

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

5 Marines declared dead; search ends

BY JAMES BOLINGER
AND HANA KUSUMOTO

Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — The Marine Corps has ended an extensive search for five Marines missing after their KC-130J Hercules collided midair with an F/A-18 Hornet last week off Japan's southern coast.

"After an update from the Joint Personnel Recovery Center, and a review of all available information, I have made the determination to end the search and rescue operations for the crew of our [Hercules] ... and to declare that these Marine warriors are deceased," III Expeditionary Force commander Lt. Gen. Eric Smith said in a statement posted Tuesday afternoon to the organization's official Facebook page.

"Every possible effort was made to recover our crew and I hope the families of these selfless Americans will find comfort in the incredible efforts

made by US, Japanese, and Australian forces during the search," he added.

Seven Marines were involved in the training accident, which occurred just before 2 a.m. Thursday about 200 miles south of Muroto Cape on Shikoku Island, U.S. and Japanese officials said.

Although the crews were conducting regularly scheduled training, Marine investigators have not confirmed that aerial refueling was underway during the incident, the statement said.

The Hercules' flight data and cockpit voice recorders have not been found, making it "premature to speculate about wreckage recovery," the statement added.

Two Marines aboard the Hornet were recovered the day of the accident. The first has been released from a hospital, while the second — Capt. Jahmar Resilard, 28 — was pronounced dead after being found by a Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces ship.

The statement did not identify the five Marines, but it said their next-of-kin had been notified. Their identities were expected to be released later Tuesday by the Defense Department.

However, family members of four of the fallen Marines identified their loved ones to Stars and Stripes.

They are: Maj. Kevin Herrmann, 38, of Fredericksburg, Va.; Staff Sgt. Maximo Flores, 27, of Litchfield Park, Ariz.; Cpl. Carter Ross, 21, from Hendersonville, Tenn., and Cpl. Daniel Baker, 21, of Tremont, Ill.

"All of us in the Sumo family are extremely saddened following the announcement of the conclusion of search and rescue operations," Lt. Col. Mitchell Maury, commander of Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 152, said in the statement. "We know this difficult decision was made after all resources were exhausted in the vigorous search for our Marines. Our thoughts are heavy, and our prayers are with

all family and friends of all five aircrew."

Smith also expressed his condolences to the lost Marines' families.

"Every member of the III MEF family mourns this loss and stands alongside the families of the fallen in this terrible moment," he said in the statement. "We remain, Semper Fidelis."

Both the Japan Self-Defense Forces and Japan Coast Guard announced Tuesday that they'd halted their search efforts at 6 a.m. While the U.S. Coast Guard has stopped searching specifically for the crewmembers, it will keep an eye out during regular patrols of the area, a spokesman for 5th Regional Coast Guard Headquarters told Stars and Stripes on Tuesday via telephone.

The coast guard sent six of its patrol boats on Thursday and continued to send vessels until Monday, although its search team had shrunk during that time, the spokesman said.

Trump: Military will build border wall if Dems refuse

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump sought Tuesday to pressure Democratic congressional leaders into supporting his demand for billions of dollars to build his promised wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, threatening to have the military build it "if Democrats do not give us the votes to secure our Country."

Trump tweeted the threat hours before Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi were to meet with Trump at the White House in an effort to avert a possible partial

government shutdown on Dec. 21, when funding for some agencies is scheduled to expire.

In a series of tweets Tuesday, Trump said immigration and border patrol agents and thousands of active-duty servicemembers he sent to the border have done a "FANTASTIC" job. But he said "A Great Wall would be, however, a far easier & less expensive solution."

Trump said he looked forward to meeting with Schumer and Pelosi, but claimed they don't want border security for "strictly political reasons."

"If the Democrats do not give us the votes to secure our Country, the Military will build the

remaining sections of the Wall. They know how important it is!" Trump said.

Schumer and Pelosi said Monday that Republicans have the power to keep the government open since they control Congress and the White House.

"Our country cannot afford a Trump Shutdown," they said in a statement, adding that Trump "knows full well that his wall proposal does not have the votes to pass the House and Senate and should not be an obstacle to a bipartisan agreement."

Republican congressional leaders have repeatedly said it's up to Trump to cut a deal with Democrats, an acknowledgment

of their inability to produce spending bills with Republican votes alone.

That gave Democrats momentum heading into the closed-door talks, which also could veer into Trump's request for emergency funding for deadly wildfires in California and a Republican-sponsored bill to extend expiring tax breaks and delay some health care taxes.

Before lawmakers adjourn for the year they also could consider a bipartisan criminal justice reform bill, a bill to protect special counsel Robert Mueller and a plan to overhaul the system for handling sexual harassment complaints on Capitol Hill.

USS Harry S. Truman departs Europe after 3-month deployment

BY SCOTT WYLAND
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The USS Harry S. Truman left European waters Tuesday after a three-month operation that included conducting the first aircraft carrier patrol in the Arctic since the Cold War.

The Truman took part in exercises and security missions in the North Atlantic, as well as in the Mediterranean and Adriatic, while using the “dynamic force employment” concept, which involves deploying warships in less predictable patterns.

The Nimitz-class carrier’s foray into the icy Arctic regions followed the National Defense Strategy’s edict to focus less on combating violent extremism and more on countering a more assertive Russia and China.

“The operations the strike group conducted across the region alongside our allies and

partners — and withstanding a variety of austere environmental conditions in the high north — showcase our inherent flexibility,” Adm. James Foggo, head of Naval Forces Europe and Africa, said in a statement. “[They] prove that there are no international waters off limits to our forces.”

