

# STARS AND STRIPES®

Tuesday, December 26, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## GAO warns of climate threat to posts

By SCOTT WYLAND

*Stars and Stripes*

Drought-induced wildfires scorching California bases. More frequent hurricanes battering island installations. Rising seas that will put many military bases under water in the next 20 years. These are some possible climate change threats that the military must better prepare for in the coming years to protect bases and personnel, the Government Accountability Office said in a report that runs counter to the White House's climate change skepticism.

"A three-foot rise in sea levels will threaten the operations of more than 128 United States military sites, and it is possible that many of these at-risk bases could be submerged in the coming years," the GAO said in the

report, released this month.

For example, in the Marshall Islands an Air Force radar station built on an atoll for \$1 million is expected to be underwater within two decades, the report says.

To prepare for such threats, the GAO said, the Defense Department should require all bases to budget for future costs of repairs and safeguards while training more staffers on how to plan for climate-driven hazards such as rising seas.

The Trump administration's recently released national security strategy stands in contrast to the GAO's sense of urgency over climate change. It emphasizes that the real security threat is regulations that hinder America's energy dominance and economic growth. It references climate change (greenhouse gases, which most

scientists say are the chief cause of global warming) but never describes it as a threat.

This dismissal of climactic threats is at odds not only with the GAO's position but also with the views of congressional leaders, who believe the military should treat climate change as a growing threat.

The defense bill that President Donald Trump signed last week included a section about how climate change could imperil military bases and create "breeding grounds" for terrorism in regions plagued by famine and droughts.

"Climate change is a direct threat to the national security of the United States and is impacting stability in areas of the world ... where the United States Armed Forces are operating today," a bipartisan amendment said.

The defense secretary must submit a report to Congress in a year that identifies 10 installations most vulnerable to climate change, including from floods, wildfires and melting ice caps. The report also must outline how to mitigate climate-related problems such as storms eroding a training site.

The military concluded years ago that climate change could damage U.S. bases and disrupt operations, and it will continue to explore how to lessen the impacts regardless of the president's political rhetoric, said David Livingston, climate and energy expert with the Atlantic Council, a nonpartisan think tank in Washington.

"They're not going to walk away from it (climate change) now that they have findings," Livingston said. "That train has left the station."

## UK tracks Russian naval ships seen near British waters

*The Washington Post*

BRUSSELS — British ships and a helicopter were dispatched over the Christmas holiday weekend to track an "upsurge" of Russian naval vessels passing near British waters, the British Navy said Tuesday, as British and NATO leaders have warned of Russian naval activity at levels unseen since the Cold War.

At least four Russian ships, including a warship and an intelligence-gathering ship, passed near British waters starting on Saturday, the British Navy said. The traffic on the water meant British sailors on the Royal Navy frigate St. Albans spent Christmas tracking their Russian counterparts. Those sailors planned to return to port on Tuesday, the navy

said, although they remained on high readiness for further activity.

The ship traffic came days after the head of the British military warned in an interview of the threat of Russian submarine activity near the sensitive undersea data cables that carry internet traffic between North America and Europe.

"I will not hesitate in defending our waters or tolerate any form of aggression," said British Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson in a statement announcing the holiday maneuvers. "Britain will never be intimidated when it comes to protecting our country, our people, and our national interests."

Russian ships routinely sail through international waters near British territory as they pass from ports in northern

Russia into the open Atlantic or into the Mediterranean, where they have been involved in Russia's intervention in Syria. The British Navy did not allege any misbehavior or territorial violations, and because it does not routinely publicize its encounters with Russian ships, it was not immediately clear how unusual the Christmas movements were.

In its statement, the navy said that "the festive season has seen an upsurge in Russian units transiting U.K. waters."

The navy said that a Russian warship, the Admiral Gorshkov, passed close to British territorial waters starting Saturday and that the St. Albans frigate was dispatched to escort it as it passed through the North Sea. It released several grainy photographs of the two

ships sailing close to each other in what appeared to be choppy waters.

Separately, a Russian intelligence-gathering ship sailed through the English Channel on Sunday, tracked by the H.M.S. Tyne, a 261-foot-long patrol vessel. A Wildcat helicopter based in Yeovilton, in southern England near the English Channel, was sent to monitor two other Russian ships, the British Navy said.

British Air Chief Marshal Stuart Peach said last week that his nation's doctrine was to closely track Russian vessels that strayed near British waters. He said that he believed NATO needed to focus on maintaining open lines of communication across the Atlantic in the face of a resurgent Russian navy.

# Dems hope to use tax law against GOP

Associated Press

ATLANTA — A Democratic congressional candidate outside Philadelphia calls the Republican tax overhaul a “cynical bill” that will redistribute wealth upward.

One of her counterparts in California dismisses estimates of tax savings for most U.S. households and says the legislation is “just putting money in the pocket of the wealthy.” And in Kansas, a Democratic candidate for governor says it’s “a recipe for disaster” that signals inevitable cuts to popular programs like Social Security and Medicare.

While Republicans celebrate a massive tax overhaul they say will goose the economy and increase workers’ take-home pay up and down the income ladder,

Democrats are aiming to turn the tax law into a cudgel in next year’s fight to retake control of Congress and to dent GOP advantages in statehouses.

Democrats hope to use the tax plan, passed without a single Democratic vote, to stake their ground as the party of middle-class and working-class America. They hope Republican efforts to gut the 2010 health care law and President Donald Trump’s unpopularity will help that cause.

