

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Call to action is issued amid troop misconduct allegations

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The head of U.S. special operations forces has issued a call to action after a series of high-profile instances of misconduct revealed a damaged culture of discipline in the ranks.

“Left unchecked, an eroded values system threatens to erode the trust of our fellow comrades, our senior leaders, and ultimately the American people,” U.S. Special Operations Command boss Gen. Tony Thomas wrote in a message to the force Wednesday.

The message, which calls for “rapid and focused action to begin to identify and address the underlying causes,” comes after a series of incidents that

has raised alarms within the military.

Among the cases that have garnered headlines: four special operations troops charged in connection with the 2017 murder of a Green Beret while on assignment in Mali, and a SEAL standing trial on charges he murdered an Islamic State prisoner in Iraq. The ambush of a special operations team in Niger, which led to the deaths of four soldiers, also resulted in reprimands of two senior officers involved in mission planning.

“Correcting this trend will take committed leadership at all levels of our command and personal moral courage by all,” Thomas wrote.

On Jan. 1, SOCOM will

launch a 90-day internal review, which will require officers O-5 and above to get more involved with their troops, according to Thomas’ message, which was first reported on by Newsweek. The review also includes a look at instruction, culture, command climate surveys and research into behavioral health issues associated with operations.

Thomas said the trend of misconduct cuts across all sectors of the special operations community.

“No component or command has escaped this trend and all of us will feel the disproportionate and negative impacts of these incidents on our missions and people,” Thomas wrote.

## New Africa policy aims to counter Russia, China

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY  
AND JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Africa is a strategic battleground where countering China and Russia’s growing influence will be the top U.S. priority, national security adviser John Bolton said Thursday as he unveiled the Trump administration’s new approach on the continent.

“America’s vision for the region is one of independence, self-reliance and growth — not dependency, domination and debt,” Bolton said during a speech at The Heritage Foundation, a right-leaning think tank.

Bolton said the new strategy in Africa focuses on furthering American interests and priorities in the continent by encouraging economic opportunities with partner nations, the effective use of U.S. aid and peacekeeping efforts, and countering extremist groups such as Islamic State and al-Qaida by supporting regional government efforts to improve security and cooperation.

Echoing the Department of Defense’s National Defense Strategy in naming China and Russia as “great power competitors,” Bolton said those countries are focusing on Africa to expand their influence on the continent politically and financially as a way to “gain a competitive advantage over the United States.”

While much of the focus of the U.S. in Africa has centered recently on countering violent extremism and coordinating with local forces in impoverished countries such as Chad and Niger, Beijing has invested billions to finance mining ventures, telecommunication projects and infrastructure deals.

## Report: Chinese expert says ‘ram’ US ships

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS  
*Stars and Stripes*

A Chinese military expert has suggested his nation’s navy should ram the next U.S. warship to sail through waters claimed by China, according to a report by the state-run newspaper Global Times.

According to the newspaper, Dai Xu, president of China’s Institute of Marine Safety and Cooperation, on Saturday said: “If the US warships break into Chinese waters again, I suggest that two warships should be sent: one to stop it, and another one to ram it.”

Dai spoke at a conference held by the Global Times in Beijing, where officials and experts addressed “key topics of 2018

and their predications for 2019,” according to the article.

The U.S. regularly sends vessels on freedom-of-navigation missions in the South and East China seas claimed by China but recognized by most legal experts under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as international waters.

Dai’s suggestion follows two publicized U.S. patrols into contested waters. The first resulted in a near-miss confrontation in September with a Chinese warship close to the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.

During that incident Sept. 30, the Chinese vessel made what Navy officials called an “unsafe and unprofessional” move by sailing within 45 yards of the USS Decatur, which was con-

ducting a freedom-of-navigation operation. The Decatur veered away to avoid a collision.

On Nov. 26, the guided-missile cruiser USS Chancellorsville sailed around the Paracel Islands, also in the South China Sea and claimed by China, according to officials of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. The Navy reported nothing untoward occurred on that patrol.

The Chancellorsville — as part of the USS Ronald Reagan carrier strike group — the week prior to the patrol had made a port call in Hong Kong, where the USS Wasp was denied a visit in October. China denied the Wasp entry after the two countries in September imposed another round of tariffs on each other’s imports.

## Marines on Okinawa get jungle training, just in case

By CARLOS M. VAZQUEZ II  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP GONSALVES, Okinawa — Marines assigned to the 9th Engineering Support Battalion were exposed to a different type of battlefield setting than the U.S. has been involved in for the past quarter-century during recent drills at Okinawa's Jungle Warfare Training Center.

Engineers of four specialized companies camped out in the jungle and participated in a weeklong exercise that began Dec. 2 and consisted of rappelling steep mountain terrain, patrolling, land navigation, rope work and other basic-to-intermediate jungle environment skills.

"We are here to learn the basics so that when we are called upon to operate across the Indo-Pacific area of operations, we are able to better accomplish our mission," Bravo Company commander Capt. Felipe Bayona told Stars and Stripes during the exercise. "If you are not exposed at least a little bit to the environment that we are going to be operating in, then it will create extra friction and make it difficult to operate downrange."

Conflicts in the past 17 years have occurred mostly in desert terrain, Bayona said. Being on Okinawa allows him and his

team to practice in a new arena to meet and overcome different challenges they are not used to enduring. The training consisted of 165 Marines within the battalion, all with various job positions, practicing their skill-sets and stepping outside their comfort zones.