In April, the Truman deployed to the eastern Mediterranean and launched airstrikes against Islamic State the week after the U.S. led a missile strike against suspected chemical sites in Syria.

The Truman returned to Norfolk, Va., in mid-July and then resumed operations in Europe in September.

The schedule was a change from previous years when carriers would deploy to the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf for six or seven months before returning home.

US, British forces test robotic technologies

BY WILLIAM HOWARD
Stars and Stripes

WILTSHIRE, England — Children who grew up playing with remotely controlled toy tanks are now using real world versions in wargames here on the Salisbury Plain Training Area near Stonehenge.

For the past month, U.S. and British forces have been testing emerging robotic technologies in a try-before-you-buy exercise dubbed Autonomous Warrior. The fourth annual Army Warfighting Experiment is a collaborative effort focused on using unmanned aerial and ground vehicles to make troops safer and more effective on the battlefield.

“If you work off the principle that robotics should be first into harm’s way, then that will start to open up opportunities where you don’t have to commit manpower,” said Maj. Gareth Morris, a British Army exchange officer serving as executive officer at the U.S. Army Maneuver Battle Lab. “It’s all about increasing combat power without necessarily increasing the size of an army.”

This year saw land-based driverless technology for the first time on a robotic tracked vehicle named Titan Strike, made by the British firm Qinetiq, and an unmanned variant of the British Warrior infantry fighting vehicle.

The driverless vehicles were among the 50 products selected for use in this year’s exercise from an initial 122 submissions from commercial industry. Of those, 36 made the final cut for future consideration after soldiers from the Fort Benning, Ga.-based U.S. Army Experimental Force Platoon, or EXFOR, as well as British light infantry and Royal Marines, put them through four weeks of combat trials in rain, mud and snow.

We’ll show up in the right place and right uniform, get some pieces of kit, and then we’ll tell them the pros and cons and try to get good data for Maneu-

ver Battle Lab to then decide on what to buy for the Army,” said 1st Lt. William Wren, EXFOR platoon leader. “It’s our responsibility to make it as realistic as possible, so we try to put a lot of tactical pressure on ourselves.”

Human operators were required to fire any weapon systems, but the Titan Strike is programmed to work autonomously.

“In the 21st century, the army that knows how to use these first effectively will win,” Morris said.

Testing also included a slew of unmanned and remotely controlled construction, sustainment and military vehicles, such as the Horiba Mira Bobcat and Rakka 3000 tractors that can clear away roadblocks while their operators are tucked away safely in a nearby bunker.

An unmanned Polaris MRZR X, a light, four-wheeled, off-road vehicle, can quietly zip across muddy terrain while running solely on battery power to deliver ammunition to soldiers in cover. The Hippo amphibious vehicle can carry supplies, provide cover and transport casualties.

“We were using it to take it across a field for casualty evacuations so that I wasn’t out there in the field of fire,” said Pfc. Austin Meggison, an Army infantryman with EXFOR, speaking about the Hippo. “It’s really easy to use.”

Some products return each year with improvements based on previous soldier feedback, like the FLIR Black Hornet PRS. The nearly silent, pocket-sized drone transmits live video and high definition images back to the operator. It can fly about a mile in up to 25 minutes.

Observers from 14 NATO countries gathered their own impressions on possible acquisitions.

“We’re helping them scout their own needs,” Morris said. “For some of those nations who don’t have the capacity, size of technology or advantages that we have in the U.K. and U.S., that’s quite important.”

Suspect in Camp Zama bombing may be charged

BY HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — A Japanese man suspected of attempting a crude rocket attack on Camp Zama in April 2015 may face charges under Japan’s Explosives Control Act, Kyodo News reported Saturday.

Toyotsuna Numada, 67, is already under indictment under the act for two similar incidents in the past five years, one near Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo and another in the city of Kawaguchi, according to Tokyo newspaper Sankei Shimbun.

An investigative team of police from Tokyo and Kanagawa

and Saitama prefectures in September recommended prosecutors add another charge based on the Camp Zama incident, Kyodo News reported.

Numada is allegedly a member of Kakumei gun, or Revolutionary Army, a guerrilla unit of the extreme leftist group Kakuryokyo Liberation Faction, according to Kyodo News.

Police found two metal pipes stuck in the ground on a farm about 880 yards from the Camp Zama fence line after residents heard explosions at about midnight April 28, 2015. Police later found a fired projectile on a nearby farm.

Japan seeks 1st carrier to deploy US F-35 fighters

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan is seeking to possess its first aircraft carrier to allow for the deployment of U.S.-made stealth fighters as it seeks to bolster its arms capability under a new 10-year defense plan.

A draft outline of Japan's new defense plan, presented by the government Tuesday, proposes refitting an existing helicopter carrier into one that can deploy U.S.-made F-35 stealth fighters capable of short takeoffs and vertical landings.

A candidate would be the Maritime Self-Defense Force's helicopter carrier Izumo, an 820-foot-long warship that can carry 14 helicopters.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is scrapping the current program after only five years, citing rapid changes in a security environment that requires greater deterrence to cope with threats from North Korea and China.

The new National Defense Program Guidelines are expected next week.

The draft outline says Japan needs more STOVLs such as

F-35Bs to beef up its air defense capability in the Pacific while expanding surveillance in the area. Japan plans to buy 99 F-35s to replace some of the country's fleet of F-15s.

