

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## ISIS attack on Kabul facility kills dozens

BY CHAD GARLAND  
AND ZUBAIR BABAKARKHAIL  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — A trio of back-to-back blasts killed about 40 people and wounded more than 80 at a Shiite cultural center in Kabul on Thursday.

Nasrat Rahimi, deputy spokesman for the Interior Ministry, said women and students were among the casualties in western Kabul, after an attacker wearing a bomb vest blew himself up.

Sticky bombs placed in the area caused two more blasts, Rahimi said.

The Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan, in a statement on its Aamaq news agency, claimed responsibility for the attack, which follows a Christmas Day suicide bombing at the country's main intelligence agency. The ISIS affiliate also claimed that attack, which left six people dead and several wounded.

Thursday's attack struck as students and others gathered for an academic discussion on the Soviet invasion, which began

on Christmas Eve in 1979, as well as a ceremony marking its 38th anniversary, said Hassan Mujtaba, an eyewitness.

"We were having the gathering in the basement," he said in a phone interview. "There were many people; suddenly there was a big blast, and after that I don't know what happened."

Known as the Tebyan Social and Cultural Center, the facility is located in a predominantly Shiite neighborhood. Journalists at a nearby news agency also were among the casualties, Rahimi said. The center and the news outlet are both owned by pro-Iran religious figure Sayed Eissa Hussaini Mazari.

Preliminary findings indicated many children were among the casualties, the U.N.'s Afghan mission said in a statement condemning the attack. The number of dead and wounded may rise, the U.N. said.

The U.S.-led NATO mission also condemned the attack, saying it would not deter Afghanistan's cultural advancement and freedom of speech.

The ISIS affiliate in Afghanistan, known

as ISIS-Khorasan province, or ISIS-K, has carried out several high-profile attacks on Shiite gatherings, including a dual suicide bombing that killed at least 80 and wounded more than 280 at a July 2016 demonstration organized by the country's largely Shiite Hazara ethnic minority.

The U.S. had pledged this year to eliminate ISIS-K and has been backing Afghan forces battling the group mainly in the country's eastern Nangarhar province along the Pakistan border, but the group has proven to be a stubborn enemy. An estimated 700 fighters belonged to the group in March, U.S. officials had said, but last month, officials said they had killed 1,600 and estimated another 1,000 remained.

Also last month, Gen. John Nicholson, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, said U.S. and Afghan special operations forces would soon "take the fight" to ISIS-K fighters who had established a foothold in the country's northwest.

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## Army plans to end early-retirement program

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
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WASHINGTON — The Army will end a program in 2018 that allowed some soldiers to receive retirement benefits without serving a full 20 years in uniform, the service's top civilian recently announced in a memorandum.

Army Secretary Mark Esper said in a Dec. 15 memo that the end of the Army's drawing down of its force strength was the reason why he rescinded the Temporary Early Retirement Authority, or TERA, program.

TERA, in use since 2012, allowed soldiers who had served at least 15 years but less than the 20 years typically needed

to secure full retirement entitlements to receive those benefits if they had been selected for discharge as part of the Army's drawdown. It also allowed some officers to receive those benefits if they had not been selected for promotion.

TERA "has served as an effective tool for drawing down the Army's end strength," Esper wrote in his memo. "However, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2017 increased Army end strength and we have ceased the drawdown."

Last year, the Army ended its yearslong drawdown that followed budget cuts and the decreased need for troops in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The service now seeks to grow

its active-duty force strength by some 7,500 soldiers to about 483,500 by September to meet growing worldwide challenges, including an uptick in troops operating in Afghanistan.

Esper's ending of the TERA program allows some soldiers to receive the benefit next year. The program initially was approved to run throughout fiscal year 2018, according to the Army.

Soldiers eligible for TERA must submit requests through their chains of command by Jan. 15 for early-retirement consideration, which will be approved or denied by Feb. 28, according to the memo.

However, some soldiers still will have opportunities after Jan. 15 to receive early-

retirement benefits through TERA.

Soldiers still awaiting the results of pending 2017 promotion boards after Jan. 15 will have 30 calendar days following the promotion announcements to submit early-retirement requests to their chains of command.

Four officer promotion boards from fiscal year 2017 have not yet been announced, said Hank Minitrez, a spokesman for the Army's personnel office.

All soldiers who are approved to retire through the TERA program must leave the service by Sept. 1, Esper wrote in the memo.

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## Military women plan #MeToo demonstration

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY  
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Advocates for military women are planning a #MeToo demonstration outside the Pentagon next month to add their voices to the movement that has put a spotlight on workplace sexual harassment and extinguished the careers of powerful men in entertainment, media, technology and politics.

The event is envisioned as a way to allow military women and their supporters throughout the Washington area to raise awareness, to show solidarity and to share stories about sexual assault and harassment in the military.

“We are demonstrating outside the Pentagon to ensure the voices of servicewomen and men are not left behind in the #MeToo movement and that the reckoning that has swept other industries in the nation also takes place in the military,” said Lydia Watts, CEO of the Service Women’s Action Network, one of three nonprofit groups involved in the effort.

“Despite major efforts undertaken by the military in the last decade, sexual assault and harassment continues to be widespread in the military, victims still face retaliation if they report, and justice for victims remains elusive,” Watts said in a statement.