"I've never done rappelling; I didn't get a chance to do it in boot camp," said Lance Cpl. Cesar Gonzalez. "For it being my first time, I'm a bit nervous but I'm excited about it and it looks fun."

Gonzalez, who has been a Marine for 19 months, grew up in San Antonio. The Jungle Warfare Training Center's vastly different environment adds another dimension to his experience, he said.

"This place right here allows us to focus solely on provisional infantry skills," said battalion commanding officer Lt. Col. Soulyamma Pharathikoune. "Here they get motivated again and [experience] something they normally don't get a chance to do."

The 9th Engineer Support Battalion provides expeditionary engineering support to the Marine Air Ground Task Force, including mobility, survivability, tactical utilities, fuel storage, bulk water production and explosive ordnance disposal, according to the Marines' official website.

## US warns Turkey over plans in Syria

*Los Angeles Times*

BEIRUT — Turkey's plans to launch a military operation against U.S.-backed Kurdish fighters in northern Syria "within a matter of days" prompted warnings from the Pentagon and State Department on Wednesday.

Washington backs the Kurds with thousands of servicemembers, special forces and contractors who maintain a presence east of the Euphrates River, while Turkey and its coalition of Syrian rebels have mainly stayed to the west.

Turkey will target the east to "save the area from the separatist terrorist movement," President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, using his routine term for Kurdish militias.

"Our target is never American soldiers, but members of the terrorist organization operating in the region. This is especially emphasized," Erdogan said in a televised speech. "This step will allow for the path to a political solution to be opened and for healthier cooperation with the U.S."

Cmdr. Sean Robertson, a Pentagon spokesman, said such a move would be "unacceptable" and would undermine

shared interests in the border area.

"Unilateral military action into northeast Syria by any party, particularly as U.S. personnel may be present or in the vicinity, is of grave concern," Robertson said Wednesday.

Turkey has long protested Washington's support of the People's Protection Units, Kurdish militias also known as YPG. Turkey views the YPG as an extension of the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party, which has fought a decadeslong guerrilla war against Turkey.

Washington's support of the YPG has enabled its fighters to beat back the militant group Islamic State from much of its territory in northeastern Syria.

Since 2016, Erdogan has launched two operations to stop the Kurds from establishing what he called "a terror corridor" along the 511-mile Syrian-Turkish border. Working with Syrian rebels as his proxy, he has secured much of Syria's north. But fears of armed clashes between Turkish troops and what the Pentagon says are approximately 2,000 servicemembers in Syria had so far stayed Erdogan's hand from attacking east of the Euphrates.

## Future USS Lyndon B. Johnson is launched in Maine

By CHRISTIAN LOPEZ  
*Stars and Stripes*

The third and final Zumwalt-class destroyer was launched from General Dynamics Bath Iron Works in Maine, the Navy announced this week.

The destroyer, scheduled to be christened the USS Lyndon B. Johnson next year, now begins its final outfitting at the Maine shipyard.

The 610-foot-long ship, launched Sunday, has a stealth design, state-of-the-art electric

propulsion system and wave-piercing tumblehome hull to help the Navy evolve with new systems and missions, according to a Navy statement Tuesday.

"With the first two ships of the class underway, we are excited to continue the next phase of construction of the future Lyndon B. Johnson," said Capt. Kevin Smith, DDG 1000 program manager for Program Executive Office Ships.

The USS Zumwalt, commis-

sioned in October 2016, is the first and lead ship in the Zumwalt class. The Johnson and its sister ships, the Zumwalt and the soon-to-be christened USS Michael Monsoor, are outfitted with the most advanced warfighting technology and weaponry available, which allow the Navy to perform sea control, power projection, deterrence, and command and control missions, the statement said.

"The crew of Lyndon B. Johnson looks forward to bringing

this great warship honoring our 36th president to life, and we're proud to have the opportunity to be present for this important step in the ship's construction," said Capt. Jeremy Gray, chosen to command the Johnson.

On Saturday, the Monsoor finally reached its homeport in San Diego. During acceptance trials in July, the main turbine engine needed to be replaced following damage to its turbine blades, according to U.S. Naval Institute News.

# Trump, top Dems on Hill dig in on fight over border-wall funding

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders are digging in for a fight over government funding after Tuesday's combative White House meeting with President Donald Trump that seemed to raise the likelihood of a partial government shutdown.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said Trump was holding parts of the government "hostage to a petty campaign pledge" to build a border wall with Mexico in order to "fire up" his political base.

Republican leaders, meanwhile, said they have the votes in the House to approve Trump's request for \$5 billion for the southern border wall in a must-pass spending bill — but weren't sure they wanted to bring it up with no assurance that the plan could get the necessary 60 votes in the Senate.

The burden "is on the Senate to negotiate what they can get with 60 votes," said Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., a member of House leadership and a key vote counter.

"It is my hope and it's my thought that the Senate should work this thing out," McHenry said.

That appeared unlikely Wednesday, as Democrats reiterated their opposition to spending more than \$1.6 billion on border security and Republicans urged Trump to remain steadfast.

"This is a fight we're going to have. He needs to dig in and not give in," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a key Trump ally.

Sen. John Kennedy, R-La., said House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi appeared to be calling the shots for Democrats, "and she's not going to make any concessions because she wants to be the next speaker."