Critics say possessing an aircraft carrier would give Japan a strike capability in violation of the country's pacifist constitution.

The draft outline also calls for setting up a unit specializing in space, cyberattacks and electronic warfare while integrating the ground maritime and air forces to better coordinate operations.

As Japan comes under pressure from President Donald Trump to allow more exports from the U.S., purchases of costly American weapons would be a way to reduce the U.S. trade deficit while enhancing military cooperation between the allies.

US returns to Philippines 3 bells taken a century ago during war

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

A C-130 transport plane landed in Manila on Tuesday morning carrying three bells taken from the Philippines a century ago during its war with America, ending a long-standing dispute between the two allies.

U.S. Ambassador Sung Kim turned over the "Balangiga Bells" to the Philippine government, which had called for their return for decades over the objections of some U.S. veterans.

"The history of these bells spans the entire relationship between the United States and the Philippines," Kim said at a ceremony at Manila's Villamor Air Base. "Their return underscores the enduring friendship, partnership and alliance between our countries."

The Air Force conducted a special airlift mission to bring one of the bells from Korea to Japan, where it met its two sister bells before flying to Manila.

The Philippine government will now take the three bells to their original parish in the vil-

lage of Balangiga, in the center of the Philippine archipelago, for a ceremony on Saturday. They will be hung in a Catholic church rebuilt by villagers and U.S. sailors after a super typhoon in 2013.

Local religious leaders said they were grateful the bells were being returned in time to ring for Christmas services.

"During a time of war, the bells were taken," Bishop Crispin Varquez said in a statement. "They are being brought back during the season of hope and peace."

The bells' contentious history dates back to the Philippine-American War, which lasted from February 1898 to July 1902 and left more than 4,000 U.S. troops and about 200,000 Filipinos dead, according to U.S. estimates.

U.S. soldiers took the three bells in 1901 after a deadly battle in Balangiga, where they had reportedly rang to signal an ambush that killed 48 U.S. troops. After the attack, U.S. cannons shelled the town. Army Gen. Jacob Smith infamously or-

dered his troops to kill any male in the region over the age of 10 and turn the area into a "howling wilderness."

Until recently, two bells had been housed at F.E. Warren Air Force Base, Wyo. The Army's 9th Infantry Regiment possessed the third bell and displayed it in the 2nd Infantry Division museum at Camp Red Cloud in South Korea.

Over the years, the missing trio assumed emotional significance in the Philippines, where some saw their taking as a colonial-era slight. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and his predecessors have repeatedly called for their return since 1994, but some veterans and Wyoming's members of Congress opposed the move.

The bells came to represent the sacrifice American troops had made, even if the war was messy and in some parts dishonorable, said Eric Burke, a historian who had served as the 9th Infantry Regiment's guidon-bearer, shortly after Defense Secretary Jim Mattis had called for their return.

Russia sends two bombers to Venezuela

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Two Russian nuclear-capable strategic bombers arrived in Venezuela on Monday, a deployment that comes amid soaring Russia-U.S. tensions.

Russia's Defense Ministry said a pair of Tu-160 bombers landed at Maiquetia airport outside Caracas on Monday following a 6,200-mile flight. It didn't say if the bombers were carrying any weapons and didn't say how long they will stay in Venezuela.

The ministry said the bombers were shadowed by Norwegian

F-18 fighter jets during part of their flight. It added that

a heavy-lift An-124 Ruslan cargo plane and an Il-62 passenger plane accompanied the bombers to Maiquetia.

The Tu-160 is capable of carrying conventional or nuclear-tipped cruise missiles with a range of 3,410 miles. Such bombers took part in Russia's campaign in Syria, where they launched conventionally armed Kh-101 cruise missiles for the first time in combat.

The bombers' deployment follows Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's visit to Moscow last week in a bid to shore up political and economic assistance even as his country has been struggling to pay billions of dollars owed to Russia.

Russia is a major political ally of Venezuela, which has become increasingly isolated in the world under growing sanctions led by the U.S. and the European Union, which accuse Maduro of undermining democratic institutions to hold onto power, while overseeing an economic and political crisis that is worse than the Great Depression.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said at last week's meeting with his Venezuelan counterpart, Vladimir Padrino Lopez, that Russia would continue to send its military aircraft and warships to visit Venezuela as part of bilateral military cooperation.

Trump scrambles to find new chief of staff

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is scrambling to find a new chief of staff after his first choice to replace John Kelly bailed at the last minute and several other potential successors signaled they weren't interested in the job.

Back to square one, Trump is mulling over a list of at least four potential candidates after Nick Ayers, Vice President Mike Pence's chief of staff, took himself out of the running Sunday and decided that he would instead be leaving the White House.

The announcement surprised even senior staffers who believed that Ayers' ascension was a done deal.

Trump is now soliciting input on a list of candidates that is said to include Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney; Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., the chairman of the conservative House Freedom Caucus; and former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie. Allies are pitching Trump on even more contenders.

But as quickly as names were being floated, candidates appeared to be pulling themselves from consideration, underscoring the challenges of working for a mercurial president who has acknowledged that he likes to surround himself with chaos and despises any suggestion he's being managed.

"In the best of times, it is relentless," said Chris Whipple, an expert on chiefs of staff and author of "The Gatekeepers," a book on the subject. "It's 24/7. It's thankless. You get all of the blame and none of the credit for everything that happens. And that's in the best of times. We are not in the best of times."