The rally is scheduled for 8 to 9 a.m. on Jan. 8 at the Pentagon Metro Station in Arlington, Va.

Sexual assault and harassment in the military has been discussed and studied for more than a decade. Though it has been addressed with policy and law changes, it remains a serious problem.

A 2014 Rand Corp. study found that an estimated 26 percent of active-duty women were sexually harassed in that year and that nearly 5 percent had been sexually assaulted. Of the minority of those who reported, about 60 percent said they’d faced retaliation for reporting it.

At the Army and Navy service academies where future military leaders are minted, half of female cadets had been sexually harassed; 12 percent said they’d been sexually assaulted, according to Defense Department reports released earlier this year.

# GAO report: Navy downplayed technology risks for new sub

*Bloomberg*

The U.S. Navy underplayed the development risks posed by key technologies for its new \$128 billion Columbia-class nuclear-powered submarine, the Government Accountability Office said.

If the risks materialize, they are likely to result in increased costs and schedule delays for a program that already appears to be underfunded, the watchdog agency said in a report released Thursday on the Navy’s top acquisition program.

General Dynamics Corp. is the prime contractor for the submarine, which is designed to carry intercontinental ballistic missiles.

“The Navy underrepresented the program’s technology risks” in a key Pentagon assessment in 2015 when it failed to “identify these technologies as ‘critical,’” according to the report issued by Shelby Oakley, the GAO’s director of acquisition management. “Not identifying these technologies as critical means Congress may not have had the full picture of the technology risks and their potential ef-

fect on cost, schedule, and performance goals as increasing financial commitments were made.”

The 12-vessel Columbia-class is the Navy’s undersea equivalent of Lockheed Martin’s F-35 jet program in terms of potential cost and strategic importance.

The Pentagon disagreed almost entirely with the report’s thrust in comments attached to it.

The technologies that the GAO identified as key while questioning their state of maturity are:

- The Integrated Power System, which uses an electric drive to propel the submarine through the water, unlike other current U.S. subs, which use a mechanical drive system.

- The propulsor, which takes the place of the traditional propeller for moving the vessels and is part of a “coordinated stern.”

- A “stern area section technical feature that’s comprised of three sub-components” that weren’t spelled out in the report because they are classified.

## Former Marines sued over '08 assault

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The family of an Okinawan taxi driver brutally assaulted by two Marines in 2008 is reportedly suing his attackers, saying they failed to pay appropriate compensation under bilateral agreements.

A suit seeking nearly \$164,000 in damages was filed Wednesday with a branch of Naha District Court by relatives of Munekazu Ura, who is now deceased, against Joseph Wayne Riddle and Reginald Crapps, Kyodo News reported Thursday.

Riddle was a 20-year-old corporal and Crapps was a 19-year-old private first class at the time of the incident.

Ura was assaulted in the early-morning hours of Jan. 7, 2008, in Okinawa City after picking up the pair, who were assigned to Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. Riddle hit the then-59-year-old from the backseat with a liquor bottle while Crapps punched Ura in the face. They then chased him down and struck him with the bottle again.

Ura sustained injuries to his head and neck, and his false teeth were knocked out.

Riddle and Crapps were apprehended later

and confessed to the crimes. Riddle was sentenced to 4½ years in prison with forced labor, while Crapps received three to four years with forced labor.

Ura quit his job because of post-traumatic stress disorder, the Kyodo report said. He died of cancer in 2012 at age 63.

Ura and his family reportedly sent invoices to U.S. officials through the Japanese government five times between 2009 and 2014, seeking about \$200,000, Kyodo reported. The U.S. government had offered a settlement in November of about \$13,000; however, Ura’s family rejected the offer.

According to the status of forces agreement that governs U.S. servicemembers stationed in Japan, the U.S. must pay compensation on behalf of its military personnel if they have caused an accident or an incident, even off duty, and are unable to pay.

The issue is often raised by anti-base politicians like Okinawa’s Gov. Takeshi Onaga, who has claimed that victims rarely receive proper compensation.

U.S. Forces Japan and III Marine Expeditionary Force officials could not be reached for comment Thursday.

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## Cold takes hold in US

Associated Press

ERIE, Pa. — Bitter cold weather has taken hold of much of the northern U.S. and is expected to stay put for days to come as two Minnesota cities already have set record-low temperatures and a city in Pennsylvania continues to dig out from a record snowfall.

Forecasters warned of hypothermia and frostbite from arctic air settling in over the central U.S. and spreading east.

The National Weather Service reported International Falls, Minn., the self-proclaimed Icebox of the Nation, plunged to 37 degrees below zero, breaking the old record of 32 below set in 1924. Hibbing, Minn., bottomed out at 28 below, breaking the old record of 27 below set in 1964.

Wind chill advisories or warnings were in effect for much of New England, northern Pennsylvania and New York. Those places and states in the northern Plains and Great Lakes region were projected to see highs in the teens or the single digits and lows below zero for the rest of the week and into the new year.

The National Weather Service said wind chills in many areas Thursday could make temperatures feel below zero.

## Alabama certifies Doug Jones' victory in Senate special election

The Washington Post

Alabama has certified the result of Doug Jones' upset Senate victory, clearing the Democrat's path to Washington just hours after his Republican rival filed a lawsuit asking for a new election.