The funding fight is some-

thing leaders of both parties had hoped to avoid as Congress seeks to wrap up its work for the year and adjourn for the holidays. But Trump, who for months had suggested he'd be willing to force a shutdown over wall funding, dashed hopes for a quick resolution on Tuesday, sparring with Pelosi and Schumer during an extraordinary Oval Office meeting that he made sure played out in front of television cameras.

Trump told the Democrats he will be "proud to shut down the government" in the name of border security, declaring: "I will take the mantle. I will be the one to shut it down."

Schumer said the American people will "suffer needlessly" if Trump follows through on his threat to shut down parts of the government as of Dec. 21 unless he receives the \$5 billion he is demanding.

## First lady flies in Osprey on visit to carrier

Associated Press

HAMPTON, Va. — Melania Trump made history Wednesday by flying in a V-22 Osprey aircraft and onto the deck of an aircraft carrier.

The White House says it's the first time a first lady has flown in an Osprey. The tiltrotor aircraft takes off and lands vertically.

Trump flew from Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling in Washington to Joint Base Langley-Eustis in Hampton, Va., and onto the deck of the USS George H.W. Bush and back. She later tweeted about her "incredible flight" and visit with servicemembers.

In Virginia, Trump checked out the F-22 Raptor stealth fighter jet and addressed servicemembers, noting that many had recently returned from deployment. Some had responded to such natural disasters as Hurricane Michael, which devastated some Florida Panhandle communities.

"I'm honored to be able to say welcome home and thank you for answering the call of duty," she said. "I have said this before, but it's worth repeating. We know that we are free because you're brave. And I speak on behalf of my husband when I tell you we are forever grateful for your service."

The first lady exchanged high-fives with elementary schoolchildren and posed for selfies with some of those in military garb. She also spent time with the crew aboard the USS George H.W. Bush and toured part of the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier named after the former president, who died in November.

In an interview with Fox News Channel's Sean Hannity aboard the carrier, Mrs. Trump said the hardest part of being first lady was dealing with "the opportunists who are using my name or my family name to advance themselves — from comedians, to journalists, to performers, book writers."

## Pelosi agrees to limit speaker tenure if voted in

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Rep. Nancy Pelosi all but ensured that she will become House speaker next month, quelling a revolt by disgruntled younger Democrats by agreeing to limit her tenure to no more than four additional years in the chamber's top post.

Within moments of announcing Wednesday she would restrict her time in the job, seven of her critics distributed a statement promising to back the California Democrat. Democrats widely agreed that the pledge meant Pelosi had clinched a comeback to the post she held from 2007 until January 2011, the last time her party ran the House and the first time the speaker was a woman.

Wednesday's accord gives Pelosi a clear path to becoming

the most powerful Democrat in government and a leading role in confronting President Donald Trump during the upcoming 2020 presidential and congressional campaigns. It moves a 78-year-old white woman to the cusp of steering next year's diverse crop of House Democrats, with its large number of female, minority and younger members.

The agreement also ends what's been a distracting, harsh leadership fight among Democrats that has been waged since Election Day, when they gained at least 39 seats and grabbed House control for the next Congress. It was their biggest gain of House seats since the 1974 post-Watergate election.

Democrats have been hoping to train public attention on their 2019 agenda focusing on

health care, jobs and wages, and building infrastructure projects. They also envision investigations of Trump, his 2016 presidential campaign and his administration.

To line up support, Pelosi initially resorted to full-court lobbying by congressional allies, outside Democratic luminaries, and liberal and labor organizations. She cut deals with individual lawmakers for committee assignments and roles leading legislative efforts.

But in the end, she had to make concessions about her tenure to make sure she'll win a majority — likely 218 votes — when the new House convenes Jan. 3. Democrats are likely to have 235 seats, meaning she could spare only 17 defections and still prevail if, as expected, Republicans all oppose her.

# Police seek suspect in Strasbourg attack

Associated Press

STRASBOURG, France — French security forces are trying to catch the suspected Strasbourg gunman dead or alive Thursday, as the city in eastern France mourned with flowers and lit candles left at the site of the attack near its famous Christmas market.

More than 700 officers are involved in the manhunt for Cherif Chekatt, 29, who has a long criminal record and had been flagged for extremism, government spokesman Benjamin Griveaux told CNews television.

Asked about instructions given to police forces searching for Chekatt, Griveaux said the focus was on catching the suspect “as soon as possible,” no matter whether he was dead or alive, to “put an end to the manhunt.”

Chekatt allegedly shouted “God is great!” in Arabic and sprayed gunfire during Tuesday’s rampage near Strasbourg’s Christmas market. Local authorities increased Thursday the death toll to three. The attack wounded 13 others, including five in serious condition, the prefecture of the

Strasbourg region said.

Prosecutors have opened a terror investigation into the attack.

Police have distributed a photo of Chekatt, who was wounded in an exchange of fire with security forces, with the warning: “Individual dangerous, above all do not intervene.”

France raised its three-stage threat index to the highest level and deployed 1,800 additional soldiers across France to help patrol streets and secure crowded events.

The usually busy streets of Strasbourg were eerily empty on Thursday morning, with a heavy police and military presence. The Christmas market was closed at least through Thursday, authorities said.

French authorities said that the suspect, born in Strasbourg, had run-ins with police starting at age 10 and his first conviction was at age 13.

