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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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New unit to have say over 7th Fleet ships

BY TYLER HLAVAC

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Navy's top officer said a recently created unit will make the calls on whether warships in the region are capable of deployment.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson's statement Tuesday comes on the heels of a report from the secretary of the Navy that says Naval Surface Group Western Pacific is not needed and should be dissolved.

"They operate with the authority of the Pacific Fleet commander," Richardson told Stars and Stripes in an interview at Yokosuka, Japan, home of the 7th Fleet. "They report directly to him. ... The ship's not ready to go and operate until they say it's ready to go and operate."

Naval Surface Group Western Pacific's creation on Oct. 31 was one of many corrective actions the Navy launched after a string of mishaps and collisions in the Pacific led to the deaths of 17 sailors and put two 7th Fleet

destroyers out of commission.

In January, the USS Antietam ran aground and spilled roughly 1,100 gallons of hydraulic fluid into Tokyo Bay; in June, a collision between the USS Fitzgerald and a merchant ship killed seven sailors; and in August, the USS John S. McCain ran into an oil tanker, killing 10 more.

Some have suggested that lack of time for training, maintenance and certification is at least partly to blame for the collisions. As of June, 37 percent of warfare certifications for Japan-based cruiser and destroyer crews had expired — a fivefold increase in expirations in two years, according to a recent Government Accountability Office report.

A comprehensive review released last month by Fleet Forces Command said Naval Surface Group Western Pacific would serve as the "immediate superior in command administrative headquarters responsible for maintaining, training and certifying [Forward Deployed Naval Force] Japan ships."

Vice Adm. Tom Rowden, Naval Surface Forces commander, previously told Stars and Stripes the new unit would differ from the Yokosuka-based Afloat Training Group Western Pacific, which certifies individual ship parts but doesn't evaluate vessels as a whole.

Naval Surface Group Western Pacific is led by Capt. Rich Dromerhauser, a former Fitzgerald commander who once served as the head of the 6th Fleet's Destroyer Squadron 60, based out of Rota, Spain. A previous version of the group worked out of Subic Bay, Philippines, before moving to Singapore in 1992 to become Logistics Group Western Pacific, which now focuses on supporting ships logistically in the region.

A similar group, Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, oversees the maintenance and training of ships homeported at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

The Navy secretary's 2017 Strategic Readiness Review released last week says the new

group will create unnecessary "staff headquarter layers" and should be broken up, with personnel reassigned to the existing afloat training groups or destroyer squadrons.

The review was spearheaded by former Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Gary Roughead and by Michael Bayer, chairman of the Defense Business Board, which advises the secretary of defense and other senior leaders.

"The Strategic Review does not concur with establishment of Naval Surface Group Western Pacific," the report says. "Standing up an additional oversight layer provides another headquarters staff and administrative control function that is likely to perpetuate ambiguous and conflicting authorities."

Richardson told Stars and Stripes on Tuesday that he disagrees with the report's assessment and that the new unit is needed, based on input he's received from 7th Fleet and Pacific Fleet commanders.

Cyberwar against ISIS gives glimpse of US forces' future

The Washington Post

The U.S. military has conducted cyberattacks against Islamic State for more than a year, and its record of success when those attacks are coordinated with elite special operations troops is such that the Pentagon is likely to carry out similar operations with greater frequency, according to current and former U.S. defense officials.

The cyberoffensive against ISIS was a first, and included the creation of a unit named Joint Task Force Ares. It focused on destroying or disrupting computer networks used by

the militant group to recruit fighters and to communicate inside the organization. Such offensive weapons are more commonly associated with U.S. intelligence agencies, but they were brought into the open in 2016 after then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter pressured U.S. Cyber Command to become more involved in the campaign to defeat ISIS.

The move sparked a debate in the U.S. government over whether American allies would object to the U.S. military's altering computer networks abroad, The Washington Post reported in May. Some intelligence officials

argued that using such weapons in other countries could jeopardize the cooperation of international partners on which U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies depend.

But the cyberattacks were approved and launched anyway, and the campaign recently received the full-throated endorsement of Army Gen. Raymond "Tony" Thomas III, the head of U.S. Special Operations Command.

Thomas, speaking Dec. 13 to Army officers at a conference in northern Virginia, cited Joint Task Force Ares, saying its efforts, combined with those

of Special Operations troops, other elements of Cyber Command, the intelligence agencies and international partners produced "an operation which provided devastating effects on the adversary."

When combined with traditional military operations, Thomas said, the cyberstrikes culminated "in the kinetic destruction of that adversary on an epic scale."

He argued that the military can "only achieve exquisite effects like this" with a task force that combines a variety of capabilities, including cyberweapons.

US: ISIS still a significant threat to Iraq and Syria

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — American-backed forces have cleared Islamic State from more than 97 percent of the land that it once controlled across Iraq and Syria, yet the terrorist group remains a significant security threat in both nations, a U.S. military spokesman said Tuesday.

The United States estimates fewer than 3,000 ISIS fighters remain in Syria and Iraq, with the majority confined to small chunks of land that the group still occupies along the Euphrates River, south of Raqqa in eastern Syria. In Iraq, small groups of the militants remain in several areas of the country, launching occasional attacks on Iraqi security forces, said Army Col. Ryan Dillon, a spokesman for the U.S.-led Operation Inherent Resolve coalition.