“It’s all a consistent message: This is not what you were promised,” said Chrissy Houlahan, a Democratic candidate in the suburban Philadelphia district of Republican Rep. Ryan Costello, who voted for the tax plan. He is one of Democrats’ top GOP targets as they try to flip the 24 GOP-held seats necessary for a

House majority.

Republicans acknowledge dismal polling for their approach but count on a turnaround in public opinion as tax cuts for many take effect.

“When Americans see they have more in their paycheck, we think they’ll be appreciative,” said Corry Bliss, who runs a political advocacy organization and a separate political action committee backed by House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis. “I think it sets up a wonderful contrast for the midterms.”

Democrats beyond the higher-income, high-tax suburbs are leaning on more populist arguments on values and priorities, like the prospect that the tax cuts will increase the national debt.

“You can’t have these kinds of cuts and keep the services that

people expect,” said Democrat Jim Ward, a Kansas state legislative leader who is running for governor. Republican-run Kansas, Ward said, is the perfect example for the potential fallout given the state’s experience since Gov. Sam Brownback’s sweeping tax cuts after he took office in 2011.

Brownback, an acolyte of supply side economics, promised an economic boom once Kansas slashed personal income taxes for business owners and eliminated the top marginal personal income tax rate. What followed was a cratering in state revenues, followed by cuts to education and other services, along with increased debt and a lower state credit rating.

## Immigrants seek state help to block deportation

Los Angeles Times

The two Cambodian refugees living in Northern California had been convicted of crimes years ago and, under the Trump administration’s more aggressive immigration enforcement policies, those offenses had placed them on a path toward deportation.

But Saturday, Gov. Jerry Brown announced the pardons of both men — Mony Neth, of Modesto, and Rottanak Kong, of Davis — saying they had paid their debts to society and now lived honest and upright lives.

Immigration is a federal, not state, responsibility, but attorneys for the men hope the pardons will eliminate the rationale for deporting them. Across the country, immigration attorneys are doing the same: seeking gubernatorial pardons in last-ditch attempts to forestall deportations or allow the deported to return to the U.S.

Targeting convicted criminals for deportation isn’t a new idea; it was a priority under President Barack Obama, who deported more people than any of his pre-

decessors. But during the Obama administration, only those with serious crimes on their records were targeted for removal. President Donald Trump has cast a much wider net.

Shortly after his inauguration, Trump signed an executive order directing the Department of Homeland Security to prioritize the removal of people in the U.S. illegally who have criminal convictions. In addition, Trump’s orders also called for quick removal of people in the country illegally who are charged with crimes and waiting for adjudication. Federal officials began to act swiftly.

In June, immigration authorities in Michigan rounded up more than 100 Iraqi nationals with criminal backgrounds. A month later, about 40 of them asked Republican Gov. Rick Snyder for pardons.

Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner, a Republican, received similar pleas — including one from an Army veteran with a felony drug conviction. Miguel Perez Jr., 39, joined the military in 2001 as a legal permanent resident and served two tours in Afghanistan.

In 2008, he was convicted of distributing less than 100 grams of cocaine. Perez, a native of Mexico, served half of his 15-year prison sentence but had his residency revoked as a result of the conviction and is being held in a detention center in Wisconsin.

Rauner hasn’t decided whether he’ll grant the pardon.

Gubernatorial pardons don’t guarantee an immigrant facing deportation could remain in the U.S., but they might have an effect, said Jason Cade, an associate professor of law at the University of Georgia, who characterized it as a case-by-case issue.

Though the federal government may still have grounds to deport someone, Cade said, a pardon might lead authorities “to exercise favorable discretion.”

But that hasn’t always happened.

This year, Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe, a Democrat, pardoned Liliana Cruz Mendez, a mother of two who lived in the suburbs outside Washington. Cruz Mendez, who was in the country illegally from El Salvador, was stopped for a minor traffic infraction in 2014.

George Escobar, senior director at an immigrant rights group in the Washington area, called McAuliffe’s pardon “a show of solidarity for her cause and the belief she should not have to leave this country. We had hoped that it would sway” Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said Escobar, who had worked to secure her pardon. “Unfortunately, that was not the case.”

Cruz Mendez was deported last summer.

But for others, especially people with green cards or other legal status, pardons have helped. Another common thread: living in a state with a Democratic governor who perhaps is looking to push back against the Trump administration.

Last spring, Brown, a Democrat, pardoned two former Marines — Erasmo Apodaca Mendizabal and Marco Antonio Chavez — as well as former soldier Hector Barajas Varela. All three had received honorable discharges from the military but later were convicted of crimes and eventually deported.

# Calif. firefighters get no holiday

*Los Angeles Times*

VENTURA, Calif. — As the sun rose Monday morning, Pedro Barba had to settle for imagining what his family was doing without him.

In their Riverside home, Barba's wife would be fixing hot cocoa and pan dulce for their two children. The three would be readying to open their gifts.

A hundred miles away, the hotshot firefighter was gearing up for another day attacking the Thomas fire, California's largest wildfire on record. He was one of 1,500 firefighters and crewmembers working around the clock even on Christmas Day to douse hot spots, maintain containment lines and mop up parts of the more than 280,000 acres charred by the massive blaze.

Barba, 35, wore boots covered with soot and ashes, and looked away as he thought of his homesickness and sense of duty.

"My family's not happy, but they understood I love fighting," he said before calling his son and daughter.