Chekatt had been convicted 27 times, mostly in France but also in Switzerland and Germany, for crimes including armed robbery. He had been flagged for extremism and was on a watch list.

# Air Force base secretary admits faking overtime

The Virginian-Pilot

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. — A former employee at Langley Air Force Base admitted Wednesday that she bilked the federal government out of \$1.46 million — mainly by faking the amount of overtime she worked over 17 years.

Michelle M. Holt, 52, was a civilian secretary at the base, where she worked in the communications support squadron of Air Combat Command.

She pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Newport News to felony charges that she undertook a long-running effort to boost her own pay.

Between December 2001 and July 2018, Holt falsely claimed 42,847 overtime hours that she didn’t work, according to a statement of facts that Holt, her lawyer and prosecutors signed off on Wednesday as part of the plea deal.

The ruse began slowly at first.

In late 2001, Holt used a co-worker’s log-in information — without that co-worker’s knowledge — to get into a Department of Defense computerized pay database. She retroactively added 15 hours of overtime to her paycheck.

As time went on, Holt’s retroactive additions to her overtime “became a regular occur-

rence,” the statement said. She began to get bolder, particularly after 2008 — when her overtime pay began to double her regular salary.

In 2017, for example, Holt’s salary was \$51,324, but she took home \$119,585 in overtime pay.

In one two-week period, the statement said, she billed the Air Force for 137 overtime hours that she didn’t work. Though overtime was by far the bulk of the scheme, she also falsified holiday and sick pay.

Things began to unravel in June when the Department of Defense’s Inspector General’s Office found discrepancies between Holt’s pay and attendance records.

She appeared to get wind that an investigation was afoot. She first told investigators she took extra overtime for only a few months. But an investigator then showed Holt a spreadsheet of her overtime going back 10 years.

In Wednesday’s plea agreement, Holt admitted to both charges she faced — computer fraud and theft of government property. When she is sentenced March 13 by U.S. District Judge Raymond Jackson, she faces up to 15 years in prison, plus fines and forfeitures.

# Chocolate über alles: Road flooded by factory mishap

The Washington Post

It was an accident. It was a municipal headache. It was a Roald Dahl fan’s dream.

Just before 8 p.m. Monday, liquid chocolate began streaming out of the DreiMeister chocolate factory in Westonnen, a suburb of Werl, Germany.

A tank at the factory had overflowed, prompting a river of chocolate to breach the factory grounds and ooze onto Weststrasse, the nearest road.

Soon, the leaked liquid chocolate — about a ton in all — solidified in the crisp December

air, creating something of a magical carpet that blanketed Weststrasse.

“A ten-square-meter chocopancake formed,” the Werl fire department explained in a dramatic statement that warned chocolate lovers to “stay strong” before reading about the incident.

Comparisons to “Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory” were inevitable on social media, with one person tweeting, “Willy Wonka, that you?”

The Werl fire department said the road was closed for

about two hours and cleaned “with shovels and muscle power.”

“This was a traffic hazard, which made the use of the fire department necessary,” the department said.

Images of the cleanup effort showed firefighters using shovels, blow torches and hot water to remove the congealed and hardened chocolate — and appearing to throw it away in nearby bins.

The Werl fire department assured people that “despite the heartbreaking incident,

it is unlikely that a chocolate-free Christmas is imminent in Werl.”

DreiMeister chief executive Markus Luckey told the Germany newspaper Soester Anzeiger that it would have been “a catastrophe” had the spill happened closer to Christmas and that the chocolate factory would be reopened Wednesday.

It’s not the first time Europe has seen such a delicious mess. Earlier this year, about 12 tons of melted chocolate spilled across a highway in Poland after a tanker overturned.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Charges dropped in school chair tossing

**MI** ST. JOSEPH — A prosecutor has dropped charges of failing to report child abuse against two school officials in a case in which an art teacher threw a chair in his southwestern Michigan classroom, hitting and injuring an 11-year-old student.

Berrien County Prosecutor Michael Sepic announced Tuesday the decision comes after Benton Harbor Charter School Academy's governing body, Choice Schools Associates, took steps to educate those at its schools about reporting child abuse. The principal and assistant principal who were charged participated in the training.

The teacher, Thomas Barnes, was fired. He pleaded guilty in November to misdemeanor assault and received a 30-day suspended jail sentence, nine months of probation and 50 hours community service.

### After 14 years, woman gets \$3 from police

**NJ** MONMOUTH BEACH — Police in New Jersey have given \$3 to the person who found it 14 years ago.

Paige Woodie was 12 when she and a friend discovered the cash and turned it into a Monmouth Beach police officer in 2004.

Sgt. Jeff Godwin told the Asbury Park Press that people who turn in found money are able to claim it within a reasonable amount of time if no one comes forward. The cash turned up during an audit and police "thought it had been long enough."

Woodie said officers came to her home and asked if she could remember what she did in 2004. She couldn't think of

anything bad. That's when the officers turned over the \$3 in an evidence bag. She said half belongs to her friend.

### Paramedics debut armored ambulance

**ID** BOISE — Ada County Paramedics unveiled a brand-new vehicle to help the team in dangerous situations — a custom-made armored ambulance.

The ambulance, plated in black, bulletproof metal with the word "RESCUE" on the side, made its debut Monday.

