riddled Texans (4-10) have dropped four in a row and seven of eight.

"It's embarrassing, and you never want to get beat like that," said Houston linebacker/defensive end Jadeveon Clowney, who also called Bortles "trash" in the locker room. "It's embarrassing for the whole organization."

Bortles finished with a season-high 326 yards and the best QB rating (143.8) of his career. He did it without receivers Allen Robinson, Allen Hurns and Marqise Lee.

With Robinson (knee) on injured reserve, Hurns (ankle) inactive for the fifth consecu-

tive week and Lee (ankle) in the locker room, Mickens and rookie Keelan Cole stepped up. Mickens caught four passes for 61 yards and two scores. Cole had seven receptions for a career-high 186 yards and a TD.

"It's kind of cool that we solidified our (playoff) spot," Jaguars defensive tackle Malik Jackson said. "Now we can get over the giddiness of it. ... It's cool to be where we are, but we're not done yet."

Jacksonville was an NFL-worst 22-74 over the previous six years and was widely considered more of a laughingstock than a postseason contender.

"It's a story of perseverance," Jaguars owner Shad Khan said.

# Foles, Eagles hold off Giants, earn bye

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — One down, one to go for the Philadelphia Eagles.

Nick Foles replaced the injured Carson Wentz and threw four touchdown passes, and the NFC East champion Eagles (12-2) secured a well-deserved first-round bye in the playoffs with a harder-than-expected 34-29 win over the New York Giants on Sunday.

Philadelphia can wrap-up NFC home-field advantage next weekend with a Minnesota loss at Green Bay on Saturday or an Eagles victory at home over Oakland on Christmas night.

Wentz went down last week with a torn ACL and the Eagles never missed a beat with Foles, who finished off a win at the Rams, and on Sunday went 24-for-38 for 237 yards and no interceptions.

The Eagles rallied from a 13-point first-half deficit to win. They made a late stand on first-and-goal in the final minute in spoiling a three-touchdown, season-high 434-yard passing game by Eli Manning.

In other NFL games Sunday: **49ers 25, Titans 23:** Jimmy Garoppolo led one final scoring

drive in the closing seconds to cap a fantastic first home start, and Robbie Gould kicked a winning 45-yard field goal as time expired.

Garoppolo threw for a career-high 381 yards and a touchdown to give host San Francisco (4-10) a three-game winning streak in a lost season.

**Vikings 34, Bengals 7:** Eric Kendricks had an interception return for a touchdown, Case Keenum passed for 236 yards and two scores, and host Minnesota clinched the NFC North with a victory over depleted and disinterested Cincinnati.

Running backs Latavius Murray and Jerick McKinnon combined for 37 touches and 242 yards from scrimmage for the Vikings (11-3). They were never challenged by the Bengals (5-9).

**Panthers 31, Packers 24:** Cam Newton threw for 242 yards and four touchdowns, and host Carolina spoiled Aaron Rodgers' return from a broken collarbone.

Damiere Byrd had two touchdown catches, and Christian McCaffrey had 136 yards from scrimmage, including a 7-yard touchdown reception as the Panthers (10-4) won

their fourth consecutive home game.

Greg Olsen had his most productive game since returning from a broken foot, catching nine passes for 116 yards and a TD, and the Panthers kept pace with the first-place New Orleans Saints in the NFC South.

**Saints 31, Jets 19:** Mark Ingram ran for two touchdowns and gained 151 yards from scrimmage, including a late 50-yard TD run, and host New Orleans overcame three turnovers.

Michael Thomas became the second NFL player with at least 90 receptions in his first two seasons. He caught nine passes for 93 yards, including a pivotal fourth-quarter touchdown on a short slant for New Orleans (10-4), which retained its tenuous hold on first place in the NFC South.

Bryce Petty made his first start at quarterback this season for the Jets (5-9).

**Ravens 27, Browns 10:** Joe Flacco threw a touchdown pass, ran for a score and beat host Cleveland again as the Ravens stayed on track for the AFC playoffs.

With victories at home over Indianapolis and Cincinnati in

its past two games, the Ravens will return to the postseason after a two-year absence. The Browns are two losses from becoming the NFL's second 0-16 team.

**Cowboys 20, Raiders 17:** Dallas kept its playoff hopes alive by the slimmest of margins after Dak Prescott converted a fourth-down sneak by the width of an index card to set up Dan Bailey's go-ahead 19-yard field goal, and Derek Carr fumbled the ball inches from the goal line with 31 seconds left.

**Bills 24, Dolphins 16:** LeSean McCoy scored twice and surpassed 10,000 career yards rushing, while helping host Buffalo stay in the thick of the AFC playoff hunt.

Tyrod Taylor also scored on a 9-yard touchdown run and Shareece Wright and Jordan Poyer intercepted Miami's Jay Cutler on consecutive drives to start the second half. Buffalo never trailed.

**Redskins 20, Cardinals 15:** Anthony Lanier sacked Blaine Gabbert and forced a fumble that Preston Smith recovered, and host Washington held on to beat Arizona in a comedy of errors for each team.

**Top 25 roundup****Tar Heels rally past Tennessee***Associated Press*

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — North Carolina passed the kind of road challenge it wanted to face before starting Atlantic Coast Conference competition.

Kenny Williams sank a go-ahead three-pointer with 35 seconds left as the seventh-ranked Tar Heels rallied past No. 20 Tennessee 78-73 Sunday.