Trump's administration has set records for staff turnover, and the president has often struggled to attract experienced political professionals, a challenge that has grown more difficult with the upcoming threat of costly Democratic oversight investigations and an uncertain political environment.

U.S. Trade Representative Robert Ligh-

thizer, a potential contender, said he was "entirely focused" on his current position. A person familiar with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's thinking but not authorized to speak publicly made clear he, too, is happy in his current post.

Ayers' ascension and Kelly's departure looked like a done deal Friday night, according to multiple people in and close to the administration, with an announcement planned for Monday. Trump and Ayers had discussed the job for months, and the president had already been steering inquiries to the Pence staffer rather than Kelly.

These people, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive personnel matters.

But Trump jumped the gun Saturday, and Ayers re-evaluated his decision.

While a White House official said Ayers' decision was driven by a desire to return to Georgia to be closer to his family, people familiar with his thinking said he was also worried about scrutiny of his former political consulting business.

Roads still dangerous after storm hits southern US

Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — Several southern states hit hard by a wintry storm were gradually warming Tuesday, but forecasters warned that temperatures in many areas would plunge below freezing again Tuesday night. That will refreeze the melting snow, making some roads treacherous.

Scores of schools in Virginia and North Carolina were closed for a second day. Georgia also announced a late start for state government workers because of fears about ice on roads. The storm that blew in over the weekend was blamed for at least three deaths in North Carolina, along with numerous car crashes, power outages and canceled flights.

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper said Monday that the worst of the storm had

passed, but residents — particularly motorists — should keep watch for dangerous conditions.

The highway patrol already had responded to more than 670 collisions and nearly 1,600 calls for services since the storm began.

"We need to stay vigilant. We're not out of the woods yet," Cooper said Monday. "This storm dropped staggering amounts of snow, ice and rain across our state. A year's worth of snowfall or more fell in some places in little more than a day."

More than 20 inches fell in parts of western North Carolina.

A truck driver died Sunday after suffering what appeared to be a heart attack from shoveling out his rig that got stuck at the height of the storm along Interstate 77 in the central part of the state, Yadkin County

Emergency Services Director Keith Vestal said.

The state emergency operations center said one man died Sunday when a tree fell on him in Mecklenburg County, while an ailing woman died in Haywood County when her oxygen was cut off due to power outages.

In Charlotte, police shut down a street Monday after reports of ice falling from the Duke Energy Center. And an overturned truck full of pigs added to traffic delays in the western part of that state.

Still, the snow gave some people a chance for fun in places that don't normally see a lot of snow. In North Carolina's Durham County, where a foot fell in places Sunday, kids reveled in a day off from school as a second dusting of snow and sleet fell Monday.

Iran confirms ballistic missile test that US condemned

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran has confirmed a recent ballistic missile test that was condemned by the United States.

The semiofficial Fars news agency on Tuesday quoted Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh as saying the test was an "important one." Hajizadeh, who leads the Revolutionary

Guard's aerospace division, said the American outcry "indicates that the test was very important to them."

The U.S. seized on the missile test to urge European countries to follow its lead in restoring tough sanctions on Iran.

Under the 2015 nuclear accord, Iran was urged to cease its testing of ballistic mis-

siles, but the agreement does not forbid such tests.

President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the landmark agreement in May despite Iran's continued compliance. European nations have been working to salvage the agreement, which curbs Iran's uranium enrichment.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Ring lost in toilet found 9 years later

NJ SOMERS POINT — A southern New Jersey woman has her wedding ring back, nine years after she accidentally flushed it down her toilet.

Paula Stanton was sure the diamond-encrusted gold ring was lost forever after she noticed it wasn't on her finger while she was cleaning her bathroom.

Luckily, a member of Somers Point's public works department remembered Stanton mentioning the ring about three years ago.

Ted Gogol was doing maintenance work near a manhole about 400 feet from Stanton's house. He told the Press of Atlantic City he saw a shiny object sitting the mud. It turned out to be Stanton's ring, and after boiling it in peroxide and lemon juice she is wearing it again.

Rat found in school vending machine

FL DELRAY BEACH — Students at a Florida high school found an unwelcome surprise in a vending machine: a rat climbing the rows of packaged snacks and drinks.

Video of the rat shot by an 11th-grader quickly spread on social media among students at Atlantic Community High School in Delray Beach.

In the video aired by news station WPTV, the brown rat appears as large as a snack-size bag of chips.

A Palm Beach County Schools statement said the vending machine was quickly locked Tuesday to keep students from using it.

The district says the vending machine company was alerted and an exterminator was called to the school.

Mares donated to boost pony population

VA CHINCOTEAGUE — Three Chincoteague ponies have returned to their ancestral Virginia island to help boost the herd's population.

Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Co. spokeswoman Denise Bowden wrote in a Facebook post that this year has been one of the most difficult in terms of herd loss. The fire company manages the wild herd.

This month's additions to the herd are all mares. Oreo, Star and Treasure are genetically Chincoteague ponies, but the Chincoteague Pony Pedigree Database says Star was born in Texas.

Police probe theft of \$5K worth of wine

NH HOOKSETT — New Hampshire state police are investigating the theft of about \$5,000 worth of wine from a state liquor store over several weeks.

Police said the thefts happened at the Interstate 93 northbound store in Hooksett.

Police are requesting the public's assistance in identifying a woman who is a person of interest.

Dogs get snow boots at police department

SD RAPID CITY — A police dog in South Dakota is learning how to walk a beat in snow boots.