On Thursday afternoon, Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey, Attorney General Steve Marshall and Secretary of State John Merrill — all Republicans — signed off on election results from all 67 counties. After late-counted provisional and military ballots were added to the total, Jones defeated Republican nominee Roy Moore by 21,924 votes out of more than 1.3 million cast.

Moore, the first Republican to lose a Senate race in Alabama since 1992, had attempted to stop that vote from being counted. Late Wednesday night, the former state judge filed a legal complaint alleging "election fraud," and asked the state to consider holding a new election.

In the complaint, filed in state court, Moore's campaign argued that Alabama would "suffer irreparable harm if the election results are certified without preserving and investigating all the evidence of potential fraud."

Moore's campaign cited rumors of election fraud that had already been investigated and refuted by the Alabama secretary of state, argued that high Democratic turnout in key areas was statistically unlikely, and reported that Moore had taken a polygraph test — an attempt to disprove allegations that he made unwanted sexual advances on teenagers when he was in his 30s.

Moore's lawyers filed the complaint at 10:33 p.m. Wednesday night, and announced it to re-

porters less than two hours later. Early Thursday morning, Merrill's office said that it would move ahead with the election certification unless ordered to do otherwise.

Shortly before the official certification, Montgomery Circuit Judge Johnny Hardwick denied Moore's request to stop the process.

Moore's complaint, filed in the circuit court of Montgomery, Ala., contains little that election observers have not already seen and dismissed. Moore's campaign argues that the election result, a 1.5-point margin of victory for Jones, was "contrary to most of the impartial, independent polls conducted prior to the Special Election."

It accuses the secretary of state of failing to properly investigate claims of "election fraud," while at the same time recounting how the state cracked down after sample ballots in one heavily Democratic County were found pre-marked for Jones. (Sample ballots, which are clearly marked as such, are ineligible to be counted in election.)

The complaint also recounts how the secretary of state investigated a viral video of a man saying people had come from "across the country" to help beat Moore — but goes on to argue that the investigation was not transparent. The man in the video turned out to be a legal Alabama voter.

The Moore campaign's main argument is that high Democratic turnout and low support for Moore in the state's most populous, urban counties resulted in an "implausible, unexplained 35 percent drop in votes for Roy Moore relative to the vote share of Republican Party straight-line votes."

## Flight to Tokyo returns to LA over passenger error

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A Tokyo-bound flight returned to Los Angeles hours into the journey after the crew discovered that one of the passengers had boarded the wrong plane, All Nippon Airways said Wednesday.

The pilot of Flight 175 decided to return to the originating airport as part of the airline's security procedures, ANA said in statements that apologized to passengers but supported the decision.

The flight left Los Angeles International Airport at 11:36 a.m. Tuesday and returned at 7:33 p.m.

Model Chrissy Teigen and her singer husband, John Legend, were aboard and she live-tweeted the developments. She

wondered on Twitter why the plane was turning around four hours into the 11-hour flight.

"Why did we all get punished for this one person's mistake? Why not just land in Tokyo and send the other person back? How is this the better idea, you ask? We all have the same questions," she wrote.

Teigen also tweeted photos, videos and updates as they waited to resume the trip.

"Taking off!!!" she finally tweeted early Wednesday.

FBI spokeswoman Laura Eimiller said the agency conducted interviews Tuesday night but made no arrest. She said no charges were filed, but the investigation is ongoing.

A U.S. government official with knowledge of the situation told The Associated

Press that the incident involved two brothers — one ticketed on ANA and the other on a United Airlines flight leaving about the same time.

The official who spoke on condition of anonymity says both cleared security and had valid boarding passes. ANA and United are codeshare partners.

ANA said it was trying to determine how the passenger boarded the wrong flight.

"At the time during the flight, the pilot in command was presented with information about the discrepancy in the passenger manifest. Based on the available information in flight, he made the correct decision to return to LAX," ANA said.

The airline said it supported the pilot's decision "out of the abundance of caution and safety for the passengers and crew."

## Putin: Explosion was a terror attack

Associated Press

MOSCOW — The explosion at a supermarket in Russia's second-largest city was a terrorist attack, President Vladimir Putin said Thursday, adding that another attack had been thwarted.

At least 13 people were injured Wednesday evening when an improvised explosive device went off at a storage area for customers' bags at the supermarket in St. Petersburg. Investigators said the device contained 7 ounces of explosives and was rigged with shrapnel to cause more damage.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Putin made his comment Thursday at an awards ceremony at the Kremlin for troops who took part in Russia's Syria campaign. He did not offer any details. He also said another terrorist attack had been thwarted in St. Petersburg but did not elaborate.

Putin has portrayed Russia's operation in Syria as a pre-emptive strike against terrorism at home. He said the threat of attacks at home would have been much worse if Russia had not intervened in Syria.

"What would have happened if those thousands (of terrorists) that I have just spoken about, hundreds of them had come back to us, trained and armed," he said in comments to Russian news agencies.

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, would not say what led authorities to declare the attack an act of terrorism, but he said the fact that the bomb was rigged with shrapnel proved it "was a terrorist attack anyway."

Earlier this month, Putin telephoned President Donald Trump to thank him for a CIA tip that helped thwart a series of bombings in St. Petersburg, Putin's hometown.