Seeing them on a screen was not an option.

"If I do FaceTime, I'll cry myself," Barba said. "You want to spend Christmas with your family, but you can't. Not today."

Holiday touches were everywhere Monday. Santa and Mrs. Claus (David Munger and Molly Williams, of Los Alamos) greeted crews. And fire officials used a giant candy cane to highlight the portions of the map on which units were focusing.

Since it ignited Dec. 4, the fire has destroyed more than 1,000 structures, spread from Santa Paula to Ventura and wrapped around Ojai before pushing toward Santa Barbara and inland forests.

The fire is mostly contained now and is not expected to grow.

Pat Russell, deputy chief of the Anaheim Fire Department who is helping to supervise operations, said crews were focusing on Rose Canyon and Hartman Ranch, north of Ojai, as they kept watch for flare-ups.

Patches of unburned vegetation — green islands — are

expected to ignite but not to threaten containment lines or structures. Firefighters on the line said they were standing by as these remote swaths of land burned.

The crews said they could feel heat wafting from the vast canyons. They worried that changes in wind could propel another round of flames.

"It's like a sleeping dragon. Most of the time it stays asleep, but sometimes it doesn't," said Tim Price, a firefighter and fisheries biologist with the U.S. Forest Service. "This fire won't go out until we get extensive rain."

Rain, however, will bring a new set of threats including mudslides, debris flows and flooding.

The lanes carved out by bulldozers and containment lines built to help stop the fire could become powerful channels of water in a rainstorm, eroding soil and threatening the watershed of the Central Coast.

# Psychologist says he left manure gift for Mnuchin

*Los Angeles Times*

LOS ANGELES — A Los Angeles psychologist claims to have left the festively wrapped box of manure outside the Bel-Air home of U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven T. Mnuchin that spurred a Secret Service investigation, billing it as a political protest against the recently passed tax bill.

Robert Strong, a Kentucky native now living in L.A., appears to have enthusiastically documented the act on Twitter and Facebook, posting photos of himself with a shovel and a Santa-spangled box full of manure and describing it as a "Secret Santa project."

One of his Facebook posts shows an envelope labeled "To Stevie" and a card from "The American People" inscribed: "We're returning the 'gift' of the Christmas tax bill. It's (expletive)." In a YouTube video posted on Christmas Day, Strong declared that "the prophets of old often did shocking things to highlight the injustice" against which they preached.

"For me, that was delivering a gift-wrapped box of (horse manure) to parallel the idiocy of the complete ... bill that's been passed," Strong said.

Strong told AL.com, which was first to identify him as the person claiming to have delivered the box, that it was an "act of political theater" meant to inspire others to step up their activism. Since his name was revealed in the media, his Facebook page has been deluged with both tickled supporters and outraged critics.

Strong downplayed the idea that the box could have alarmed Mnuchin or created a dangerous situation, saying it was "something a frat boy may do to another frat boy," AL.com reported.

The Secret Service said Monday that it had found a person who had claimed responsibility for delivering the package and had interviewed him, but declined to confirm whether that person was Strong.

# Christmas brings bitter cold, snow

*Associated Press*

CHICAGO — The good news for many in the Northeast and Midwest was that it has been a white Christmas. The bad news was that a blizzard swept into parts of New England and bitter cold enveloped much of the Midwest.

Even the usually rainy Pacific Northwest got the white stuff. The National Weather Service said it's only the sixth time since 1884 that downtown Portland had measurable snow — only an inch or two — on a Dec. 25.

A blizzard warning was issued Monday for portions of Maine and New Hampshire, with forecasters saying snow of up to 10 inches and wind gusts up to 50 mph could make travel "dangerous to impossible."

States from Montana and the Dakotas to Wisconsin expected

wind chill temperatures in places at 40 below zero, the National Weather Service said. The upper half of Iowa and northern Illinois also braced for subzero temperatures.

Minnesota experienced its most frigid Christmas Day since 1996, with wind chills as cold as 35 degrees below zero, KSTP-TV reported. The National Weather Service warned that those whose skin was exposed in such conditions could get frostbite in as little as 15 minutes.

Snow amounts in the Midwest were not large for this time of year. A storm system that swept from Nebraska through Iowa dropped around 2 inches of snow on Chicago, the weather service said.

Chicago's O'Hare International Airport reported just six cancellations and average de-

lays of only 15 minutes around noon Monday. There were no cancellations at the city's other major airport, Midway, and delays were less than 15 minutes on average.

In addition to slowing travel in New England, the storm was responsible for some power outages. Eversource reported more than 20,000 customers in eastern Massachusetts without electricity, the bulk on Cape Cod which was feeling the brunt of strong winds.

New England was expected to get up to 8 inches of snow. Strong winds were predicted for Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island with gusts up to 65 mph.

Mountain areas in parts of Colorado, Montana and Wyoming received more than 1 foot of snow, which started Saturday.

# Political legacy drives Abe, opposition says

Bloomberg

The leader of Japan's main opposition party said Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is treating the nation's 70-year-old pacifist constitution as a "toy" in an effort to define his own political legacy.

"He wants to change it in whatever way he can so that he can go down in history," Yukio Edano, head of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, said in an interview at his Tokyo office Monday. "In fact, everything depends on how you change it. You can change it for the worse or for the better. To make constitutional revision an end in itself is frivolous."