Video posted by the Rapid City police department shows Jary trying to adjust having the boots on its paws. The dog awkwardly lifts its legs while getting used to the new boots.

The department says it equips its officers for the chilly weather, "even the furry ones!"

Dumped pets create big problems for lake

TN KNOXVILLE — Workers in Knoxville have removed three truckloads of invasive weeds from a local lake, including aquarium grasses that officials believe were dumped there by residents.

The Knoxville News Sentinel reported the city has spent nearly \$760,000 cleaning up the one-acre lake in Fountain City Park. Efforts to clean the lake have been going on for more than 30 years.

First, the feces from abandoned pet ducks created a massive algae problem. Once the algae was under control, the invasive grasses took over.

David Hagerman, a stormwater engineer for the city, told the paper that people may intend to give their aquarium inhabitants a chance at life. But he says the reality is the animals have almost no chance of survival and the exotic plants overtake native vegetation.

Man accused of setting decor on fire

SC SUMMERVILLE — A South Carolina man is accused of setting a Summerville home and his neighbors' Christmas decor on fire.

News outlets reported Cameron Lewis Baun, 29, was arrested Friday and charged with arson. Summerville police said officers responded to reports of someone lighting several neighbors' personal property on fire.

Police said Baun was detained for setting fire to Christmas ornaments and igniting a decoration of a snowman at another home. Police said Summerville Fire Rescue also responded and fought a house fire believed to have been started by Baun.

A police report said Baun also is accused of breaking into a garage of another home and trying to set it on fire.

EMT loses license over driving drunk to a call

ME BATH — A Maine firefighter who pleaded guilty to driving under the influence while working as a paramedic has been sentenced to a 150-day license suspension.

The Bangor Daily News reported James Perry, 55, was also ordered to pay a \$500 fine during his sentencing.

Perry was responding to a suspected drowning in Bath in September as a paramedic for Mid Coast Hospital when police say they noticed signs of impairment.

Police arrested Perry, and court documents show his blood alcohol level was tested at 0.08 percent. Police later determined there was no drowning.

A spokeswoman for the hospital said Friday that Perry is no longer employed there.

Observation wheel to remain through June

OH CINCINNATI — The Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber said the large SkyStar observation wheel will remain in the city through June 2019.

Officials said the mobile observation wheel was supposed to be moved on Dec. 2. WCPO-TV reported an estimated 100,000 people have ridden the attraction since it first arrived in August.

SkyStar official Todd Schneider said the people of Cincinnati have been very welcoming, saying, "We're thrilled to stay another six months."

From wire reports

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Dallas' Jones credited for getting Cooper

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Jerry Jones is getting praised for a football move.

There might not be a better way to explain the impact of the oft-criticized owner and general manager's bold trade for Dallas, sending a 2019 first-round pick to Oakland for receiver Amari Cooper with the Cowboys fading fast in the NFC East race.

Cooper leads the NFL in yards receiving since joining the Cowboys, who have won five straight games to get to the brink of the division title and a home wild-card game.

With Cooper, Dak Prescott looks more like the 2016 NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year rather than a struggling quarterback. And Jones' name is coming up in broadcast booths, and as an off-the-wall choice for performer of the week in the NFL.

In other words, the primary object of ire for fans fed up with

nearly a quarter-century without a trip to the Super Bowl, or even an NFC championship game, is being viewed as someone who saved Dallas' season.

The Cowboys (8-5) can wrap up the NFC East with a win at Indianapolis (7-6) on Sunday.

"I think a big part of doing things with the desire to excel is to show them," Jones said after Cooper scored three touchdowns, including the winner in overtime of a 29-23 victory against Philadelphia that gave the Cowboys a two-game division lead with three to go. Dallas has the tiebreaker by virtue of a season sweep of the defending Super Bowl champs.

"I think that's a major motivation factor — to show them. I think the way sports and football, it just gives you a chance when people say, 'I don't like that move, that's not smart.' I like this stuff. As a matter of fact, I make my worst grades when I'm being praised."

There were plenty of second-guessers when Jones made the

move at 3-5, with conventional wisdom saying the Cowboys had problems beyond a missing playmaker at receiver in the first season without franchise TD catch leader Dez Bryant, dumped in a cost-cutting move.

Prescott was on that list of issues, mired in a 25-game stretch of mediocrity and numbers sharply lower than those from his sensational rookie season, when Dallas set a franchise record with an 11-game winning streak and had an NFC-best 13 victories.

And while Prescott had two interceptions and a lost fumble to help the Eagles stay in a game the Cowboys were dominating, the display he put on with Cooper in the last half of the fourth quarter and overtime was remarkable.

Touchdown throws of 28 and 75 yards in the fourth quarter were followed by a 15-yarder on the first possession of overtime, with Cooper grabbing a pass tipped by Philadelphia's

Rasul Douglas and cruising in from the 7.

"I knew he was good," Prescott said. "I knew he was going to get separation and get open and make great catches. But when you just see the run after catch and breaking tackles, and being that great of a player, I'm just thankful we got that trade."

Star running back Ezekiel Elliott is a beneficiary of Cooper's presence as well. The running lanes have been wider, and check-downs against defenses preoccupied with the former Alabama standout have been more frequent. Elliott had a career-high 12 catches against the Eagles.