"There is still work to do," Dillon told reporters at the Pentagon. "When they are defeated, we have to make sure they cannot come back."

In the Middle Euphrates River Valley, U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces remain on the offensive, engaged in violent clashes with remaining hardline ISIS fighters, he said.

Recent fighting in Syria has centered on the village of Abu Hamam about 30 miles from the country's border with Iraq along the Euphrates, Dillon said.

ISIS continues to provide a challenge to SDF fighters in that area with vehicle bombs, rocket and mortar fire and counterattacks, he said.

ISIS' resistance has required the continued assistance of U.S. military advisers who remain embedded with the SDF forces to assist them as they battle the terrorist group. That is the reason the Pentagon has yet to pull out much of its 2,000 or so forces inside Syria, Dillon said.

CNO seeks upgrades, more ships

By TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A bigger, more networked Navy equipped with the latest weapons systems is needed to deal with security threats like North Korea, the Navy's top officer told sailors during an all-hands call in Japan.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson visited sailors aboard the USS Ronald Reagan at Yokosuka Naval Base on Tuesday, wrapping up a tour that included visits to Hawaii, South Korea and other bases in Japan.

The threat from North Korea — which has conducted a pair of underground nuclear tests and has fired more than 20 missiles so far this year — was a popular topic as Richardson answered sailors' questions.

"This is an unprecedented and urgent threat we are seeing from North Korea," he said, adding that the region's security situation has worsened over the past five years. "The approach to addressing that right now is primarily through a diplomatic and economic pressure cam-

paign. The backstop to that has got to be a firm set of military options."

North Korea recently declared it has achieved its long-sought goal of becoming a nuclear power after testing a powerful new weapon it claims can hit any point in the United States. The intercontinental ballistic missile, which was fired at a steep angle from an area north of Pyongyang, flew for more than 50 minutes. It traveled nearly 600 miles and reached an altitude of up to 2,800 miles before crashing into the sea off the coast of Japan, military officials said.

Richardson met Monday with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera. Japanese media outlet Kyodo News reported that Onodera told Richardson that naval forces from both countries would be needed to counter North Korean threats.

"We cannot tolerate repeated provocative acts by North Korea," Onodera said. "It is necessary for the (Japan) Maritime Self-Defense Force and the U.S. Navy to cooperate with each other."

Last month, JMSDF ships participated in a rare tricarrier exercise off the Korean Peninsula that involved the Ronald Reagan, USS Nimitz and USS Theodore Roosevelt strike groups.

Richardson said the service is undertaking several key steps to increase naval power, including building more ships. The Navy has a long-term goal of expanding to about 350,000 sailors to meet a 355-ship goal set by President Donald Trump. The service now has about 322,000 sailors and 277 commissioned vessels.

"Increasing the number of platforms is a very important part of naval power," he said. "The [National Defense Authorization Act for 2018] talks about 355 ships as the target, and we're going to do everything we can to get there. There is a near-unanimous consensus that we need more naval power than we have now."

Richardson added that he wants to expand the capabilities of ships as well, with better networking between weapons systems, aircraft, ships and sensors.

Deported former Marine allowed to return

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — A former Marine deported to Mexico 15 years ago after he was convicted of a minor offense has won his fight to return to the United States and regain his permanent U.S. residency.

Marco Chavez said Monday that he was looking forward to reuniting with his three sons in Iowa after missing their childhoods. He is now 45, and they range in age from 17 to 21.

"One of the things I wanted to let my kids know is they did have a father and I did not plan to leave them," said Chavez, who has been living in the border city of Tijuana. "That wasn't part of the plan with me and my ex-wife. I just want to be there to support them. They

still might have resentment, but that's understandable."

An immigration judge's ruling last month is allowing Chavez to return. It came after California Gov. Jerry Brown, a Democrat, pardoned Chavez. He was convicted in 1998 of animal cruelty for a dog beating but said another person was responsible. He was sentenced to two years in state prison, was released after 15 months because of good behavior and later deported.

Brown said Chavez "served our country, earned a pardon and deserves to come back home."

His wife initially moved to Tijuana with their sons so they could all be together, but life was too hard for the family in

the violence-plagued border city, where the schools were not as good and jobs were scarce, Chavez said.

The couple divorced, and she moved to Iowa with their children. He plans to meet his parents at the U.S.-Mexico border crossing in San Diego before Christmas and will live in Los Angeles with them for several months while he deals with his residency paperwork. He then will move to Iowa and try to rebuild a relationship with his children. Chavez last saw his sons when they visited him in Tijuana in 2013.

Chavez was a baby when his parents took him to the U.S. He served four years in the Marine Corps and was honorably discharged.

Standing ovation for Kyle Carpenter at USC

The (Columbia, S.C.) State

Kyle Carpenter says he never went a day at the University of South Carolina without a professor or fellow student thanking him for his sacrifice as a U.S. Marine.

But he admits he also never encountered a moment more special than his last as a USC student, when thousands of his classmates and their families gave the Medal of Honor recipient a rousing standing ovation at graduation.

"That was one of the most incredible moments since I woke up at the hospital and realized I had a second chance at life," Carpenter, 28, said Monday,

minutes after receiving his bachelor's degree in international studies.