Abe proposed in May to change the wording of the pacifist Article 9 to clarify the legal status of the nation's Self-Defense Forces, a move that could spark concern

in neighboring countries that suffered under past Japanese aggression. A growing threat from North Korea has prompted calls for Japan, a U.S. ally, to gain offensive capabilities.

While Abe's party retained its two-thirds majority in parliament in an October election, the plan to change a document that has remained untouched since the postwar U.S. occupation remains controversial. A poll by the Nikkei newspaper published in November found 44 percent of respondents agreed with Abe's proposal, while 41 percent opposed it.

Abe backed down from an initial call to change the constitution before the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, saying lately that there's no fixed timeline. Even so, his ruling coalition has a window of opportunity after the election win to use

its two-thirds majority to pass an amendment in both houses. It must then be approved in a national referendum.

Abe has sought the changes so members of the Self-Defense Forces aren't at risk of being called unconstitutional. His ruling Liberal Democratic Party last week published a summary of its constitutional discussions that featured Abe's plan, as well as an alternative proposal to define the SDF more clearly and delete the part of Article 9 that renounces "ground, sea and air forces."

Edano, 53, a former lawyer, said there was nothing in the document he could agree with. He said there should be no discussion of Article 9 unless laws passed in 2015 to allow Japan to defend other countries were first repealed, saying they breached

the constitution.

In the parliamentary session starting next month, Edano plans to press the Abe government on its plan to buy long-range missiles that could in theory be used to strike North Korea. He said the announcement of the plan — months after the main budget request — was timed to avoid discussion during the election campaign of whether Japan should arm itself with such weapons.

Edano served as chief cabinet secretary and trade minister during the then-Democratic Party of Japan's time in office from 2009 to 2012. He formed the CDPJ as the opposition splintered ahead of the October election, and emerged as leader of the largest opposition party — albeit with only 54 of the 465 seats in the lower house.

## N. Korea wants US to prove hacking claim

Associated Press

TOKYO — North Korea's envoy in charge of U.S. affairs at the United Nations demanded Washington provide evidence to back up its claim Pyongyang was behind the Wannacry ransomware attack, an allegation he has said was a "baseless provocation" being used to generate tensions.

Pak Song Il told The Associated Press in a telephone interview from New York late Monday that Pyongyang sees the allegation as an effort to create an "extremely confrontational atmosphere."

"If they are so sure, show us the evidence," he said.

The Wannacry ransomware attack infected hundreds of thousands of computers worldwide and crippled parts of Britain's National Health Service in May.

U.S. Homeland security adviser Tom Bossert wrote in a Wall Street Journal op-ed published last week that the

U.S. administration had determined North Korea was behind the WannaCry attack. He said its finding of responsibility is based on evidence that has been confirmed by other governments and private companies, including the United Kingdom and Microsoft.

He wrote that North Korea would be held accountable.

North Korea's state-run media quickly condemned the accusation, saying Pyongyang would never tolerate such "reckless" claims. It called Bossert's claim a "grave political provocation" and vowed to retaliate.

Officials in Washington and Seoul have accused the North of launching a series of cyberattacks in recent years, including the hack on Sony Pictures Entertainment over the movie "The Interview," a black comedy about a plot to assassinate North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The North has denied those accusations as well.

## Flake: Trump is inviting primary challenge in '20

New York Daily News

Sen. Jeff Flake warned Sunday that President Donald Trump will face a primary challenge or an independent opponent in 2020 if the Republican continues his bombastic ways.

"I do believe if the president is running for re-election, if he continues on the path that he's on, that that's going to leave a huge swath of voters looking for someone else," Flake, R-Ariz., said on ABC's "This Week." "I think he's inviting that. He's probably inviting a Republican challenge as well."

Flake said he wouldn't rule it out himself, but that running is "not in my plans."

Flake has been critical of the path his party is taking. He pointed to rallies for Trump and other firebrand conservatives, where the audiences are like "spasms of a dying party."

"When you look at the lack of diversity, sometimes — and it depends on where you are, obviously — but by and large,

we're appealing to older white men and there are just a limited number of them, and anger and resentment are not a governing philosophy," he said in the interview.

Flake said his faith in the Republican Party was restored when Roy Moore, the party's candidate for the Senate from Alabama, lost a special election this month despite Trump's endorsement.

Flake wrote a \$100 check to Moore's Democratic opponent, Doug Jones, and refused to back Moore, who was accused of misconduct with several teenage girls when he was in his 30s. After Moore's defeat, Flake said, "maybe we can turn back."

"But if we continue to go down that path, just to drill down on the base, I think you'll have a lot of people realize there is no future for them in this party," he said. "I hope, like I said, with the election results in Alabama, that maybe the party's realizing that we have to change."

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Man slashes tires of 19 county vehicles

**HI** WAILUKU — Someone slashed the tires of at least 19 county vehicles, Maui officials said.

Security video caught the man slashing the tires Thursday in the parking lot of the Kaula O Maui County building.

Maui County Communication Director Rod Antone said it was pouring rain as the man ran around in a raincoat, puncturing tires.

Officials patched the tires they could, but will need to replace others.

### Vandalism ends parking spot tradition

**KS** MARION — A rural Kansas school district has stopped letting high school seniors personalize parking spaces after one student painted his spot with a gay pride rainbow flag that was immediately vandalized.

The school board for the 500-student Marion-Florence school district voted 4-3 this month to put an end to the tradition, which had created challenges in the past. Superintendent Aaron Homburg told The Associated Press that last year, one student wasn't allowed to paint a Confederate flag and another was stopped from painting a marijuana leaf.