"I didn't know we were going to get all that, honestly," said Elliott, who retook the NFL rushing lead with 1,262 yards. "But when I finally saw him in person, when I saw him catch the ball, I saw him run around and run after the catch, that's when I really realized he's truly special."

Blocked FG attempt helps Seahawks put away Vikings

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Bobby Wagner leaped over the line of scrimmage, swatted Dan Bailey's field-goal attempt and sparked the Seattle Seahawks to two late touchdowns.

Whether what Wagner did was entirely legal, he frankly didn't care.

"I'm not stressing about that. I made the play. They called what they called," Wagner said. "There's times in games where things happen all the time. I'm not stressing on it. It was a big block and we'll definitely take it. It was amazing."

Wagner's block midway through the fourth quarter was the catalyst in a 21-7 win over the Minnesota Vikings on Monday night that pushed Seattle to the brink of a playoff berth.

Chris Carson followed the blocked kick with a 2-yard TD run with 2:53 left, and Justin

Coleman capped off the Seahawks' fourth straight victory with a 29-yard fumble return for a touchdown 18 seconds later.

What was an ugly and mostly forgettable first three quarters turned into a Seattle party in the fourth as the Seahawks (8-5) moved to the brink of wrapping up a wild-card spot in the NFC. One win in Seattle's final three games — including matchups with lowly San Francisco and Arizona — should be enough to put the Seahawks into the postseason.

"It's really about the defense. I loved the way they played, they played so hard and so spirited," Seattle coach Pete Carroll said. "It was almost poetic after last week's game that Bobby would get to block the field goal and he pulled it off and did it. That was an incredible play."

Minnesota (6-6-1) twice had scoring chances in the fourth

quarter when it was still a one-score game but was turned away each time. Minnesota's chances of winning the NFC North took a major hit with its second straight loss, but the Vikings still hold the No. 6 spot in the NFC.

"Part of it is being better on third downs. We haven't really done a good job there. Part of it is being better in the red zone," Vikings coach Mike Zimmer said. "We had the ball on the 2-yard line and didn't score."

But much of the conversation centered on Wagner's block of Bailey's 47-yard attempt with 5:38 left and whether it was entirely legal. Wagner's jump through a gap in Minnesota's offensive line was fine, but it appeared he used his teammates to gain leverage, which allowed him to come through and block the kick. A flag was initially thrown but was picked up by the officials.

Wagner said he attempted it four times in practice without a problem but acknowledged it could be tough to pull off the play during the fourth quarter of a tight game.

"When I did it in practice I was pretty fresh," Wagner said.

Zimmer said he asked for an explanation of what happened but wasn't given one. He was told he couldn't challenge.

"Quite honestly, I didn't see what happened. I was told what happened," Zimmer said.

Seattle took possession and Russell Wilson immediately scrambled 40 yards deep into Minnesota territory. Five plays later, Carson scored and Seattle finally had a cushion. Two plays after that, Jacob Martin sacked Minnesota's Kirk Cousins and the ball popped to Coleman, who weaved his way for the clinching touchdown.

CFP teams dominate All-America Team

Associated Press

The College Football Playoff semifinalists combined to place 10 players on The Associated Press All-America first team, including a high of four from No. 1 Alabama.

The Crimson Tide had six players chosen to the three All-America teams, more than any other school. No. 2 Clemson has three first-teamers, No. 4 Oklahoma has two All-Americans — including quarterback and Heisman Trophy winner Kyler Murray — and No. 3 Notre Dame had one.

The Tide and Sooners meet in the Orange Bowl on Dec. 29 and the Tigers play the Fighting Irish at the Cotton Bowl that day. The winners meet in the College Football Playoff national championship game Jan. 7 at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, Calif.

The playoff teams combined for 17 overall selections on the teams chosen by a panel of AP poll voters and released Monday.

The Tide placed two players

on each side of the ball, with Outland Trophy winner Quinnen Williams highlighting the defense. Receiver Jerry Jeudy, offensive tackle Jonah Williams and safety Deionte Thompson also made the first team while Tua Tagovailoa was the second-team quarterback.

Tagovailoa finished second behind Murray in the Heisman voting on Saturday. Ohio State's Dwayne Haskins was the third-team quarterback after finishing third in the Heisman voting.

FIRST TEAM OFFENSE

Quarterback — Kyler Murray, junior, Oklahoma

Running backs — Jonathan Taylor, sophomore, Wisconsin; Darrell Henderson, junior, Memphis

Tackles — Jonah Williams, junior, Alabama; Mitch Hyatt, senior, Clemson

Guards — Beau Benzschawel, senior, Wisconsin; Bunchy Stallings, senior, Kentucky

Center — Garrett Bradbury, senior, North Carolina State

Tight end — Jace Sternberger, junior, Texas A&M

Wide receivers — Jerry Jeudy, sophomore, Alabama; Marquise Brown, junior, Oklahoma

All-purpose player — Rondale Moore, freshman, Purdue

Kicker — Andre Szmyt, freshman, Syracuse

DEFENSE

Ends — Clelin Ferrell, junior, Clem-

son; Sutton Smith, junior, Northern Illinois

Tackles — Quinnen Williams, junior, Alabama; Christian Wilkins, senior, Clemson

Linebackers — Josh Allen, senior, Kentucky; Devin White, junior, LSU; Ben Burr-Kirven, senior, Washington