Carpenter, from Gilbert, S.C., is best known for throwing himself onto a live grenade in Afghanistan in 2010 to save a fellow Marine's life. Miraculously, he survived, even though his heart stopped three times as doctors worked to save him.

The grenade blast took Carpenter's right eye and injured his left, broke both his eardrums and shattered most of his teeth and lower jaw. He spent five weeks in a coma and the next two years in the hospital, undergoing dozens of surgeries to put his body back together.

Four years later and a year

after enrolling at USC in August 2013, he was awarded the nation's highest military honor — the Medal of Honor — at 24 years old by then-President Barack Obama.

The award kicked off a new wave of publicity. He was featured on "Late Night With David Letterman" and by virtually every major news outlet in America.

His grueling recovery was recounted in magazine features and in documentaries. He made the motivational speaking rounds, appearing before USC's sports teams, veterans groups and Fortune 500 companies.

He backpacked across Europe, led Williams-Brice Sta-

dium in a "Game-Cocks!" chant and took an Honor Flight to Washington in 2015.

Meanwhile, his Instagram page, named @chiksdigscars, collected nearly half a million followers.

Carpenter isn't sure what is in store for him as he hits the job market. He is sure he will continue his motivational speaking and working with veterans groups. And he wants to say thank you, to his professors and his fellow students.

"My college experience was like everyone else's. I learned a lot. I gained a new perspective on the world and on people that I'm so thankful and appreciative for," Carpenter said.

Suit: Trump administration hostile to women in combat

Bloomberg News

SAN FRANCISCO — Women in the U.S. military escalated their legal battle for equal footing in combat units, saying the Trump administration has shown "extreme hostility" toward integrating the armed services.

Almost five years after the Obama administration vowed to end gender barriers, the Service Women's Action Network alleged in court Monday that

Trump set the tone for a retreat when he faulted his predecessor on the campaign trail for pursuing a "politically correct military."

The women say the president's chief of staff, Marine Gen. John Kelly, and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis also have shown an "animus toward women soldiers" and promoted their continued exclusion from combat units.

In Monday's filing, an update to a lawsuit first filed in

San Francisco federal court in 2012, the women take aim at an Army and Marine Corps policy of "Leaders First," which bars junior enlisted women from entering combat battalions until two or more "women leaders" have joined those battalions.

The Defense Department "has not provided any justification for a policy that deliberately leads to the isolation and segregation of women, either during training or upon accession to a combat arms unit," ac-

cording to the complaint.

The women also blast the Marines over "sex-segregated Basic Training," saying it relegates females to second-class status.

The administration said last month in a filing that while it's making "substantial progress on the implementation of females into previously closed units and has no plans to reverse that policy, DOD cannot commit that a policy will never be changed in the future."

US vetoes resolution on Trump's decision on Israeli capital

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — The United States on Monday vetoed a resolution supported by the 14 other U.N. Security Council members that would have required President Donald Trump to rescind his declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, a vote that showed the depth of global opposition to the U.S. move.

The United States was certain to veto the Egyptian-sponsored resolution, but its Arab supporters wanted the vote to demonstrate that countries everywhere and even many U.S.

allies such as Britain, France and Japan are against Trump's action.

The Palestinians immediately announced that they will seek a resolution with similar demands in the 193-member General Assembly, where there are no vetoes. But unlike the Security Council, the assembly's resolutions are not legally binding.

Palestinian Ambassador Riyad Mansour told reporters after meeting with the General Assembly president that he expects a vote this week. He said he hopes for "overwhelming support" telling the Trump

administration that the international community doesn't accept the U.S. position, which he said violates international law and Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley called the Security Council resolution "an insult" that won't be forgotten, saying the United Nations forced the U.S. to cast a veto simply because of its right to decide where to put its embassy. She said the veto — the first cast by the U.S. in more than six years — was done "in defense of American sovereignty and in defense of America's role in the

Middle East peace process."

The vetoed resolution would have demanded that all countries comply with 10 resolutions on Jerusalem, dating to 1967, including requirements that the city's final status be decided in direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

It would also have affirmed that "any decisions and actions which purport to have altered, the character, status or demographic composition of the holy city of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded."

Amtrak train speeding before it derailed

Associated Press

DUPONT, Wash. — Federal officials confirmed an Amtrak train was hurtling 50 mph over the speed limit when it careened off an overpass south of Seattle, spilling cars onto the highway below and killing at least three people.

Bella Dinh-Zarr, a National Transportation Safety Board member, said at a Monday night news conference that information from the event data recorder in the rear locomotive showed the train was traveling at 80 mph in a 30 mph zone when it derailed at 7:34 a.m. Mangled train cars ended up on top of each other — and one hung precariously over the freeway.

When the clanging of metal and screeching stopped, at first it was quiet. Then came the screams.

After the crash, the injured called out as rescuers — including people who had been in cars on their morning freeway commute — rushed to help. One of

the train passengers was Emma Shafer, who found herself at a 45-degree angle staring at the seats in front of her that had dislodged and swung around.