### Man robbed storage units over meth habit

**WI** EAU CLAIRE — A judge has sentenced an Eau Claire man to five years in prison for burglarizing multiple storage units and residences across northwestern Wisconsin to support his methamphetamine addiction.

The Eau Claire Leader-

Telegram reported Travis Hagman was sentenced Friday.

Hagman pleaded no contest in October to five felony counts of burglaries committed during the summer of 2016 in Altoona, Eau Claire and Fall Creek.

Prosecutors said he led a ring of thieves that broke into storage units and homes and stole coins and jewelry. Investigators tied Hagman to the thefts after discovering his blood in a storage unit. Hagman said he turned to burglary to pay for his methamphetamine habit.

### Elf decoration turns heads, loses own

**MA** ROCKPORT — A life-size elf mannequin on display in a Massachusetts yard has been turning heads — and occasionally losing his own.

Melissa McMeekin has been having a little fun by moving her 6-foot elf doll to different locations outside her Rockport home.

During the countdown to Christmas, Daryl — as McMeekin named the red-suited elf — appeared seated on a tree branch, riding a bicycle, lying on a hammock and tied up like a hostage.

### Manufacturer cleared in man's tractor death

**AR** NORTH LITTLE ROCK — A jury has rejected claims from the relatives of a man who died in a lawn-mowing accident in North Little Rock five years ago.

Cedric Quinn Hill was found crushed to death under a Kubota L275 tractor in May 2012. His family filed a civil suit against the manufacturer and its Arkansas affiliate several months later, saying the tractor was defective.

According to the Arkansas

Democrat-Gazette, jurors this month rejected those claims and cleared Kubota of any responsibility in Hill's death.

### Coast Guard seizes Mexican fishing boat

**TX** CORPUS CHRISTI — Authorities said the Coast Guard confiscated a Mexican fishing vessel after finding its crew fishing illegally off South Texas.

The Coast Guard said the four-person crew had nearly 2,000 pounds of fish, primarily red snapper, when it was stopped Thursday night. The crew was transferred to the U.S. Border Patrol for enforcement action.

Guard Cmdr. Keith Pierre in Corpus Christi said the volume of red snapper and other fish being poached in U.S. waters is having a "devastating environmental and economic impact."

### Tracker on great white on Twitter falls silent

**FL** JACKSONVILLE — The transmitter attached to a great white shark being tracked on Twitter has fallen silent.

The research group Oearch says the transmitter on the shark known as Mary Lee has not sent a signal since June 17, when she was swimming off the New Jersey coast.

Founding chairman Chris Fischer and his crew caught and tagged the 16-foot shark off Massachusetts in 2012. Since then, thousands of people have followed Mary Lee's travels along the East Coast on a Twitter page managed by Oearch.

In a Florida Times-Union report, Fischer said the transmitter's batteries simply may have died, partly because Mary Lee surfaced frequently, which triggered more signals.

### 1944 love letter found within home's walls

**MA** GREENFIELD — Massachusetts police have a new mystery to solve: Who wrote a 1944 love letter discovered within the walls of a house being remodeled?

The Greenfield Police Department took to Facebook on Saturday to ask for the public's help in figuring out the backstory behind the handwritten letter. Police say the letter is dated April 19, 1944, and was penned by a man who identified himself only as Walter.

The letter was addressed to Miss Betty Miller, of Greenfield. In the letter, Walter makes no attempt to hide his affections. He writes: "I have always thought more of you than any other girl, and I still do."

### Officers rescue 80 domesticated rats

**CO** LOVELAND — Animal control officers rescued more than 80 domesticated rats from two Fort Collins natural areas.

The Reporter-Herald reported that officials say the Larimer Humane Society received a report Thursday that about 30 apparently tame rats were at the North Shields Ponds Natural Area.

Humane Society officers rescued some of the rats Thursday, and then another call came in Friday that echoed the concerns of the first. The caller had found dozens of friendly rats at Riverbend Ponds Natural Area.

Animal Protection and Control Officer Jason Downs said he used some peanut butter cookies his children had made for him to lure the rats out of the bushes. It took officers about an hour to round up the rats.

From wire reports

On a mission to provide objective reporting to America's military, wherever they serve.  
Read us online at [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

STARS AND STRIPES®

# NFL goes into final week with questions

Associated Press

One week left, lots of questions to answer.

And plenty of certainty in the NFL, too.

First, to the seemingly sure things, start with the AFC. Does anyone really believe the conference title game won't be at Gillette Stadium? Or that the Patriots won't be hosting the Steelers?

The separation in the AFC is as stark as the wide-openness of the NFC. Barring a collapse or more major injuries — Pittsburgh already is minus the league's best receiver, and perhaps the NFL's best player, Antonio Brown, who's due back for the postseason — New England will go after its sixth Lombardi Trophy or Pittsburgh will try for its seventh.

Kansas City could be pesky, but that's about it. Jacksonville, despite its sensational turnaround, appears a year away from true championship status. Baltimore's defense can scare opponents, while its offense only scares Ravens fans.

Buffalo? Nice to see you after nearly two decades out of the playoffs, if you get there. The Chargers can do some dynamic things, but not nearly enough to

be a threat.

Simple.

One more certainty: Cleveland's headed for 0-16 ignominy, joining the 2008 Lions. That the Browns also lost 15 games last season undoubtedly stamps them as one of the worst teams in sports history.