The \$312,000 ambulance, delivered by the Department of Homeland Security, will accompany the Ada County Paramedics' Tactical Medical Team when they join SWAT teams in the field. It will offer paramedics a safe place to render aid to those injured and a place to store more medical equipment.

"We wish we didn't have to have this type of equipment but, unfortunately, in today's world we do," said Ada County Commissioner Jim Tibbs.

### Cold-stunned turtles get trip to the Keys

**FL** MARATHON — Officials said 32 cold-stunned Kemp's ridley sea turtles rescued off New England's coast have arrived in the Florida Keys to warm up at the Turtle Hospital.

A volunteer group of general aviation pilots, under the banner of "Turtles Fly Too," transported the reptiles Tuesday.

Hospital officials said several of the turtles suffer from compromised immune systems and pneumonia as a result of "cold stunning," a hypothermic reaction that occurs when turtles are exposed to cold water for prolonged periods.

### Club ostracized over membership rejection

**SC** CHARLESTON — A South Carolina rifle club's decision to deny membership to its first black candidate has cost it relationships with several local groups, including a long-favored charity.

The Post and Courier reported that Navy veteran and doctor Melvin Brown was the only one denied membership to the Charleston Rifle Club in October. The 13 accepted were white, sparking accusations of racism.

Porter-Gaud and College of Charleston bowling groups and the Kiwanis Club of Charleston have stopped using the club's facilities, and the March of Dimes announced Saturday it won't accept further club support. The rifle club's by-laws bequeath half its assets to the charity in the event of dissolution.

### Fort will restage 1776 Christmas riot

**NY** TICONDEROGA — The first Christmas at Fort Ticonderoga under the newly formed United States was a riot — literally.

Staff and volunteers at the upstate New York tourist attraction and museum will stage a re-enactment this weekend of what's known as the Christmas riot of 1776, when Pennsylvania soldiers attacked Massachusetts militiamen.

Curator Matthew Keagle said the Pennsylvanians derisively referred to as "buckskins" and the New Englanders didn't get along early in the American Revolution.

Tensions erupted into an all-out brawl the night of Dec. 25, 1776, when a Pennsylvania battalion attacked Massachusetts troops, pulling the "Yankees"

from their huts and beating them, and even firing off a few musket shots in their direction.

### Dogs avoid injury roaming on freeway

**AZ** PHOENIX — Authorities said a group of dogs narrowly avoided injury while roaming a Phoenix freeway during Monday morning traffic.

The Arizona Department of Transportation shared images on its Twitter account of six dogs walking in the southbound lanes of Interstate 17 near Grand Avenue around 9:45 a.m. The images also showed drivers stopping for them.

Authorities said the pups were on the roadway for about 10 minutes before Arizona Department of Public Safety troopers on motorcycles were able to usher them to safety.

### Mom's bail reduced in child shooting case

**NM** GALLUP — A judge on Wednesday reduced bail for the mother of an 8-month-old girl who police say was shot in the face at a New Mexico motel.

Following a hearing, New Mexico State District Judge Robert Baca decided to decrease the bond for Shayanne Nelson from \$50,000 to \$20,000.

Nelson, 18, was arrested after telling police she was in a Gallup motel shower with her boyfriend, Tyrell Bitsilly, 21, when her 3-year-old boy found a gun and accidentally shot the infant. Nelson said she believed the gun was left in the room by a prior occupant.

Nelson and Bitsilly are facing child abuse charges. Bitsilly also was charged with tampering with evidence. He remained held on \$70,000 bond.

From wire reports

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# Browns' Mayfield playing with confidence

Associated Press

BEREA, Ohio — As Baker Mayfield threw long passes to his wide receivers and short ones to backs before Sunday's game against Carolina, Browns interim coach Gregg Williams knew his rookie quarterback was going to have a good game.

It wasn't any sight.

It was a sound.

"You can hear the ball come out of the quarterback's hand with a 'sssssst' and you can hear how tight the ball was coming out of his hand," Williams said. "It was bringing a smile to my face when I saw him warm up and really the entire game he was zipping it."

Mayfield zipped it all day long, completing a 66-yard pass on Cleveland's first play and whipping several passes into tight coverage during a 26-20 victory that gave the Browns their fifth win and kept their faint playoff hopes flickering.

Mayfield's arm strength isn't

usually the first thing mentioned when discussing the No. 1 overall pick's top attributes. More often his accuracy, leadership and, of course, abundant confidence are brought up first. But Mayfield, whose "I woke up feeling dangerous" has become a catchphrase around Cleveland, has shown he can rear back and fire the ball with any quarterback.

After the Browns fell behind the Panthers 7-0, Mayfield quickly stripped Carolina of momentum by throwing a laser down the field — the ball traveled more than 60 yards — to receiver Breshad Perriman, who hauled in the deep pass to set up Cleveland's first TD.

The play exemplified Mayfield's confidence, and the trust he's built with Cleveland's coaching staff.

"That was a rocket and that was a long throw, and it is a long throw on the money," Williams said. "In practices, we have seen longer throws and we have seen even more accu-

rate throws that other people have not seen yet."

Mayfield showed off his arm — and accuracy — a little later with a 51-yard TD toss to receiver Jarvis Landry, who appeared to be well-covered on the play. Mayfield, though, squeezed his throw between two defenders, showing both fearlessness and faith.

"It was where it needed to be," Landry said. "The guy's back was turned. The corner that was coming from the outside was trying to squeeze it, and the ball literally went between both of them. It was a hell of a throw."