“It felt oddly silent after the actual crashing,” Shafer said. “Then there was people screaming because their leg was messed up. ... I don’t know if I actually heard the sirens, but they were there. A guy was like, ‘Hey, I’m Robert. We’ll get you out of here.’”

Dinh-Zarr said it’s not yet known what caused the train to derail and that “it’s too early to tell” why it was going so fast.

Positive train control — the technology that can slow or stop a speeding train — wasn’t in use on this stretch of track, according to Amtrak President Richard Anderson.

In 2015, an Amtrak train in Philadelphia was traveling at twice the 50 mph speed limit as it entered a sharp curve and derailed. Eight people were killed and more than 200 were injured.

A track chart prepared by the Washington State Department of Transportation shows the maximum speed drops from 79 mph to 30 mph for passenger trains just before the tracks curve to cross Interstate 5, which is where the train went off the tracks.

The chart, dated Feb. 7, was submitted to the Federal Railroad Administration in anticipation of the start of passenger service along a new bypass route that shaves off 10 minutes from the trip between Seattle and Portland, Ore.

Kimberly Reason, with Sound Transit, the Seattle-area transit agency that owns the tracks, said speed signs are posted 2 miles before the speed zone changes and just before the speed zone approaching the curve.

Eric Corp, a councilman for the small city of DuPont near the derailment, said he rode the train with about 30 or so dignitaries and others on a special trip Friday before the service

opened to the public Monday.

“Once we were coming up on that curve, the train slowed down considerably,” he said, adding that “in no way did it make me feel like we were going too fast.”

The train was not full. Authorities said there were 80 passengers and five on-duty crewmembers aboard when it derailed and pulled 13 cars off the tracks. Authorities said there were three confirmed deaths. More than 70 people were taken for medical care — including 10 with serious injuries.

About two hours after the accident, a U.S. official who was briefed on the investigation said he was told at least six people were killed. The official said he had no new information to explain the discrepancy in the numbers. The official was not authorized to discuss the investigation publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

McCain says he’s feeling well, will return

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republican Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., on Monday expressed thanks for the overwhelming support as he battles brain cancer, saying he is feeling well and looks forward to being back on the job in January.

The senator, 81, returned home to Arizona after being treated for a viral infection at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Maryland. He missed votes last week and will miss a crucial vote on the GOP tax bill this week.

McCain tweeted on Monday: “Thanks to everyone for your support & words of encouragement! I’m feeling well & looking forward to returning to work after the holidays.”

His wife, Cindy, tweeted earlier Monday: “Nothing beats the feeling of being home in

Arizona for the Holidays!” with a photo of a Christmas tree.

A statement from his office late Sunday said McCain would undergo physical therapy and rehabilitation at the Mayo Clinic in Arizona. Now in his sixth Senate term, McCain underwent surgery in mid-July to remove a 2-inch blood clot in his brain and was diagnosed with glioblastoma.

McCain’s daughter, Meghan, tweeted on Sunday, “My father is doing well and we are all looking forward to spending Christmas together in Arizona.”

In its statement Sunday, McCain’s office provided an assessment from Dr. Mark Gilbert, chief of neuro-oncology at the National Institutes of Health’s National Cancer Institute.

“Senator McCain has responded well to treatment he received at Walter Reed Medi-

cal Center for a viral infection and continues to improve,” Gilbert said. “An evaluation of his underlying cancer shows he is responding positively to ongoing treatment.”

McCain’s closest friend in the Senate, Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said he hadn’t spoken to McCain but planned to do so over the holidays.

“The steroids and chemotherapy have been tough — be tough for anybody,” Graham told reporters Monday night. But he said he’s “encouraged that John’s going to be back in January and be good to go.”

President Donald Trump told reporters Sunday he had spoken to Cindy McCain.

“They’ve headed back, but I understand he’ll come if we ever needed his vote, which, hopefully, we won’t,” Trump said after returning to the White House from Camp David.

Republicans start tax bill’s final drive

WASHINGTON — Their long-sought political goal within grasp, Republicans in Congress are set to catapult sweeping \$1.5 trillion tax legislation through the House, rolling over a dozen GOP defectors from high-tax states.

The Republicans’ final drive to deliver the tax package to an eager President Donald Trump began Tuesday with a vote in the House. A vote later in the Senate was expected to quickly follow. Both tallies likely will cling along party lines.

The Senate result was in doubt in recent weeks. Only on Friday did Republican leaders cement the needed support for the legislation, securing endorsements from wavering GOP Sens. Marco Rubio, of Florida, and Bob Corker, of Tennessee. More holdout GOP senators — moderate Susan Collins, of Maine, and Mike Lee, of Utah — came into the fold on Monday.

From The Associated Press

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Inmate escapes jail for 2nd time this year

AL FLORENCE — An Alabama inmate awaiting trial for the attempted murder of a police officer has escaped for the second time this year.

News outlets reported that Lauderdale County Detention Center administrator Jason Butler said officials discovered at about 11 p.m. Saturday that Christopher Wayne Kilpatrick, 43, had escaped. Kilpatrick had previously escaped the facility on April 8 and was taken into custody again April 15 following a standoff.

Lauderdale County Sheriff Rick Singleton said Kilpatrick escaped using the same method as in April. He cited “faulty design on the jail.”