Of course, there always are some puzzlements in sports, and the AFC has these:

■ Will Hue Jackson really survive as Browns coach, even after owner Jimmy Haslam said he would be staying? New GM John Dorsey might have a say in that.

"I'm not going to change," Jackson said Sunday. "I'm going to be very consistent with this group. I have their total trust, they have mine. We just have to do some things better."

Some things? How about everything?

■ Will Chuck Pagano keep his coaching gig in Indianapolis after such a disappointing season punctuated by the fiasco of Andrew Luck's injury rehab?

■ Is Marvin Lewis leaving Cincinnati, where, despite Sunday's win, the team has been more Bungles than Bengals?

■ Does Todd Bowles get the contract extension he deserves with the talent-poor Jets?

Tune in when the calendar turns to 2018.

On the field, the NFC is far more intriguing. It's hard to argue that any of the six teams who get into the playoffs — the Eagles, Vikings, Rams, Saints and Panthers have qualified, with the Falcons or Seahawks getting the other berth — isn't capable of a long run. Injury-ravaged Seattle's solid performance Sunday in eliminating the Cowboys makes that obvious, and the Falcons have some recent pedigree, even though they haven't played up to the standard that got them so close to grabbing the Lombardi last February.

"In these situations where it truly is a must-win game, we don't have to make anything up," Seahawks receiver Doug Baldwin said. "We're well-prepared for it. The process that we've gone through the whole season really helped us today."

Who is the favorite in the conference? Had Carson Wentz remained healthy, Philadelphia would have that role. While the Eagles have clinched home-field advantage, the other four qualifiers won't fear them — or anyone else — in the postseason.

Well, until they have to face

the formidable AFC champ, New England or Pittsburgh.

There are coaching complexities in the NFC, too.

■ Who gets the job with the Giants, where it's unlikely Steve Spagnuolo is given a shot with nothing much changing on the scoreboard under his interim leadership?

■ Is Kirk Cousins playing his final game as Redskins quarterback on Sunday, at the Giants, before striking it even more rich elsewhere?

■ Do John Fox in Chicago, Dirk Koetter in Tampa Bay and Jim Caldwell in Detroit remain as coaches?

■ Can Todd Gurley's late surge — he's actually been spectacular for most of the season — get him a league MVP award? Could Wentz, despite missing the month, still walk off with it?

■ Will the Vikings be the first team to play in a Super Bowl they are hosting in their stadium?

Maybe of most interest, given the uproar over officiating this season, is how calls will affect the 12 teams who take to the road to the Super Bowl on Jan. 1? If you think the controversies of the last four months were wild, just wait.

## Steelers rout Texans, clinch first-round bye in playoffs

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Ben Roethlisberger told his teammates they didn't need to make up for Antonio Brown's absence. He just wanted everyone to do what they could to help out, figuring that would be enough.

It certainly was.

"I know everyone was thinking about A.B. not being out there and trying to fill those shoes, but you can't fill those shoes," Roethlisberger said. "I just tried to tell them: 'Don't try to fill them, just try to be the best you can be.'"

Roethlisberger threw for 226 yards and two touchdowns in the first game since Brown in-

jured his calf, and the Steelers clinched a first-round playoff bye with a 34-6 win over the Texans. Roethlisberger threw passes to six players as Pittsburgh (12-3) romped over the lowly Texans (4-11) despite missing the NFL's leading receiver.

"It just kind of shows how many weapons we actually have in our offense ... everybody played well," Le'Veon Bell said. "Ben made the plays when he needed to. I made some plays on third down when I needed to. It was literally a total team effort."

The Steelers led 20-0 at halftime after taking advantage of two turnovers by the Texans.

Bell added a 10-yard TD run late in the third quarter and rookie JuJu Smith-Schuster made it 34-6 with an 18-yard touchdown grab in the fourth.

Bell finished with 14 carries for 69 yards and Smith-Schuster had six receptions for 75 yards.

"Significant day for us," Pittsburgh coach Mike Tomlin said. "Our last regular-season road game, finishing 7-1, getting our 12th win, securing a ticket to the second round. All very positive things, but it's kind of the culmination of being singularly focused on the next opportunity."

T.J. Yates was 7-for-16 passing for 83 yards and a touch-

down for the Texans, who lost their fifth straight game and for the eighth time in nine games.

### Family time

J.J. Watt didn't get to play on Monday as he recovers from a broken leg, but spent some time pregame with his brother, Pittsburgh rookie linebacker T.J. Watt. Houston's defensive end threw the ball around with T.J. and the brothers also posed for some pictures with their parents before the game.

T.J. was disappointed that his brother didn't get to play on Monday, but is looking forward to seeing him return next season.

# Another NFL touchdown gets overturned

Associated Press

With yet another touchdown reversal by officiating chief Al Riveron, the only thing that's "clear and obvious" anymore is the owners' decision to grant full replay authority to NFL headquarters has only added to the league's cluster of headaches.

To the player protests, president's put-downs, receded ratings and sidelined superstars add the unrelenting second-guessing the league has invited with its frame-by-frame micro-management of the on-field officiating in 2017.

After Jets tight end Austin Seferian-Jenkins lost two TDs and Bears tight end Zach Miller another this season, the latest example came Sunday when Kelvin Benjamin's 4-yard TD catch just before halftime against New England was overturned on review.