The Federal Security Service said seven suspects linked to Islamic State were arrested in connection with the suspected plot. The Kremlin said the suspects had planned to bomb Kazan Cathedral and other crowded sites.

In April, a suicide bombing in St. Petersburg's subway left 16 people dead and wounded more than 50. Russian authorities identified the bomber as a 22-year old Kyrgyz-born Russian national.

## Thousands of Puerto Rican police are calling in sick

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Thousands of police officers are calling in sick every day in Puerto Rico, partly to press demands for unpaid overtime pay for hurricane recovery efforts as concerns grow over people's safety in a U.S. territory struggling to restore power.

The increase in absences recently prompted Puerto Rico Police Chief Michelle Hernandez to recommend that U.S. National Guard soldiers help fill the temporary vacancies.

"We have had an inordinate amount of absences that we haven't seen in years prior," she told The Associated Press, adding that while there has been a drop in major crimes this year, she is concerned that trend could reverse.

However, the administration of Gov. Ricardo Rossello on Wednesday rejected the idea of using the National Guard.

Normally, an average of 550 police officers are absent every day across Puerto Rico, which has one of the largest police departments under U.S. jurisdiction, with more than 13,000 officers overall. Recently, more than 2,700 officers, on average, have been absent daily.

Public Affairs Secretary Ramon Rosario said the government already has made nearly \$15 million in overtime payments since Hurricane Maria hit more than three months ago and \$6.4 million more will be distributed Saturday.

"There are a lot of police officers who are not showing up," he said. "We are trying to address all demands to

encourage these police officers to return to their jobs."

Hernandez estimated the government owes officers an additional \$35 million in overtime pay, but said the department is still tallying attendance sheets to determine the exact amount.

Authorities said part of the problem is that Puerto Rico's government has to wait for the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency to reimburse it for overtime police pay and that it is a slow process.

The police chief said officers also are upset about other changes amid Puerto Rico's economic crisis, including smaller pensions and an end of payments for unused sick days. "They feel, in a way, cheated in the past 15 years in terms of benefits," Hernandez said.

The island is struggling to recover from the Category 4 storm that hit amid an 11-year-old recession, killing dozens of people and causing up to an estimated \$95 billion in damage.

Police officers worked seven days per week for 12 to 15 hours per day in September and October, said lobbying groups for the island's police officers, who are not allowed to unionize.

"The question is quite clear: Do they have the money to pay police officers?" said Carlos Morales, president of an association that represents more than 8,000 officers.

He said in a phone interview said it is unfair to keep asking officers to work without paying them what is owed.

"Police officers can't take it anymore," Morales said. "They have their problems. They've lost their homes. They've lost a lot of things, and on top of it, they have to keep working."

## Calif. man seeks owners of goldfish that survived fires

Associated Press

SANTA ROSA, Calif. — What Logan Hertel and his friends found in the scorched remains of their Northern California neighborhood wasn't a photo album, a wedding ring or even a skittish cat separated from its family.

What they discovered were goldfish — plain, sickly and living off ash in a grimy tub.

Somehow the unspectacular goldfish had survived infernos that had wiped out neighborhoods, and Hertel was determined to reunite the fish with their owners, he told The Mercury News of San Jose.

"I could picture myself in their shoes," said Hertel, 21, a student at Santa Rosa Junior College, "and knowing that if I lost everything, even knowing something this small is alive

would be kind of important to me."

Wildfires in October swept through Sonoma, Napa and other counties in and around wine country, killing 44 people and destroying thousands of homes. Entire neighborhoods were leveled.

Lisa Hertel made signs Tuesday with her number and a photo of her son, Logan, rescuing the goldfish. She taped them

around the rubble of the home where the fish were found.

The Hertels were lucky that their house wasn't damaged. But she knows other people lost mementos, keepsakes and photos, which is why she wants to get the fish back to their owners.

"Something actually did survive," Lisa Hertel added, "and somebody cared enough to get the fish and save them."



## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Hunter's cougar carcass is snagged at airport

**NV** LAS VEGAS — Police said a traveler's trip home hit a snag in Las Vegas after security screeners found a dead cougar with a hunting tag in his luggage.

No crime was committed, but Las Vegas police Lt. David Gordon told the Las Vegas Review-Journal that Transportation Security Administration agents held the man at McCarran International Airport on Tuesday to confirm the validity of the Utah state hunting and fishing game tag.

The man's name and destination were not made public.

Airport spokeswoman Melissa Nunnery said the man ended up shipping the cougar carcass home, but not on the airplane.

### 115 skiers have to be rescued from chairlift

**VT** PERU — Officials said 115 skiers had to be rescued when high winds caused a chairlift to come to an abrupt stop at Bromley Mountain in Vermont.

Resort officials said the mishap took place on Christmas Day and that it took more than two hours to get all of the skiers down. No one was hurt.

Bromley Mountain executive Michael van Eyck said the lift is designed to operate in winds up to 50 mph, and that gusts were at 40 mph before a sudden burst caused the chain of events.

### Hairstylist accused of snipping customer's ear

**WI** MADISON — Madison police said they arrested a hairstylist accused of snipping a 22-year-old customer's ear.

Police spokesman Joel DeSpain said the victim told officers the hairstylist told him to stop fidgeting and moving his head before nicking his ear Dec. 22. The Wisconsin State Journal reported that DeSpain said the hairstylist then ran the clipper with the shortest attachment down the middle of the customer's head.