This was the first game North Carolina (10-1) played all season that was decided by a single-digit margin. Even its lone loss of the season was a 63-45 blowout against No. 2 Michigan State.

"This will be good for us," Williams said. "Every game in the ACC is like that. To have this experience and know we can pull it out, I think it will come in handy down the road."

North Carolina capitalized on a 9-0 run in the final minute to win for the fifth straight time and ended Thompson-Boling Arena's hex on defending national champions.

Tennessee (7-2) had won each of the last five times it had hosted a defending national champion, a string that included victories over Connecticut (in January 2012), Florida (February 2007 and February 2008) and Kentucky (February 1999 and February 2013).

**No. 5 Arizona State 76, Vanderbilt 64:** At Tempe, Ariz., Tra Holder scored 25 points, Shannon Evans II added 15 and the Sun Devils (10-0) overcame a dismal start to beat the Commodores (3-7).

Arizona State was coming off a victory last week over then-No. 2 Kansas that sent it to its highest ranking in 36 years.

Saben Lee had 24 points to lead Vanderbilt.

**No. 21 Baylor 118, Savannah State 86:** At Waco, Texas, Jo-Lual Acuil had career highs with 31 points and 20 rebounds as the Bears rode a 21-0 first-half run to a rout of the Tigers.

**In special shoes, James lifts Cavs***Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — LeBron James joked that he changed out of his shoes — one black, one white, with "equality" in gold capital letters — at half-time because he was playing poorly.

"If that's a bad game," teammate Kevin Love said, "then sheesh!"

James finished with 20 points, 15 assists and 12 rebounds to lead the Cleveland Cavaliers past the Washington Wizards 106-99 on Sunday night for their 18th victory in 19 games, and then said afterward his choice of footwear was related to the game being played about a mile from President Donald Trump's White House.

"This is a beautiful country and we're never going to let one person dictate how beautiful and how powerful we are," the four-time NBA MVP said.

James had his fourth triple-double in the past five games despite being called for four fouls in the final quarter.

**NBA roundup****Pistons make team-record 17 threes in win over Magic***Associated Press*

DETROIT — Reggie Bullock scored a career-high 20 points, and the Detroit Pistons tied a franchise record with 17 three-pointers in a 114-100 victory over the Orlando Magic on Sunday.

The Pistons have won three in a row after starting December with a seven-game losing streak. They almost let this game slip away when Orlando went on a 19-0 run to cut the lead to five late in the fourth, but Detroit was able to hold on.

Nikola Vucevic had 24 points, 14 rebounds and seven assists for the Magic. They have

Still, he offered a scathing self-critique.

"I actually played pretty bad tonight. I wasn't as strong with the ball: I had six turnovers. Kind of lazy with the ball, at times," James said. "And my teammates did a great job bailing me out."

Love led Cleveland with 25 points and added nine rebounds. Jeff Green added 15 points, and Kyle Korver scored 11.

"He just affects the game in so many ways and makes a lot of plays for other guys, too ... He's our leader," Love said about James.

The last time these teams played, at Washington on Nov. 3, Cleveland won thanks to 57 points from James.

Bradley Beal led Washington with 27 points, and John Wall had 15 points, 10 rebounds and six assists in 32 minutes in his third game back after missing nine with an injured left knee.

dropped five straight and 16 of 19.

**Raptors 108, Kings 93:** DeMar DeRozan scored 21 points, Jonas Valanciunas had 13 points and a season-high 16 rebounds and Toronto won its ninth straight home game, beating Sacramento.

Bogdan Bogdanovic and Garrett Temple each scored 18 points for the Kings.

**Pacers 109, Nets 97:** Victor Oladipo scored 26 points, Domantas Sabonis had 17 and visiting Indiana beat Brooklyn.

Quincy Acy, Caris LeVert and Joe Harris each had 14 for the Nets.

**NHL roundup****Win gives Vegas lead in Pacific***Associated Press*

LAS VEGAS — Erik Haula scored the go-ahead goal midway through the third period and the Vegas Golden Knights beat the Florida Panthers 5-2 Sunday.

Nate Schmidt, Colin Miller, Jonathan Marchessault and James Neal also scored for Vegas, while goalie Malcolm Subban stopped 16 shots. The Golden Knights moved into first place in the Pacific Division. They are tied with Los Angeles with 44 points, but have the tiebreaker by having played two fewer games.

Vegas improved to 13-2-1 at T-Mobile Arena with the most home wins by any team in the Western Conference.

**Blackhawks 4, Wild 1:** Patrick Kane scored two slick goals, Corey Crawford made 27 saves and host Chicago got its season-high fifth straight win.

Ryan Hartman snapped a 17-game goal-scoring drought dating to Oct. 28, and Tommy Wingels added a short-handed empty-netter for the Blackhawks.

The Wild dropped their second straight after a four-game winning streak.

**Jets 4, Blues 0:** Connor Hellebuyck stopped 24 shots for his eighth career shutout, Patrik Laine got his team-high 16th goal of the season and host Winnipeg blanked the Blues a day after being shut out at St. Louis.

Adam Lowry, Mark Scheifele and Josh Morrissey also scored for Winnipeg, which lost 2-0 at St. Louis the previous night.

**Flames 6, Canucks 1:** Mark Giordano scored twice, Sam Bennett had a goal and three assists, and visiting Calgary snapped a three-game skid.

Mark Jankowski had a goal and two assists, and Matthew Tkachuk and Micheal Ferland also scored for the Flames.