Kilpatrick was originally indicted last December on multiple charges in connection with the August 2016 shooting of Florence Detective Michael Price. Price was trying to apprehend Kilpatrick, who had walked off a work-release detail.

Wealthy suspect's cost complaints rejected

SD RAPID CITY — A federal judge rejected the argument of a Rapid City man accused of defrauding consumers of nearly \$17 million that he couldn't afford to pay for his ankle monitor as he awaits trial.

Larry Lytle, 82, is facing conspiracy and other charges for allegedly ignoring a pair of 2015 federal court orders to stop making and selling allegedly bogus laser medical devices known as QLasers.

The Rapid City Journal reported that Lytle's attorney recently sought a court order allowing for the removal of the ankle monitor, saying Lytle

isn't a flight risk and is having difficulty paying for electronic monitoring as required by the court.

Prosecutors responded that Lytle is a millionaire and that his claim “defies logic.”

Threats prompt lawyer to drop pizza lawsuits

MI DETROIT — A Detroit-area lawyer said threats on social media have prompted him to drop lawsuits challenging the halal preparation of Little Caesars pizza.

Maged Moughni said the threats identified his family and his 11-year-old daughter's school. He said they also contained profanity and a racial slur.

Moughni told the Detroit Free Press that he had to “switch gears,” drop the lawsuits and protect his family. He said he filed complaints with police in Dearborn, just outside Detroit.

Moughni represented Little Caesars customers who said their pizza had regular pork pepperoni at some locations rather than a halal substitute.

Firefighters help rescue woman's wedding dress

MA WOBURN — Firefighters helped save a woman's wedding dress from a burning home in Massachusetts.

NBC Boston reported that fire crews responded Sunday evening to the blaze at a Woburn building where Julie Centeno and her fiancé, Curtis Wilson, live.

Centeno, 25, said they were able to escape the home with just their coats. When firefighters asked if there was anything important still inside, Centeno said she mentioned her dress and her diamond ring. Fire

Chief Stephen Adgate said the crews were able to recover the items.

Man offering \$10K for stolen monkey's return

FL SOUTHWEST RANCHES — A Florida man is missing his monkey.

Carl Minix told WSVN-TV a burglar broke into his home in suburban Fort Lauderdale and stole his 3-month-old capuchin monkey, named Henry. Nothing else was stolen.

Minix is offering a \$10,000 reward. He said he has spent more than \$9,000 on Henry and trained for 1,000 hours to get a state permit for the animal. He said Henry is “my child.”

Witnesses: Woman hit boyfriend with vehicle

HI KAILUA-KONA — An Alaska woman accused of driving a car into her boyfriend on the Big Island was charged with attempted murder.

Crystal Young, 30, was taken into custody Friday after witnesses said an argument led to the 36-year-old man being hit by the vehicle, West Hawaii Today reported. The man was taken to a hospital and then was flown to Honolulu in critical condition.

Witnesses said Young was driving in circles around the man before she drove hundreds of feet away and turned the car around and drove into the man head-on, launching him up the front of the hood before he fell backward.

The witnesses said Young got out of her car and began talking frantically to people who were rushing to the scene. She then got back into the car and sped north in the Old Kona Airport

State Recreation Area, where she drove into a dead end and fled on foot into bushes.

End of days comes for man's 'Zombie Nativity'

OH CINCINNATI — A ghoulish holiday tradition outside Cincinnati will soon come to a close after an Ohio man said he won't put up his “Zombie Nativity” scene after this year.

Sycamore Township's Jasen Dixon said he originally wasn't planning to install the display this Christmas season. “But I get hundreds of emails from people, local fans,” he told the Cincinnati Enquirer.

Dixon installed the display, complete with zombie Mary and zombie baby Jesus, in early December. He said he'll put it in storage or sell it after it's taken down.

Man forces ex-girlfriend to walk in street naked

NY NEW YORK — A New York City man has been convicted of coercion, assault and other charges for beating his former girlfriend, forcing her to walk naked down a public street and recording the abuse so he could show the video to friends.

Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. said Jasson Melo, 26, assaulted his former girlfriend in his Harlem home on Jan. 17, 2016. Vance said Melo hit the victim repeatedly and threatened to throw her down the stairs.

Prosecutors said Melo forced her to walk naked down the street while their 2-month-old baby was left alone in the apartment.

From wire reports

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Falcons stay close to NFC South lead

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — There's only one team the Atlanta Falcons need to be concerned about the rest of the way.

Their own.

The defending NFC champions trail division rivals New Orleans and Carolina by one game with two weeks remaining in the regular season. But if the Falcons (9-5) beat the Saints (10-4) and Panthers (10-4), they win the NFC South again. One victory in the final two games guarantees Atlanta a playoff berth.

"We're right where we need to be at this point of the season," quarterback Matt Ryan said after Monday night's 24-21 win over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. "We've got to find a way to get back to work this week, try to improve and make sure we play the best we're capable of playing this Sunday."

"That's really all our focus needs to be about. If we're worried about anything else then you're not as locked in as you need to be."

Devonta Freeman had 194

yards from scrimmage — rushing for 126 on 22 carries and catching five passes for a team-high 68 yards — to pace Atlanta's fifth victory in six games, which eliminated Green Bay from playoff contention.

Ryan threw for 212 yards, a touchdown and no interceptions.