DeSpain said officers arrested Khaled A. Shabani, 46, who pleaded not guilty to disorderly conduct Wednesday. DeSpain said Shabani told officers it was an accident.

### Handmade Polish folk costumes are stolen

**IL** CHICAGO — Five handmade Polish folk costumes were stolen from a car in Chicago's Wicker Park neighborhood.

The Chicago Sun-Times reported Wednesday that Marlena Dzis said the outfits were taken between Saturday night and Sunday morning after someone broke out a window in her parked car.

The costumes are on loan from The Lira Ensemble, a professional performing arts company specializing in Polish music, song and dance. Dzis sings with the ensemble.

She said she spent most of Christmas Day searching through alley trash cans for the costumes.

### Bullhead City mascot is marked with pink

**AZ** BULLHEAD CITY — Bullhead City's unofficial mascot got an unwanted makeover when someone colored the toenails of the concrete tortoise and added eyelashes.

The Mohave Daily News reported police are looking for whoever vandalized the giant

sculpture last week.

Two residents were able to remove most of the bright pink markings on the desert tortoise named "Poki."

Former part-time Bullhead City resident Bill Hayes donated the tortoise to the city in 2014 after he moved to Montana full time.

### Fruitcake temporarily halts ferry service

**WA** SEATTLE — Authorities said a wrapped present that turned out to be a fruitcake temporarily halted ferry service at a Seattle ferry terminal.

Washington State Patrol Trooper Kevin Fortino said troopers were notified Tuesday that a suspicious package was found underneath a Christmas tree in the pedestrian waiting area.

State ferry officials and troopers evacuated the terminal and kept all inbound ferries away from the area for about a half-hour while the Seattle Police Department bomb squad responded.

Fortino said the gift was found to be a fruitcake.

### Man dies after line drive to head during game

**FL** ST. AUGUSTINE — A Florida man has died several weeks after taking a line drive to the head during a softball game.

The Tampa Bay Times reported that Greg Fusco, 37, died Sunday. The St. Johns County Sheriff's Office said a softball struck the Palm Harbor man in the left temple during a Dec. 2 tournament near Jacksonville. A friend said Fusco had been pitching.

Officials said the ball initially knocked Fusco unconscious but he was awake and

dazed by the time an ambulance arrived. He was taken to a Jacksonville hospital, and his injuries weren't considered life-threatening.

### Police: Man tried to rob store with fake gun

**OH** AKRON — Police said a man who tried and failed to rob an Ohio convenience store with a fake gun made from pieces of furniture was charged with robbery.

Akron police said the man walked into a local Circle K store Monday afternoon waving what appeared to be a rifle and demanding cash. An employee realized the rifle was a fake and confronted the man with the help of three customers.

The man tried to flee but was subdued and detained by the people in the store until police arrived.

Police said the man had a pole, a fake scope, a spring and two table legs fastened together to look like a rifle.

### Overtaken fuel truck spills oil into stream

**MD** BALTIMORE — An overturned fuel truck spilled about 2,500 gallons of red-dyed heating oil into a Baltimore stream.

News outlets report Maryland Department of the Environment spokesman Jay Apperson said the heating oil fell into the Jones Fall stream, below Interstate 83, where the tanker overturned Tuesday morning. Crews captured another 300 gallons on the interstate.

Crews vacuumed up the oil and deployed floating oil booms to prevent the fuel from reaching Baltimore's Inner Harbor.

From wire reports

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## YEAR IN REVIEW

# Trump feud with NFL was story of '17

Associated Press

DENVER — President Donald Trump couldn't stand NFL players kneeling in protest during "The Star-Spangled Banner." His angry call to fire players who didn't stand for the national anthem rekindled both the national debate over the issue and the movement itself.

Former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick initiated the protests last year to bring attention to racial inequality and police brutality against

minorities. Kaepernick is currently out of football, and relatively few players were demonstrating this season before the president stoked his feud with the NFL.

During a speech at a political rally in Huntsville, Ala., in late September, Trump said, "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners when somebody disrespects our flag to say, 'Get that son of a bitch off the field right now, out, he's fired, he's fired.'"

Criticism from players, owners and fans — and some praise — greeted Trump's

remarks, which sparked a massive show of defiance that weekend, with more than 200 players protesting by choosing not to stand for the national anthem.

The president's feud with the NFL is the runaway winner for the top sports story of 2017 in balloting by AP members and editors, easily outdistancing the corruption scandal engulfing college basketball and the Houston Astros winning their first World Series and lifting the spirits of a city devastated by Hurricane Harvey.

## PLAYS OF THE YEAR

# Edelman's Super catch was year's top highlight

Associated Press

Some were championship-defining events. Others capped upsets. One just seemed to defy the laws of physics.

Sports are moments, and there were many that will not be forgotten in 2017.

Without further ado, here are the sports plays of the year:

### 10. No sliding required

Toronto's Chris Coghlan had three options: Go through St. Louis catcher Yadier Molina, go around him or go over him. He smartly chose the last one. Coghlan was trying to score on Kevin Pillar's triple. St. Louis right fielder Stephen Piscotty's throw to the plate was a few feet up the third-base line, putting Molina right in Coghlan's path. Coghlan went airborne, flipped over Molina, somehow landed on the plate and the Blue Jays took a 3-2 lead.