Mayfield is bringing the heat.

The Browns (5-7-1) have won three of four going into this week's game in Denver, and in those victories, he has completed 79 percent of his passes (54 of 68) for 712 yards with eight TDs and no interceptions. Mayfield has also shown remarkable resiliency by shaking off a three-pick performance in

the first half at Houston to pass for 351 yards in the second half while standing in the face of the Texans' tenacious pass rush led by J.J. Watt.

Williams has been cautious to heap too much praise on the 23-year-old, but lately he has gone out of his way to compliment his young QB.

Following Wednesday's practice, Williams said Mayfield's arm was "off the charts" in terms of its liveliness.

"He had a live day on Sunday, but (snaps fingers) came back today and it looked like it was even more live today," Williams said. "The first thing I thought was 'young'."

But beyond Mayfield's youth and the life in his high-velocity arm, Williams sees something special.

"The good quarterbacks, some of the times when some of us may judge a throw that, 'Wow, that was not a very good throw.' Why? Because it was on his back shoulder?" Williams said.

## QB Lawrence, RB Etienne power Clemson's offense

Associated Press

Trevor Lawrence and Travis Etienne are young, a bit raw and awfully talented.

Together, they anchor Clemson's high-octane offense and have helped the No. 2 Tigers get into the College Football Playoff. Now, Lawrence, a freshman quarterback, and Etienne are hunting a national title.

"We've had goals set out for the season, obviously, to win championships," Lawrence said. "We want more than just the ACC championship."

The duo — Etienne, a tailback, is the ACC player of the year and Lawrence was named ACC rookie of the year — have complemented each other during Clemson's 13-0 season. Several times the Tigers have leaned on one or the other to provide a spark.

In a September game against Syracuse, Lawrence was ineffective and had to leave the

contest with an injury in the second quarter as the Orange built a double-digit lead. It was Etienne who rallied Clemson with 203 yards and three touchdowns in a 27-23 victory.

When Etienne struggled to find running room at Boston College in November with just 78 yards, Lawrence threw for one score and ran for another to power the Tigers to a 27-7 victory.

Then in the ACC title game, Etienne set the tone en route to being named MVP when he went 75 yards on Clemson's first play in a 42-10 victory over Pitt for the Tigers' fourth consecutive league championship. Etienne finished with 156 yards rushing as Lawrence, despite a pair of touchdown throws to Tee Higgins, was off target much of the game.

Their teammates understand they'll need the best of both to win another national title.

Higgins had talked with Etienne several times about starting fast before the game against the Panthers.

"I told him, 'First play, take it to the crib.' That's exactly what he did," Higgins said.

It hasn't been a smooth journey for either of them.

Lawrence arrived at Clemson amid tremendous hype, the top quarterback prospect who had surpassed the Georgia state high school marks of ex-Tiger national championship passer Deshaun Watson. Four quarterbacks, including last year's starter who opened the first four games this season in Kelly Bryant, transferred when it became clear they would lose playing time to Lawrence.

For the freshman, it was difficult seeing teammates, friends and mentors go and knowing he couldn't let down the Tigers after they placed immense trust in his abilities.

"There were plenty of bumps," Lawrence said. "I'm just going to keep working hard and doing what I'm asked."

Etienne was one of Clemson's final recruiting gets in 2017, a gangly, happy-go-lucky — sometimes aloof — youngster who had plenty to learn about the college game.

Clemson running backs coach Tony Elliott, also co-offensive coordinator, has been at times frustrated, overjoyed and skeptical at Etienne's progress.

"It's taken a long time for him to get here," Elliott said.

A year ago, Etienne relied too much on his breakaway ability instead of patiently finding holes to extend runs, Elliott said. Etienne's vision and ability to read the line of scrimmage has vastly improved, his position coach said, leading to 1,463 yards and a Clemson single-season record 21 rushing touchdowns.

# Mariners land Encarnacion

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Slugger Edwin Encarnacion has been traded to Seattle and first baseman Carlos Santana has returned to the Indians in a three-team deal that also involved Tampa Bay.

The Rays got infielder Yandy Diaz and minor and minor league right-hander Cole Slusser from Cleveland. The Indians also acquired first baseman Jake Bauers.

The swap came Thursday at the close of the winter meetings.

On Wednesday, the revamped New York Mets bullpen added a very familiar face — longtime reliever Jeurys Familia.

Familia reached a free-agent deal with the team that traded him away last summer, a person with knowledge of the contract told The Associated Press late Wednesday night.

Familia agreed to a \$30 million deal over three years. The person spoke on condition of anonymity at the winter meetings because the team had not yet announced the move. Familia likely must pass a physical for the contract to be finalized.

The 29-year-old righty will join a Mets bullpen that recently added major league saves leader Edwin Diaz in a trade with Seattle that also netted longtime All-Star second baseman Robinson Cano, a move made by new general manager Brodie Van Wagenen.

Familia had spent his entire career with New York before being traded to Oakland last July. This move likely means Familia will slide back into a setup role, where he flourished as a rookie in 2014.

Familia was a combined 8-6 with 18 saves in 24 chances and a 3.13 ERA for the Mets and A's last season. He has 123 career saves for the Mets, who signed him at age 17.

Andrew Miller, Adam Ottavino and David Robertson are among the other relievers on the free-agent market. The Mets, looking to bounce back from consecutive losing seasons, are hoping for a quick

turnaround with Van Wagenen in charge.