Initially, Benjamin was ruled to have gotten both feet down while in possession of the ball. After looking at replays, officials ruled that he was juggling the ball when his first foot hit the turf.

"It was clear and obvious that he did not have control of

the ball until he brought it all the way down into his chest," referee Craig Wrolstad said in a pool report after the game.

It didn't appear to be so egregious a call as to merit the league's reversal, however, and the decision was met with widespread criticism.

Bills coach Sean McDermott, whose team settled for a field goal and a 13-13 halftime tie before fading after halftime, was perplexed by the league's decision.

"I am at a loss for how a play like that can get overturned," he said.

Former NFL officiating VP Mike Pereira was, too.

"Regarding the Buffalo no touchdown, nothing more irritating to an official than to make a great call and then someone in a suit in an office in New York incorrectly reverses it," he posted on Twitter.

Pereira suggested the league needs to change the rule book.

"Now that another touchdown has been taken away without clear and obvious evidence, it is time to move on to the catch rule. It doesn't work. It doesn't make sense. Start with the Jesse James play. That should be a catch and a touch-

down, not an incomplete pass," Pereira tweeted.

James' TD to beat New England was erased last week in a move that could have a major impact on the playoffs.

The dour faces in the CBS studio belied the festive holiday decorations as the Benjamin TD reversal dominated the Christmas Eve discussion.

"What else do you want these wide receivers to do?" asked analyst Nate Burleson, a former NFL wideout. "I don't care what they said ... he caught that ball and dragged his feet. That's exactly what you're supposed to do.

Other notable calls and debatable decisions in Week 16 included:

■ The Packers drew the ire of several teams for placing quarterback Aaron Rodgers back on injured reserve with a playoff berth out of reach. He returned from a broken collarbone to play in Week 15. It didn't appear he had a new injury before going back on IR.

■ The Denver Broncos activated rookie receiver/returner Isaiah McKenzie for the first time since his sixth fumble led to a safety and his second benching. He cost them

a chance at points just before halftime at Washington when he caught a pass from Brock Osweiler but instead of stepping out of bounds spun back to the middle of the field and was tackled at the 20-yard line as the clock ran out.

McKenzie, active because Emmanuel Sanders and Cody Latimer were hurt, didn't realize the Broncos had no more timeouts.

"Well, he should be aware," coach Vance Joseph said. "He was told, and that stuff we work on all the time. That's no excuse at all that he wouldn't know that. He was told we had no timeouts. It was an outside throw or nothing. We had three points. That's something he has to know. Unacceptable."

Former Broncos lineman Ryan Harris said on CBS4 in Denver that the blame should fall on the coach.

"Isaiah McKenzie should not be playing in the game," Harris said. "I played with the Steelers and even coach Mike Tomlin benched Antonio Brown, now the best receiver in the game, because he was making mistakes like this."

## Eagles hold off Raiders, earn top spot in NFC playoffs

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Nick Foles has three weeks to get in sync with his receivers.

Making his second start since MVP candidate Carson Wentz tore his left ACL, Foles had a tough time in Philadelphia's 19-10 victory over Oakland on Monday night. He was 19-for-38 for 163 yards with one touchdown and one interception, one week after he had four TD passes and no picks in a 34-29 win at the Giants.

The Eagles (13-2) clinched the NFC's No. 1 seed with the victory over the Raiders (6-9), so Foles and most of the starters may not play much or at all against Dallas in Week 17. Their next meaningful game is

Jan. 13 or 14 in the playoffs.

Considering the offense's poor performance Christmas night, coach Doug Pederson might want to let them work on it against the Cowboys.

"It'll probably be Wednesday before I make a final decision on who plays," Pederson said. "Right now with only two (quarterbacks), I would assume (Foles) has to play some."

The wind played a factor in the passing game for both teams. Oakland's Derek Carr also struggled.

"It was gusty at times, made it a little more difficult," Pederson said.

After Ronald Darby intercepted Carr's pass with 54 seconds left, Foles came through. He completed four straight

passes for 21 yards. Following an incomplete pass, Jake Elliott kicked a 48-yard field goal with 22 seconds left. Derek Barnett sealed it when he returned a fumble 23 yards for a touchdown after picking up a lateral on Oakland's final play from scrimmage.

"I didn't play good enough," Foles said. "I have to play cleaner, (need) pinpoint accuracy and good decisions on third downs."

Here's some things we learned from Philadelphia's win over Oakland:

**Big-play D:** The Eagles forced five turnovers in the second half, making one big play after another to bail out the offense. It was a dramatic turnaround for the defense, which strug-

gled against Eli Manning and the Giants last week. They held the Raiders to 274 total yards, 63 coming on one play — Carr's TD pass to Amari Cooper.

"Last week, our offense was carrying us and we were playing like trash and this week our offense was making little mistakes and we had to come out there and make some plays," Darby said. "That's what football is all about, a team effort."

**Third-down woes:** The Eagles were 1-for-14 on third downs and somehow still won. They were 2-for-2 on fourth down, including a conversion on a TD drive in the first quarter.

"We just didn't get into a rhythm," tight end Zach Ertz said. "Our defense bailed us out."

# Midseason fire turned Missouri around

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Missouri coach Barry Odom was on everyone's hot seat list when the Tigers dropped to 1-5 in October.

Rather than wallow in his own potential firing, Odom set fire to scouting reports, game plans, stat sheets and other remnants of the first half of the season at a team meeting after a 53-28 loss to Georgia on Oct. 14.