### 9. Shorthanded season-saver

Julia Duquette's only goal of her senior season at Plattsburgh State in upstate New York is one she'll never forget. Duquette's shorthanded goal with 20.7 seconds left in regulation pulled the Cardinals into a tie with Adrian in the NCAA Division III women's hockey final — and Plattsburgh went on to win it in overtime for its fourth consecu-

tive national championship.

### 8. A Preakness upset

Always Dreaming and Classic Empire were the favorites going into the Preakness Stakes, the middle leg of the Triple Crown, and those two dueling most of the way — until Cloud Computing decided it was time to beat them both. Cloud Computing, trained by Chad Brown and ridden by Javier Castellano, stole the race in the last half-dozen strides and paid \$28.80 on \$2 win bets to its backers.

### 7. Waiters strikes the pose

Dion Waiters was in no hurry. He knew exactly what he was going to do. After Kevin Durant's dunk pulled Golden State into a 102-102 tie with Miami with 11.7 seconds left, Waiters took the inbounds pass, coolly brought the ball upcourt, made a move on Klay Thompson and delivered a straightaway three-pointer that gave the Heat a win — punctuated by his striking an arms-folded pose afterward, one that quickly became part of Heat lore.

### 6. Cole Mericle's miracle

Cole Mericle kicked what became the game-winning field goal for Lima Senior High in Ohio with 3 seconds left, but no one will remember that part of his team's 25-24 victory over St. Francis de Sales. Mericle's

ensuing kickoff turned into a five-lateral return, one where St. Francis got the ball down to the Lima 2 — but the ball carrier stumbled a bit on the turf, Mericle ran him down in the nick of time and Lima escaped.

### 5. Clemson's title hunter

Hunter Renfrow, a former walk-on, made the catch with 1 second left that gave Clemson a win over Alabama in the College Football Playoff championship game. The 2-yard scoring toss from Deshaun Watson gave the Tigers a 35-31 win over the Crimson Tide, in a championship rematch where the sequel was just as good as the original.

### 4. Down goes UConn

Morgan William wanted the ball, got it and made history. William's jumper with no time remaining in overtime lifted Mississippi State to a 66-64 win over Connecticut in the national semifinals, ending the Huskies' 111-game winning streak. Mississippi State led by as many as 16 points, then found itself trailing by three late before William delivered the dagger. "I live for moments like this," she said.

### 3. Sloane's U.S. Open

It's hard to pick one play that stood out for Sloane Stephens in her ride to the U.S. Open title this

summer, but this 25-stroke point might have been the gem. Stephens was serving down 4-5, 30-30 in the third set to Venus Williams in the semifinals, and needed a backhand winner down the line to help her eventually hold. Had that shot missed, she would have faced match point. Instead, Stephens went on to capture the title.

### 2. Spieth from the sand

Here's how you win a playoff: Hole out from 60 feet from the sand. Jordan Spieth hit plenty of stellar shots in 2017, none of them probably more memorable than his bunker shot in a playoff to beat Daniel Berger and win the Travelers Championship. Berger had a 50-foot putt that just missed after Spieth's dramatic moment — and tipped his cap afterward. "Jordan does Jordan things," Berger said. "So there's not really much you can say."

### 1. Edelman's Super catch

Down by eight points with about two minutes left in the Super Bowl, the New England Patriots needed all the heroics they could get — and Julian Edelman delivered. His diving, juggling catch of a Tom Brady pass that almost got intercepted was perhaps the biggest moment in the Patriots' stirring rally from being down 28-3 and beating Atlanta in overtime for their fifth Vince Lombardi Trophy.



# Pittsburgh RB Bell could wind up shy of title, records

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Le'Veon Bell potentially could make some Pittsburgh Steelers history Sunday.

But will he even get the chance?

For all the Steelers have accomplished, a regular-season league rushing champion has been elusive.

Despite two Hall of Fame running backs and four first-team All-Pro backs during the past six decades, the Steelers haven't had a season rushing champion since "Bullet" Bill Dudley had 604 yards over an 11-game season in 1946.

For much of this season, Bell appeared poised to end that 71-year drought.

But while Bell has spent most of the past two months in the NFL rushing-yardage lead, he enters Week 17 trailing the Los Angeles Rams' Todd Gurley by 14 yards and Kansas City Chiefs rookie Kareem Hunt by 1 yard.

With the winless Cleveland Browns at home on the schedule, Bell would appear to be in good position to make a run at the rushing title.

But with the Steelers (12-3) a longshot to earn the AFC's No. 1 seed — they need to win and have the New England Patriots lose at home to the New York Jets — coach Mike Tomlin has openly mused about resting some of his star players Sunday.

With each of Bell's previous three seasons having ended with the three-time Pro Bowler injured, that might not be such a bad idea.

"I just want to win the Super Bowl," Bell said Wednesday. "I can talk about the rushing title all year; I don't really care about that. I just want to go out there and make sure that I am healthy, get into the playoffs

and get into the Super Bowl."

Bell — by far — leads the NFL in rushing attempts. With 321, he has 42 more than No. 2 Gurley. Counting his 85 receptions, Bell became only the second player since 2009 to have more than 400 combined rushing attempts/receptions.