"Can't think too far into the future. Always focus on what we've got next," Falcons safety Keanu Neal said. "Look too far ahead, you lose sight of the present."

Freeman's 32-yard TD run gave Atlanta a 10-point lead that the defense nearly let slip away over the final eight minutes.

The 5-foot-6, 206-pound running back kept pounding away at the Bucs defense until finally finding his way into the open field, darting through a gaping hole on the right side before cutting back to elude the only defender with a shot at tackling him on his way to the end zone.

"We had a sense this would be a big night for him. We talked about that before the game," Falcons coach Dan Quinn said.

"We thought he would have his opportunities. If he could get to the next level and to a linebacker or safety or corner, make sure he had a plan how he wanted to finish."

With Freeman's sidekick, Tevin Coleman, out with a concussion, third-string running back Terron Ward shared the rushing load with the two-time 1,000-yard rusher.

"I saw him hit the sideline. And, Free one-on-one with anyone in the open field, I'm taking Free," Ward said.

Some things to know about Falcons-Buccaneers:

Jameis shines

Jameis Winston had his sharpest performance of the season for the Bucs (4-10), who have lost nine of 11 following a 2-1 start.

The third-year pro completed 27 of 35 passes for 299 yards and three TDs with no turnovers. He had TD passes of 30 yards to O.J. Howard, 42 yards to Mike Evans and 16 yards to Adam Humphries, the latter pulling Tampa Bay to 24-21

with four minutes remaining.

The Bucs got the ball back with a minute left. Winston completed three passes, moving them into position to allow Patrick Murray to try a 54-yard field goal that sailed wide right on the final play.

"I think this is Jameis Winston at his best," coach Dirk Koetter said. "We've seen him at his best for parts of several games, but this was probably his best and most complete game."

Containing Julio

Falcons wide receiver Julio Jones had a monster game against the Bucs three weeks ago with 12 receptions for 253 yards and two TDs in a 34-20 win at Atlanta. Tampa Bay knew it needed to do a better job against him to have any chance this time.

Ryan targeted the star receiver eight times Monday night, but Jones only had three catches for 54 yards.

The Falcons offset the drop in production, finishing with 201 yards rushing.

Sale of Panthers has power players eyeing an opportunity

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The stunning news of the rare opportunity to purchase an NFL team has quickly garnered the attention of sports figures, business investors and politicians alike.

Amid reports of sexual and racial remarks made by Carolina Panthers owner and founder Jerry Richardson in the workplace, he has unexpectedly announced that he is selling the NFL franchise after this season ends.

It was a bombshell that rocked the Carolinas, and generated shockwaves inside and out of the organization. The team Monday promoted Tina Becker as COO and gave her full control of the day-to-day operations.

Becker said in a release

that "these have been some of the most difficult days of my 19 years with the Panthers." She added that her immediate focus will be on the corporate side of the organization, "while addressing the real concerns that have been raised in recent days."

Richardson, meanwhile, stepped away from daily responsibilities to focus on the sale of the team — which will come with a multibillion-dollar price tag.

That's what is known, but Richardson's decision to walk away after nearly 25 years as owner has left more questions than answers about the franchise's future — most notably, who will buy it and will they keep the team in Charlotte.

The Panthers are tethered to Charlotte through the 2018 season because of an agreement

on an \$87.5 stadium renovation between the city and the team in 2013. That renovation is nearly complete. But a buyer could potentially purchase the team and move it in 2019.

Panthers coach Ron Rivera was "a little taken aback" when Richardson informed him Sunday night of his decision to sell the team. But he too believes the Panthers should remain in Charlotte.

"This organization has been a source of pride and goodwill and I would like to it continue," Rivera said Monday. "This is a great community with a very supportive fan base that has been out there for us. They have been here for me and this football team and I hope that somehow it is able to stay here."

The chance to purchase an NFL team has potential suitors coming out of the woodwork.

Rapper and actor Diddy indicated his interest in purchasing the Panthers on Twitter moments after Richardson's announcement. Two-time NBA MVP Stephen Curry, a Charlotte native, chimed in with "I want in!" NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick has also expressed interest.

Other businessmen with Charlotte connections could show interest as well. Speedway Motorsports chairman Bruton Smith and his son, CEO Marcus Smith, have previously expressed interest in purchasing the Panthers should the opportunity arise.

More names will surely emerge over the next several weeks, but they need to be ready to write a big check. Forbes Magazine recently estimated the Panthers' worth at \$2.3 billion.

Gap grows between FBS haves, have nots

Associated Press

Pete Lembo has seen both sides of major college football as the head coach at Ball State and now as an assistant at Maryland.

At Ball State in the Mid-American Conference, a simple decision like buying black helmets for the team came with concessions. There was give and take on every decision.

"And I would share that openly with our team," Lembo said. "I would say, 'Look guys, this is life. You're going to have to make these same kind of decisions when you're a husband and when you're a father and you're going to have to work with your wife on these kind of things.'"

At Maryland in the Big Ten, life is easier, relatively speaking. Boosted by a share of the Big Ten's billion-dollar television deals, Maryland brought in \$94 million in athletic revenue in 2015-16, according to the figures compiled by USA Today — \$70 million more than Ball State.