Familia posted 43 saves in 2015 when the Mets made it to the World Series. He led the majors with a franchise-record 51 saves the following year and was an All-Star, again helping New York reach the playoffs.

Familia served a 15-game suspension at the start of 2017 for violating Major League Baseball's domestic violence policy. Later that year, he had a blood clot that required surgery and finished 2-2 with a 4.38 ERA and six saves in 26 games.

Last season, he was 4-4 with a 2.88 ERA and 17 saves in 21 chances with the Mets. He struck out 43 and walked 14 in 40 appearances covering 40<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> innings.

The Mets got two minor leaguers from Oakland for Familia, acquiring Triple-A righty Bobby Wahl and Class A third baseman Will Toffey, and \$1 million in international signing bonus pool allotment.

Working mostly as a setup man for A's closer Blake Treinen, Familia was 4-2 with one save and a 3.45 ERA in 30 games as Oakland earned an AL wild card.

Also on Wednesday, Charlie Morton joined Tampa Bay for a \$30 million, two-year deal after going 15-3 with Houston last season. First baseman Justin Bour headed to the Los Angeles Angels.

And in the majors' first swap of players with the first name of Tanner, the Washington Nationals sent Tanner Roark to Cincinnati for Tanner Rainey in a trade of right-handers.

Roark led the National League with 15 losses, but expected he would be part of a prime rotation that recently added All-Star Patrick Corbin to stars Max Scherzer and Stephen Strasburg.

"I felt like we would have a pretty good staff over there in D.C. but they thought otherwise and I don't know what their plans are," Roark said on a conference call.

Fans all over, meanwhile, waited to hear where the likes of free agents Bryce Harper

and Manny Machado and trade targets Corey Kluber and J.T. Realmuto might go.

The New York Yankees worked to re-sign lefty J.A. Happ but, as always, were on the lookout for bigger prizes.

"We're a fully operational Death Star," Yankees general manager Brian Cashman said.

Agent Scott Boras, meanwhile, said there are teams ready to move right now on Harper.

"Bryce is open to a lot of different venues, so it's really about what a lot of owners have said to him about their commitments and what they want to do long term," the prominent agent said.

The 26-year-old Harper, who lives in Las Vegas, had a career-high 100 RBIs while hitting 34 home runs and batting .249 last season for Washington.

"So, we're really at a point where you could be meetings away from a deal," Boras said. "And then again, you could be in the situation where it's just further meetings and conversation."

The session ended Thursday after the Rule 5 draft for players left off 40-man rosters. While some big trades got made at past gatherings — Giancarlo Stanton, Chris Sale — more and more the winter meetings are becoming a place where deals get set up for later.

Also on Thursday, a person familiar with the negotiations tells The Associated Press that reliever Joe Kelly has agreed to a \$25 million, three-year contract with the Los Angeles Dodgers.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal had not been announced.

A 30-year-old right-hander, Kelly was 4-2 with a 4.39 ERA and two saves in 73 games this year for the World Series champion Boston Red Sox. Kelly pitched in all five World Series games this year and did not allow a run, striking out 10 in six innings. He gave up one earned run in nine postseason appearances with 13 strikeouts and no walks.

## Top 25 roundup

# Houston survives LSU scare

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Galen Robinson Jr. heard the "LSU! LSU!" chants with Houston down 15 points in the second half.

"It really touched a nerve, so I was like, 'There's no way I'm quitting, no way we are losing this game.'" Robinson said. "That's the mindset that I had."

Robinson scored 18 points, Armoni Brooks added 13 — all in the second half — and No. 24 Houston overcame the big deficit to beat LSU 82-76 on Wednesday night.

Robinson was 7-for-15 from the field and had six assists and five rebounds, and Brooks added nine rebounds to help Houston (9-0) extend its home winning streak to 22 games. Cedrick Alley Jr. added 13 points, Fabian White Jr had 10.

Houston coach Kelvin Sampson said the Cougars' toughness in the second half was big, specifically rebounding where Houston got 11 offensive rebounds in the second half.

"We've worked so hard on rebounding missed shots on both ends at practice every day," Sampson said. "We missed 36 shots, and we had 18 offensive rebounds. That's 50 percent of your misses. It's just extra possessions, and eventually, you'll break a team's will by doing that, too."

Trailing by 15 with 19 minutes left, Houston outscored LSU 31-12 over the next 12 minutes to take a 63-62 lead. Robinson had eight points and Brooks seven during the run.

**"No. 11 Texas Tech 79, Northwestern State 44:** Jarrett Culver scored 15 points, Tariq Owens had 14 points and eight rebounds and the host Red Raiders ran out to a 43-point halftime lead.

Texas Tech (9-0) matched its best start since 2008-09, and all of the wins have been by double digits.

## NBA roundup

# Irving, Celtics outlast Wall, Wizards in OT

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Kyrie Irving scored Boston's last 12 points, including back-to-back three-pointers in the final 40 seconds of overtime to outduel John Wall in a point-guard showdown, and the Celtics extended their winning streak to seven games.

Irving finished with 38 points and seven assists. Marcus Morris added 27 points and nine rebounds for Boston, which played without Al Horford, Gordon Hayward and Jaylen Brown — its Nos. 4-6 leading scorers.