Bell's 2014 (hyperextended knee in the regular-season finale), 2015 (torn MCL in Week 8) and 2016 seasons (groin injury in the playoffs) ended with him on the sideline watching the Steelers.

Those experiences might have gained him a perspective that deems it wise to not push things for a regular-season game against a winless team — all for an individual accolade.

"I look at guys like (the NBA's LeBron James), he never wins scoring titles, but he's arguably the best player to ever play the game of basketball," Bell said.

"So I don't necessarily care about the rushing title or having the most yards (from scrimmage). I just want to make sure I go out there and do what it takes to help our team win games and Super Bowls."

Bell is saying all the right things. Privately, though? Veteran guard Ramon Foster said a rushing title would "absolutely" mean something to Bell.

"But I'd rather have him in January and February," Foster said. "He's OK with that, too."

There are other milestones in reach for Bell, too. Counting his 655 receiving yards, Bell is 54 yards shy of the 66th 2,000-yards-from-scrimmage season in NFL history and 4 yards from reaching 8,000 scrimmage yards over his first five seasons.

"I feel like, it is what it is, you know?" Bell said of perhaps missing out on a rushing title. "For me personally, I just want to win Super Bowls."

## Bowls roundup

# Purdue rallies to beat Arizona

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Elijah Sindelar threw a 38-yard touchdown pass to Anthony Mahoungou with 1:44 remaining and Purdue capped coach Jeff Brohm's first season in dramatic style with a 38-35 victory over Arizona in the Foster Farms Bowl on Wednesday night.

The Boilermakers (7-6) had squandered a 17-point halftime lead when Khalil Tate threw his fifth TD pass with 3:21 remaining to give the Wildcats (7-6) the lead.

But Sindelar responded with a 75-yard drive that ended with the deep throw into the end zone to Mahoungou, giving the Boilermakers their first winning record since 2011 and first bowl win over a major conference team since beating Washington in the 2002 Sun Bowl.

Sindelar threw for 396 yards and four touchdowns, with Mahoungou (118 yards) and Gregory Phillips (149) each topping the 100-yard mark and catching two TD passes.

Tate was just as good, showing he can win with his arm as well as he can with his legs that carried him to 1,353 yards rushing in the regular season. Tate threw for 302 yards and five touchdowns but his late interception to Jacob Thieneman ended the comeback attempt.

Brohm pulled out all the stops, going for it three times on fourth down, calling a couple of flea-flickers and using an innovative trick play to set up a field goal at the end of the first half that made it 31-14. The Boilermakers took over at their 32 with 56 seconds left after Tate lost a fumble. Purdue appeared to be taking a knee to run out the clock, but running back D.J. Knox was crouching hidden behind a guard. Sindelar then handed the ball to Knox, who waited an instant and then ran around left end for a 30-yard gain that helped set up the field goal.

## Pinstripe Bowl

**Iowa 27, Boston College 20:** Drake Kulick fought for a 1-yard touchdown run late in the fourth quarter on his only carry of the game and Iowa beat Boston College in the frigid Pinstripe Bowl at Yankee Stadium to snap a five-bowl losing streak.

The Hawkeyes (8-5) had been the only team in the nation to lose a bowl game in each of the past four seasons. Iowa had last won a bowl game in 2010 and started the losing streak the next season.

## Independence Bowl

**Florida State 42, Southern Miss 13:** At Shreveport, La., James Blackman threw three of his Independence Bowl-record four touchdown passes to Auden Tate and Florida State beat Southern Mississippi.

Blackman completed 18 of 26 passes for 233 yards.

The Seminoles (7-6) avoided their first losing season since 1976.

Southern Miss (8-5) was led by Ito Smith, who ran for 92 yards. Kwadra Griggs completed 13 of 25 passes for just 86 yards and a touchdown.

## Texas Bowl

**Texas 33, Missouri 16:** At Houston, freshman running back Daniel Young had 64 yards receiving with a touchdown and added 48 yards on the ground to help Texas beat Missouri.

The Longhorns (7-6), in a bowl for the first time since 2014, bounced back from a loss to Texas Tech in the regular-season finale to finish with their first winning record since going 8-5 in coach Mack Brown's final season in 2013.

Drew Lock passed for 269 yards and a touchdown, but also threw an interception and lost a fumble in the loss, which snapped a six-game winning streak for the Tigers (7-6).

## NBA roundup

# Rondo gets 25 assists in win

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Rajon Rondo set a franchise record with a career-high 25 assists in just 30 minutes on the court, Anthony Davis had 33 points, 11 rebounds and six blocks, and the New Orleans Pelicans beat the Brooklyn Nets 128-113 on Wednesday.

DeMarcus Cousins had 27 points and 14 rebounds, and Jrue Holiday scored 23 points for the Pelicans, who have won three straight.

**Thunder 124, Raptors 107:** Russell Westbrook had 30 points, 13 assists and eight rebounds, and host Oklahoma City earned its sixth straight win.

Paul George scored 33 points, helping Oklahoma City improve to 12-3 in December. Carmelo Anthony and Steven

Adams had 18 points apiece.

Toronto entered the game as the hottest team in the Eastern Conference, but lost its second game in as many nights and fell to 10-3 in December.