Media rights deals and the College Football Playoff have increased revenue at all levels of the Football Bowl Subdivision, but the gap has grown between the Group of Five leagues and the Power Five conferences — the SEC, ACC, Big Ten, Big 12 and Pac-12. Over the next month, Group of Five teams will mostly play in third-tier bowl games in front of sparse crowds, earning payouts that mostly cover travel expenses. The Power Five teams get the glamour bowls with the multimillion-dollar payouts.

It is not quite haves and have nots, but the differences show in the most practical ways.

Bigger staffs allow coaches more time to actually coach. Players not only have access to better facilities for training, but their health and performance is more thoroughly monitored from practice to training table. They also get more academic supervision and support.

"There's a big difference between a need and a want," said Joe Parker, the athletic director at Colorado State, which recently

opened a new \$220 million on-campus football stadium. "I think we fulfill every need that I've seen on our campus as it relates to intercollegiate athletes. The list of wants is extensive and there's probably not a budget to address every one of them. That's the space we live in, making those tough decisions and prioritizing them. Not convincing ourselves that this thing that might look and seem nice is a necessity when it really isn't."

Colorado State's athletic revenue was just under \$40 million, which ranks in the top half of the Mountain West but is still \$18 million less than Washington State, which ranked last among the Power Five's public schools.

Twenty-eight Power Five schools reported athletic revenue of more than \$100 million, with Texas A&M leading the way at nearly \$195 million. Each of the Power Five conferences made payouts to their members ranging between \$42 million in the Southeastern Conference to about

\$29 million in the Pac-12.

The College Football Playoff distributed at least \$60 million to each Power Five conference last season, with the Big Ten netting \$70.9 million. The Group of Five payouts ranged from the MAC at \$21.9 million to Conference USA at \$13.9 million.

Not all Group of Five conferences are created equal, but even the most lucrative — the American Athletic Conference — is paying its members about 10 times less than what most Power Five leagues share with their schools.

Lembo coached at Ball State from 2011-15, going 33-29 (23-17 in the MAC). After a 3-9 season in 2015 that made his future at the school uncertain, he left to become assistant head coach and special teams coordinator for head coach DJ Durkin at Maryland. Lembo made about \$515,000 in his final season with the Cardinals, and made \$350,000 last year at Maryland, which is about \$60,000 less than what several MAC head coaches make.

NHL roundup

Devils down Ducks, move atop Metropolitan Division

Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — Stefan Noesen scored on a rebound with 4:07 to play and added an empty net goal as the New Jersey Devils rallied from a two-goal deficit to beat the Anaheim Ducks 5-3 on Monday night.

Myles Wood had two goals, Jesper Bratt also scored and Brian Boyle added three assists as the Devils won their second straight game to start a six-game homestand. Cory Schneider had 21 saves and was helped by a goalpost on a shot by Rickard Rakell during a power play before Neosen, a former Duck, scored the go-ahead goal.

The Devils took over first place in the Metropolitan Division. They are tied with Wash-

ington with 43 points but hold the tiebreaker by having played one fewer game.

Kings 4, Flyers 1: Adrian Kempe jumped out of the penalty box and scored a big goal in the third period, Jonathan Quick made 36 saves and visiting Los Angeles ended its three-game skid and Philadelphia's six-game winning streak.

Alec Martinez, Trevor Lewis and Tyler Toffoli also scored for the Kings, who were 0-2-1 after an eight-game winning streak.

Bruins 7, Blue Jackets 2: Jake DeBrusk set up second-period power-play goals by David Backes and Charlie McAvoy and added a goal of his own, Tuukka Rask stopped 16 shots to keep up his hot stretch, and

host Boston beat Columbus.

Brad Marchand, Danton Heinen, Torey Krug and Patrice Bergeron also scored for the Bruins, who had a season-high scoring total while halting a two-game skid. Rask improved to 6-0-1 in his last seven starts. McAvoy also had an assist and his first career NHL fight.

Josh Anderson and Seth Jones scored, and Sergei Bobrovsky made 38 saves — including a penalty shot by Tim Schaller — for the Blue Jackets.

Avalanche 4, Penguins 2: Defenseman Tyson Barrie scored twice, Semyon Varlamov stopped 30 shots — even getting a little help from the posts along the way — and host Colorado beat Pittsburgh for

the second time in a week.

J.T. Compher also scored and Mikko Rantanen sealed the win with a late empty-netter as the Avalanche completed a sweep of the two-game season series.

Barrie scored his first goal since Oct. 13 in the first period. He followed that up with another in the second for his fifth career two-goal game.

Oilers 5, Sharks 3: Ryan Strome scored twice to lead host Edmonton to its second straight win.

Mark Letestu, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Patrick Maroon also scored for the Oilers, who have consecutive wins for just the third time this season. Leon Draisaitl had two assists and Cam Talbot stopped 18 shots.

NBA roundup

Durant, Warriors mar Bryant's night

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — On the night the Los Angeles Lakers retired both of Kobe Bryant's jerseys, Kevin Durant provided his own tribute with a deadly accurate impression of the Black Mamba.

Durant couldn't hit a shot early on, but simply refused to stop launching.

And when the game was finally on the line, he didn't miss.