Wall returned for the Wizards after missing a game with an aching left heel and finished with 34 points with 13 assists. But his seven points in OT weren't enough to keep pace with fellow All-Star Irving.

**Raptors 113, Warriors 93:** Kyle Lowry had 23 points and 12 assists to lead a balanced offense while leading scorer

Kawhi Leonard sat out, Serge Ibaka added 20 points and visiting Toronto dominated Golden State to complete a season sweep.

Danny Green scored 15 points, Pascal Siakam had 13 and Fred VanVleet added 10 to help the Raptors improve to an NBA-best 23-7, matching the best start in franchise history.

They did it despite not having Leonard for a second consecutive night. Toronto's star forward has a sore right hip and was ruled out less than 30 minutes before tip-off.

**Pacers 113, Bucks 97:** Thaddeus Young had 25 points, 11 rebounds and four assists, and Myles Turner added 23 points to lead host Indiana to its fifth straight win.

Indiana pulled within a half-game of the Central Division-leading Bucks.

Eric Bledsoe scored 26 points and Malcolm Brogdon finished with 15 to lead Milwaukee. Giannis Antetokounmpo had a

season-low 12 points, grabbed 10 rebounds and dealt out seven assists after missing Monday's game at Cleveland with a sore neck.

Indiana's Victor Oladipo wound up with 12 points, 10 rebounds and six assists after missing 11 games with a sore right knee.

**Cavaliers 113, Knicks 106:** Jordan Clarkson scored 28 points and a basket by Rodney Hood in the fourth quarter gave host Cleveland a late lead that handed New York its fifth straight loss.

**Hornets 108, Pistons 107:** Jeremy Lamb hit a 22-foot jumper from the right wing with 0.3 seconds left, and host Charlotte rallied from a late 10-point deficit for a wild win.

**Nets 127, 76ers 124:** Spencer Dinwiddie scored a career-high 39 points off the bench and Allen Crabbe had 20 to lead visiting Brooklyn past Philadelphia.

**Grizzlies 92, Trail Blazers**

**83:** Mike Conley scored 23 points and keyed a fourth-quarter outburst as host Memphis snapped a two-game losing streak by beating Portland.

**Pelicans 118, Thunder 114:** Anthony Davis had 44 points and 18 rebounds, and inconsistent New Orleans narrowly held on to defeat visiting Oklahoma City.

**Mavericks 114, Hawks 107:** Harrison Barnes scored 25 points, Luka Doncic added 24 and Dallas extended its home winning streak to 11 games while ending a 10-game skid against Atlanta.

**Jazz 111, Heat 84:** At Salt Lake City, Donovan Mitchell scored 21 points and Derrick Favors had 17 as Utah romped over short-handed Miami.

**Kings 141, Timberwolves 130:** Nemanja Bjelica made four of his team's 19 three-pointers and finished 25 points, helping Sacramento beat visiting Minnesota.

## NHL roundup

# Surging Golden Knights win for 10th time in 13 games

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Tomas Nosek jumped on a loose puck to help the Vegas Golden Knights' open their trip with a victory.

Nosek scored the tiebreaking goal early in the third period and the surging Golden Knights beat the New York Islanders 3-2 on Wednesday night for their ninth win in 11 games.

Oscar Lindberg's shot from the top of the left circle was stopped by goalie Robin Lehner. However, as the puck lay at the right side, neither Lehner nor defenseman Thomas Hickey immediately went for it, and Nosek put it in for his third 3:32 into the third.

"I saw the puck was loose so I just tried to go under (Hickey's) stick, and I think I hit that

and the post and then put it in." Nosek said. "It's great to have a win like that on the road."

The play started with a turnover by defensemen Ryan Pullock in the corner and Vegas' Ryan Carpenter got the puck to Lindberg.

"It was a quick turnover and Lindy did a good job getting open and he got a good, quick shot, maybe surprised the goalie," Carpenter said. "And then Nosek did a good job outworking that guy and winning the battle in front."

Jonathan Marchessault and William Karlsson also scored for the Golden Knights, who are 10-3-1 at home but improved to 8-11-0 on the road in the opener of a four-game trip. Marc-Andre Fleury, who made his 11th straight start, stopped

23 shots to take over the NHL victory lead with 18.

Anthony Beauvillier and Adam Pelech scored for New York. The Islanders have lost six of eight (2-4-2). Robin Lehner finished with 14 saves to fall to 0-4-2 in his last seven appearances.

"We played well in so many areas of the game but we gave them things that were a little bit unforced," Islanders coach Barry Trotz said. "Turnovers cost us."

On Nosek's go-ahead goal, Hickey said there was miscommunication.

**Blackhawks 6, Penguins 3:** Jonathan Toews had a goal and two assists, and host Chicago snapped an eight-game losing streak.

Toews became the 16th ac-

tive player to reach 700 career points with the same franchise. He assisted on Saad's empty-netter for his 701st point.

**Flames 6, Flyers 5 (OT):** Johnny Gaudreau scored 35 seconds into overtime, lifting host Calgary past Philadelphia.

Matthew Tkachuk had four assists for the Flames (20-10-2), who leapfrogged idle Nashville for the top spot in the Western Conference.

**Ducks 6, Stars 3:** Ondrej Kase scored three times for visiting Anaheim for his first NHL hat trick, and Brandon Montour had four points in the third period.

Anaheim trailed 3-2 midway through the third before scoring three goals in a three-minute span for its fifth win in six games.