Cornerbacks — Deandre Baker, senior, Georgia; Julian Love, junior, Notre Dame

Safeties — Grant Delpit, sophomore, LSU; Deionte Thompson, junior, Alabama

Punter — Braden Mann, junior, Texas A&M

SECOND TEAM OFFENSE

Quarterback — Tua Tagovailoa, sophomore, Alabama

Running backs — Travis Etienne, sophomore, Clemson; Trayveon Williams, junior, Texas A&M

Tackles — Dalton Risner, senior, Kansas State; Andrew Thomas, sophomore, Georgia

Guards — Dru Samia, senior, Oklahoma; Michael Dieter, senior, Wisconsin

Center — Ross Pierschbacher, senior, Alabama

Tight end — T.J. Hockenson, sophomore, Iowa

Wide receivers — Tylan Wallace, sophomore, Oklahoma State; Andy Isabella, senior, Massachusetts

All-purpose player — Greg Dortch, sophomore, Wake Forest

Kicker — Cole Tracy, senior, LSU

DEFENSE

Ends — Montez Sweat, senior, Mississippi State; Jachai Polite, junior, Florida

Tackles — Jerry Tillery, senior, Notre Dame; Gerald Willis III, senior, Miami

Linebackers — Devin Bush, junior, Michigan; David Long Jr., junior, West Virginia; Joe Dineen, senior, Kansas

Cornerbacks — Greedy Williams,

sophomore, LSU; Byron Murphy, sophomore, Washington

Safeties — Taylor Rapp, junior, Washington; Amani Hooker, junior, Iowa

Punter — Mitch Wishnowsky, senior, Utah

THIRD TEAM OFFENSE

Quarterback — Dwayne Haskins, sophomore, Ohio State

Running backs — Benny Snell, junior, Kentucky; Eno Benjamin, sophomore, Arizona State

Tackles — Andre Dillard, senior, Washington State; Cody Ford, junior, Oklahoma

Guards — Terrone Prescod, senior, North Carolina State; Chris Lindstrom, senior, Boston College

Center — Michael Jordan, junior, Ohio State

Tight end — Noah Fant, junior, Iowa

Wide receivers — A.J. Brown, junior, Mississippi; David Sills V, senior, West Virginia

All-purpose player — J.J. Taylor, sophomore, Arizona

Kicker — Matt Gay, senior, Utah

DEFENSE

Ends — Chase Winovich, senior, Michigan; Jaylon Ferguson, senior, Louisiana Tech

Tackles — Jeffery Simmons, junior, Mississippi State; Ed Oliver, junior, Houston

Linebackers — Paddy Fisher, sophomore, Northwestern; David Woodward, sophomore, Utah State; Te'Von Coney, senior, Notre Dame

Cornerbacks — Hamp Cheevers, junior, Boston College; Lavert Hill, junior, Michigan

Safeties — Andre Cisco, freshman, Syracuse; Jonathan Abram, senior, Mississippi State

Punter — James Smith, sophomore, Cincinnati

Teams start to show cards at baseball winter meetings

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Deal the New York Yankees in for the Manny Machado tournament. And J.T. Realmuto? A lot of teams already are sitting at that table.

The baseball winter meetings began in earnest along the Vegas Strip on Monday, and clubs slowly started to show their cards.

Noah Syndergaard and Zack Wheeler are attracting trade interest, the Mets say. Corey Kluber and Madison Bumgarner keep popping up in swap speculation. But still no indication of where hometown slugger Bryce Harper might go.

A couple of moves got done — speedy outfielder Billy Hamilton sprinted to the Kansas City Royals, pitcher Tyson Ross went to Detroit.

The Yankees, as usual, were on the prowl.

Always ramping up the rivalry with the champion Boston Red Sox, the Yankees linked themselves to Machado. General manager Brian Cashman said he's been talking to the infielder's agent.

"So we are definitely focused in the marketplace on those areas of need and he, obviously, is available and solves that area of need," Cashman said. "So, not going to deny we've had a conversation. Or two."

Whether that's substance or merely a smoke screen, the Yankees could use help with shortstop Didi Gregorius expected to miss at least half of next season while recovering from Tommy John surgery.

Realmuto, the prized Miami catcher, is highly coveted.

"I think a lot of teams are taking to the Marlins. I would anticipate his market picking up while we're down here,"

new Mets GM Brodie Van Wagenen said.

Not so fast, countered Miami manager Don Mattingly.

"I look at him as part of our club," he said.

"He knows how much we like him and what we think about him. He's handling everything fine. J.T.'s a tough kid. He's a big-time leader. It's why we love him. It's why a lot of teams love him," he said.

Maybe Realmuto gets traded before the meetings end Thursday, maybe not. In the meantime, don't expect any movement on contentious MLB-wide issues.

Also in play: **Now hear this:** Phillies manager Gabe Kapler plans to be publicly critical of his players more in his second season after his team's late fade.

Philadelphia led the NL East in early August, then went 16-

33 and wound up with its sixth straight losing season.

"One thing that I can do immediately that I think will really resonate well with our fans in Philadelphia is ... as much as I illuminate some of the things we're doing very well, I can be a little more assertive in illuminating the things that we need to work on. And I'm committed to taking that step," he said.

A new pitch: The Seattle Mariners made an interesting move, claiming infielder Kaleb Cowart on waivers from the Los Angeles Angels and also announcing him as a right-handed pitcher. A prep star on the mound and at the plate, the 26-year-old Cowart has not pitched since the Angels drafted in the first round in 2010. He hit .134 with 10 RBIs in 47 games with Los Angeles last season.