Durant scored 36 points and hit a tiebreaking 22-foot jumper with 7.3 seconds left in overtime, and the Golden State Warriors beat the Lakers 116-114 Monday for their ninth consecutive victory.

Klay Thompson had 17 points and 10 rebounds as the defending NBA champions predictably dampened a celebratory night for the Lakers, who honored Bryant with a halftime ceremony.

"That was for Kobe Night," Durant said with a grin. "I had to get them up for Kob."

Durant and Thompson combined to miss 31 of their first 40 shots, allowing the Lakers to keep it close. Durant was 6-for-25 in regulation but he went 4-for-4 in OT, capped by the pure go-ahead jumper that eventually won it.

Stephen Curry missed his fifth straight game with a sprained ankle, and Draymond Green sat out for the fourth time in five games with right shoulder soreness. Durant and the Warriors still hit enough big buckets to handle the Lakers, but only after plenty of misses.

"I've had so many bad shooting nights, and I know that it makes just for a better player," Durant said. "I got better tonight. I fought through it, I was able to make some shots down the stretch, and I feel more confident going into my next game

shooting the ball."

Rockets 120, Jazz 99: Eric Gordon scored 17 of his season-high 33 points in the fourth quarter to power a huge run that put his team on top, and host Houston won its 14th straight straight.

Celtics 112, Pacers 111: Terry Rozier's steal and dunk with 1.5 seconds left capped a frantic comeback in the final half-minute that gave visiting Boston the victory.

Kyrie Irving scored 30 points for Boston, which trailed 107-102 after Victor Oladipo's basket with 31 seconds remaining.

Thunder 95, Nuggets 94: Russell Westbrook scored 16 of his season-high 38 points in the fourth quarter, including the tiebreaking free throw with 2.3 seconds left, to lift host Oklahoma City.

Timberwolves 108, Trail Blazers 107: Jimmy Butler powered through a recent bout of back spasms to score 37

points, sinking two free throws that gave host Minnesota the lead with 2.5 seconds left.

Hornets 109, Knicks 91: Frank Kaminsky scored 15 of his season high-tying 24 points in the first half to give host Charlotte a jolt off the bench.

Bulls 117, 76ers 115: Nikola Mirotic and Kris Dunn each scored 22 points, and host Chicago topped Philadelphia for its sixth consecutive victory.

Spurs 109, Clippers 91: LaMarcus Aldridge scored 19 points and San Antonio beat Los Angeles in Kawhi Leonard's home debut this season.

Suns 97, Mavericks 91: Alex Len had 14 points and 14 rebounds to help Phoenix rally past host Dallas for its second consecutive comeback victory.

Hawks 110, Heat 104: Taurian Prince scored 24 points, Dennis Schroder added 23 and NBA-worst Atlanta beat injury-riddled visiting Miami.

Top 25 roundup

Arizona's Trier leaves game with sore knee

Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. — Allonzo Trier banged knees with a North Dakota State player and immediately went down. The McKale Center fell silent as Arizona's leading scorer and an All-American candidate writhed on the floor, clutching his left knee.

Trier returned later in the second half with an ice bag on his knee, but his injury put a damper on what was an otherwise dominant performance.

Deandre Ayton scored 25 points and Trier added 15 before leaving with the injury, lifting No. 18 Arizona to an 83-53 rout of North Dakota State on Monday night.

"It's scary as a player when you feel that in your knee," Arizona coach Sean Miller said. "I'm sure he'll have a bruise there and hopefully he's good for the long haul, and hopefully we get some good news."

Arizona (9-3) allowed the Bison (5-6) to hang around early before blowing past them

with a 29-3 run spanning halftime to win its 46th straight nonconference home game.

The Wildcats shot 50 percent from the floor and kept North Dakota State's long-range shooters in check most of the night, holding the Bison to 8-for-27 shooting from the three-point arc to win their sixth straight game.

"Your margin for error isn't very big against them," North Dakota State coach David Richman said. "We came out and executed our game plan, they made some adjustments like well-coached teams do and we didn't handle those adjustments very well."

Paul Miller, who inadvertently banged knees with Trier, led the Bison with 12 points.

No. 2 Michigan State 107, Houston Baptist 62: Miles Bridges matched his career high with 33 points, and host Michigan State set a school record with 16 blocks.

The Spartans (11-1) have won 10 straight

since losing to top-ranked Duke.

No. 14 Kansas 109, Omaha 64: Svi Mykhailiuk hit six three-pointers and scored 26 points, Devonte Graham added 17 points and the host Jayhawks rolled.

No. 12 Gonzaga 101, IUPUI 71: Killian Tillie scored a career-high 27 points for the host Bulldogs.

Johnathan Williams added 17 points and 14 rebounds for Gonzaga (10-2), last year's runner-up in the NCAA Tournament.

No. 15 TCU, 91, Texas Southern 72: Vladimir Brodziansky had 18 points and 10 rebounds, helping keep the Horned Frogs undefeated.

No. 24 Florida State 69, Charleston Southern 58: Phil Cofer scored 19 points, and the host Seminoles bounced back from their first loss of the season.

No. 25 Creighton 90, UT-Arlington 81: Marcus Foster scored 22 of his 32 points in the first half, and the host Blue Jays earned their fourth straight win.