**Kings 109, Cavaliers 95:** Vince Carter scored a season-high 24 points, and Sacramento handed visiting Cleveland its second straight loss.

**Warriors 126, Jazz 101:** Kevin Durant scored 21 points, and host Golden State won for the 13th time in 14 games.

**Timberwolves 128, Nuggets 125 (OT):** Jimmy Butler scored 12 of his team's 14 points in overtime and finished with a season-high 39 in host Minnesota's fifth straight victory.

**Grizzlies 109, Lakers 99:** Tyreke Evans scored 32 points and visiting Memphis handed Los Angeles its fourth straight

loss.

**Hawks 113, Wizards 99:** Dennis Schroder scored 21 points, Ersan Ilyasova added 20 and host Atlanta won consecutive games for the first time this season.

**Celtics 102, Hornets 91:** Kyrie Irving scored 21 points and Al Horford had 20 points and 11 rebounds, powering Boston to the road win.

**Bulls 92, Knicks 87:** Kris Dunn scored 17 points, including two clutch free throws in the final seconds, and surging Chicago rallied to win at home.

**Mavericks 98, Pacers 94:** Dirk Nowitzki scored 15 points, Harrison Barnes made the tiebreaking free throw with 37.7 seconds left, and Dallas snapped an eight-game road losing streak.

## Top 25 roundup

# Villanova tops DePaul

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Mikal Bridges scored 20 points, Phil Booth added 17 points and six assists and No. 1 Villanova beat DePaul 103-85 on Wednesday night in the Big East opener for both teams.

The Wildcats (13-0, 1-0 Big East) closed in on last year's program-record 14-0 start and gave coach Jay Wright his 399th victory in 17 seasons at Villanova.

Bridges and Booth each made four three-pointers, and the Wildcats nailed 15 of 31 from long range.

Jalen Brunson had 16 points and five assists. Eric Paschall scored 16, and Villanova hit the 100-point mark for the third time this season.

Max Strus had 20 points, nine rebounds and six assists for DePaul (7-6, 0-1), which dropped its 13th straight against ranked opponents. They fell to 3-21 against No. 1 teams.

**No. 6 Xavier 91, Marquette 87:** Trevon Blueitt had 23 points and J.P. Macura scored 11 of his 15 points in the second half for the visiting Musketeers.

Tyrique Jones added 12 points on 5-for-6 shooting for Xavier (13-1, 1-0), which won its eighth straight game.

Andrew Rowsey led the Golden Eagles (9-4, 0-1) with 31 points but missed a three while open from a couple of feet behind the arc with 1:16 left with his team trailing 85-82.

The Big East leader in free-throw shooting (79.8 percent), Xavier sealed the road victory by going 6-for-6 from the line over the final 28 seconds.

**New Mexico 87, Air Force 58:** Joe Furstinger dropped his third consecutive double-double and five other Lobos players reached double figures on the way to a rout of the visiting Falcons.

Furstinger, a senior post who never had a double-double until his recent streak, finished with 12 points and 12 rebounds, including six offensive boards.

## NHL roundup

# Devils earn fifth-straight victory

Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — Top overall draft pick Nico Hischier scored two goals in the first period, and the New Jersey Devils extended their season-high winning streak to five games with a 3-1 victory over the Detroit Red Wings on Wednesday night.

Taylor Hall had two assists, Cory Schneider made 31 saves and the Devils killed off all five Red Wings power plays in extending Detroit's losing streak to three games. Sami Vatanen scored into an empty net with 23 seconds to play for the final margin.

Justin Abdelkader scored for Detroit, which outshot New Jersey 25-19 in the final two periods. Jimmy Howard made 29 saves.

**Golden Knights 4, Ducks 1:** Cody Eakin scored to snap a second-period tie and visiting Vegas beat Anaheim for its fifth straight victory.

**Rangers 1, Capitals 0 (SO):** Mats Zuccarello and Mika Zibanejad scored in the shootout to lift host New York to victory over Washington.

**Penguins 5, Blue Jackets 4 (SO):** Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin scored in the shootout, and host Pittsburgh rallied past Columbus.

**Predators 2, Blues 1:** Calle Jarnkrok scored

his second goal in two games and Pekka Rinne made 29 saves as Nashville beat host St. Louis, snapping its season-high three-game losing streak.

**Coyotes 3, Avalanche 1:** Alex Goligoski scored the go-ahead goal midway through the second period, and Arizona beat host Colorado.

**Bruins 5, Senators 1:** Riley Nash scored two goals, Kevan Miller got his first of the season and surging host Boston beat Ottawa for its 14th win in 18 games.

**Hurricanes 3, Canadiens 1:** Sebastian Aho scored two goals in the third period, and host Carolina beat Montreal.

**Jets 4, Oilers 3:** Joel Armia scored twice as host Winnipeg halted Edmonton's season-high winning streak at four games.

**Islanders 3, Sabres 2 (OT):** Mathew Barzal scored 1:08 into overtime to give host New York the victory over Buffalo.

**Wild 4, Stars 2:** Mikael Granlund scored the tiebreaking goal in the second period, and host Minnesota beat Dallas.

Jared Spurgeon, Eric Staal and Jason Zucker also scored for Minnesota, which won for just the second time in six games. Charlie Coyle had two assists and Alex Stalock made 24 saves.