NBA roundup

Curry leads Warriors past Timberwolves

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Steve Kerr long ago ran out of superlatives to describe Stephen Curry.

The Warriors coach isn't even trying anymore, not with the way his All-Star point guard is playing since coming back from a groin injury.

Curry had 38 points, seven rebounds and six assists, and Golden State beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 116-108 on Monday night in Draymond Green's return to the Warriors' lineup.

Klay Thompson scored 26 points and Kevin Durant had 22 as Golden State prepared for Wednesday's showdown with Toronto by earning its fourth straight win.

"He's good at basketball," Kerr deadpanned. "Nothing he does surprises me. Even on a night he gets off to a slow start he finds a way."

76ers 116, Pistons 102: Joel Embiid scored 24 points in his return to host Philadelphia's lineup after a one-game absence.

Jimmy Butler, who had 38 points against Detroit on Friday, exited in the first half with a strained groin and did not return.

Lakers 108, Heat 105: LeBron James scored 28 points and host Los Angeles survived Dwyane Wade's 15-point performance in the second half of the superstars' probable final on-court meeting.

The game appropriately ended with James guarding Wade, who missed a difficult three-point attempt in the waning seconds. After the buzzer sounded, they shared a hug and a chat to close perhaps the final joint chapter of two careers that have intersected repeatedly since they entered the NBA together in 2003.

Wade intends to retire after this season, and Staples Center sent him out of Los Angeles in style with multiple standing ovations and a tribute video in the first quarter.

Thunder 122, Jazz 113: Paul George scored 31 points and Dennis Schroder added 23, helping host Oklahoma City to the win.

Steven Adams had 22 points for the Thunder in the first meeting between the teams since the Jazz won in the first round of last season's playoffs.

Celtics 113, Pelicans 100: Marcus Morris Sr. had a season-high 31 points, making three quick three-pointers to start the second half, and Jay-

son Tatum scored 21 to lead depleted host Boston to its sixth straight victory.

With Kyrie Irving, Al Horford, Gordon Hayward and Aaron Baynes all ill or injured, Jaylen Brown scored 19 points.

Pacers 109, Wizards 101: Myles Turner had 26 points, 12 rebounds and five blocks, and host Indiana held on for its season-high fourth straight victory.

Bojan Bogdanovic scored 22 points for the Pacers, who nearly blew a 25-point lead. Darren Collison had 10 points and 17 assists.

Nuggets 105, Grizzlies 99: Nikola Jokic had 27 points and 12 rebounds for host Denver, and reserve Monte Morris tied a career high with 20 points.

Morris gave the Nuggets the lead for good on a three-pointer with 5:22 remaining. Juancho Hernangomez followed with another three-pointer to give Denver some separation in a tightly contested game that featured 15 lead changes.

Clippers 123, Suns 119 (OT): Tobias Harris scored 33 points and Patrick Beverley made two free throws with 33.3 seconds left in overtime, sending Los Angeles to the road win.

Avery Bradley sealed the

Clippers' 17th victory of the season with a pair of free throws with 1.6 seconds left.

Kings 108, Bulls 89: De'Aaron Fox scored 23 of his 25 points in the second half, helping visiting Sacramento rally for the win.

Fox went 8-for-11 from the field after missing all five of his shots in the first half. Bogdan Bogdanovic and Marvin Bagley III added 16 points apiece as Sacramento closed out a 3-1 road trip.

Bucks 108, Cavaliers 92: Eric Bledsoe had 20 points and 12 rebounds, and Milwaukee made 15 three-pointers in the home win.

Malcolm Brogdon scored 18 points on 8-for-12 shooting for the Bucks, who rested Giannis Antetokounmpo on the second night of back-to-back games. He was ruled out about an hour before the game with neck soreness.

Mavericks 101, Magic 76: Harrison Barnes scored 19 points, rookie Jalen Brunson added a career-high 17 and host Dallas cruised to the win.

Brunson got the start at point guard in place of injured Dennis Smith Jr. and scored in double figures for the third straight game.

NHL roundup

Stamkos scores hat trick, earns 700th point of career

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Steven Stamkos and the Tampa Bay Lightning are piling up points.

Stamkos had three goals to become the first player from the 2008 draft to reach 700 points, and the NHL-leading Lightning won their seventh consecutive game by beating the New York Rangers 6-3 on Monday night.

"Stammer is finding his groove," Tampa Bay coach Jon

Cooper said.

Stamkos scored power-play goals that tied the game in the first and second periods. The center completed his ninth hat trick and first since Oct. 13, 2014 against Montreal from the slot at 10:41 of the third.

"I knew it had been a while," Stamkos said with a laugh. "I don't know the exact date. I don't want to hear it."

The Lightning star, coming off a two-goal, two-assist outing

in Saturday night's 7-1 win over the Colorado Avalanche, has 701 points in 696 career games. He joins Martin St. Louis (953) and Vincent Lecavalier (874) as the only Tampa Bay players reaching the 700-point milestone.

Penguins 2, Islanders 1 (SO): Jake Guentzel scored the decisive goal in the shootout to lift visiting Pittsburgh over New York.

Guentzel also assisted on De-

rick Brassard's tying goal in the third period.

Red Wings 3, Kings 1: Jimmy Howard made a season-high 42 saves and Dylan Larkin scored his 12th goal of the season to lift host Detroit past Los Angeles.

Sharks 5, Devils 2: Timo Meier scored twice, Joe Pavelski added his 20th goal of the season and host San Jose won for the fourth time in five games.