"He got the lighter fluid, and I was like, 'Oh, snap, this dude's serious,'" wide receiver Emanuel Hall said. "We said, 'Forget about the last six. We have six more.'"

Two months later, the Tigers point to Odom's bonfire as the turning point in the season. Missouri (7-5) ripped off six consecutive victories after the team meeting, earning a matchup with Texas (6-6) in the Texas Bowl on Wednesday. Missouri averaged 51.3 points per game during the streak.

"Anything in life worth having, it's not easy and it's not going to be handed to you," Odom said. "Our guys did an unbelievable job of staying together."

The Tigers won by at least 28 points against Idaho, Connecticut, Florida, Tennessee and Vanderbilt before edging Arkansas 48-45 to cap the season. Their offensive dominance was spearheaded by quarterback Drew Lock, whose 43 passing touchdowns set the SEC season record.

Lock's critics often cited the disparity between his performances against nonconference opponents and SEC teams. After Missouri lost to South Carolina on Sept. 9, Lock had thrown for just 13 touchdowns and 18 interceptions against SEC teams in his career. In nonconference games, he had thrown for 22 touchdowns and three interceptions.

The junior quarterback flipped that script in his final

four games, throwing for 15 touchdowns and four interceptions against SEC teams.

"It's helped, but the numbers didn't really boost my confidence," Lock said. "I think it was the guys around me. Once all of us really honed in and knew our jobs, that made everybody else really comfortable."

Lock benefited from an offensive line that allowed just 12 sacks, sixth-best among FBS teams. The line found its groove during a three-game stretch against Florida, Tennessee and Vanderbilt, allowing just one sack.

The line also powered Missouri's two-man rushing attack of Ish Witter and Larry Rountree III, a freshman who took over after Damarea Crockett hurt a shoulder against Georgia. In the last six games, the duo rushed for more than 6 yards per carry and scored 10 touchdowns.

"One of the things we lacked at the beginning of the season

was the maturity," offensive lineman Paul Adams said. "We wanted to flip that switch on. I think it flipped in time for us, and we did really well."

The Tigers became the offensive juggernaut in the second half of the season that they had aspired to be before the season began. Missouri started slowly, posting just 13 points against South Carolina, 14 against Auburn and three points against Purdue. As each facet of the game improved, so did the players' trust of Odom, who was given a two-year contract extension through the 2022 season this month.

"When we were 1-5, he got us together and told us straight up forward how things were looking for him," tight end Albert Okwuegbunam said. "Not a lot of people even wanted him to be our head coach, but he said he's never going to give up on us. He stayed true to his word, so it ultimately gave us a huge amount of respect for him."

## NBA roundup

# Durant delivers on both ends as Warriors top Cavs

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — LeBron James drove to the basket in the waning seconds and Kevin Durant swatted away any chance Cleveland had at a Christmas Day comeback.

Durant pumped his fist again and again, emphatically shook his head and pounded his chest in delight. It looked a lot like the dominant Durant from the NBA Finals six months ago.

Klay Thompson hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 1:33 left, Durant delivered on both ends of the floor, and the Golden State Warriors beat the Cavaliers 99-92 on Monday in a festive holiday rematch of the past three Finals.

"There's just so much joy in the arena today because it's Christmas and we all feed off of that," Durant said.

Durant's block against a

driving James with 24.5 seconds left went out of bounds off James, who said he thought he was fouled on the play. Durant finished with 25 points, seven rebounds and five blocked shots.

"He's one of the leaders in shot blocks a game and obviously he had five tonight, so he's been doing a heck of a job of first of all taking the individual matchup and protecting the rim, too," James said.

Kevin Love had 31 points and a season-best 18 rebounds, while James contributed 20 points, six rebounds and six assists in a rivalry missing one key piece: Warriors star Stephen Curry, who missed his eighth straight game with a sprained right ankle.

**Thunder 112, Rockets 107:** Russell Westbrook had 31 points and 11 assists to help host Oklahoma City win its fifth

straight.

Paul George scored 24 points and Carmelo Anthony added 20 for the Thunder, who shot 54.4 percent from the field.

James Harden led the Rockets with 29 points, but he made just seven of 18 field goals. The league's leading scorer was coming off back-to-back 51-point games.

Trevor Ariza and Eric Gordon each scored 20 points for Houston, which lost its third straight.

Houston point guard Chris Paul was sidelined by a groin strain. The Rockets are 15-1 when he plays and 10-6 when he sits out.

**Wizards 111, Celtics 103:** Bradley Beal scored 25 points, John Wall had 21 points and 14 assists, and Washington won the first Christmas Day home game in Boston franchise history.

Boston opened a 95-90 lead on Kyrie Irving's three-pointer with 6:18 left, but the Wizards responded with a 12-0 run.

**Timberwolves 121, Lakers 104:** Jimmy Butler scored 23 points, Karl-Anthony Towns had 21 points and 10 rebounds and visiting Minnesota got its first-ever Christmas Day victory.

Kyle Kuzma scored 31 points for the Lakers, who have lost three in a row and six of seven.

**76ers 105, Knicks 98:** At New York, Joel Embiid had 25 points and 16 rebounds, JJ Redick scored 24 points, and Philadelphia snapped a five-game losing streak.

Embiid and Redick were cleared to play after going through pregame warmups, and their presence gave the 76ers just enough to win their first Christmas Day appearance since 2001.