

# STARS AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## Officials mum on Trump's Afghanistan plan

*The Washington Post*

A week after President Donald Trump directed the military to draw up plans to withdraw about half the American troops in Afghanistan, military officials are walking a fine line detailing the future of the longest U.S. war in history.

Trump pressed White House national security adviser John Bolton to make the move Dec. 18. Bolton and other U.S. officials were trying to talk him out of it, administration officials said. Since then, no announcements have been made, and senior U.S. military officers have said they have received no new orders.

The situation has put American generals in the awkward position of attempting to downplay the significance of a potential reduction in U.S. troops in Afghanistan while American diplomats try to negotiate a peace deal with the Taliban. They must do so just weeks ahead of Trump's State of the Union address slated for Jan. 22, an event during which presidents often roll out policy plans.

Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman

of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Army Gen. Austin "Scott" Miller, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, have dismissed the reports as "rumors." Miller, speaking to Afghan officials in Nangahar province Sunday, said he had no new orders, "so nothing changed."

"We are the same today as we were yesterday, and we'll be the same tomorrow," Miller said, speaking in a room in which a camera from the largest Afghan TV station, Tolo News, was allowed. "But if I do get orders, I think it's important for you to know that we are still with the security forces," Miller added, according to a transcript. "Even if I have to get a little bit smaller, we'll be okay. We've thought about this before, and we will be able to do the things that you require in terms of support."

Dunford, speaking to U.S. troops during a holiday visit Monday, had a nearly identical message for a different audience.

"There's all kinds of rumors swirling around," Dunford told Stars and Stripes. "The mission you have today is the same as the mission you had yesterday."

Dunford added that "when there is something else to tell you," he would make sure that Miller knows "in real time what changes may be taking place."

Last week, Trump ordered the withdrawal of U.S. troops in Syria, a decision that led to the resignation of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. Trump, making his first visit to U.S. troops in a war zone, said Wednesday in Iraq that "America shouldn't be doing the fighting for every nation on Earth not being reimbursed, in many cases, at all." But he did not discuss plans for withdrawing from Afghanistan.

"We're no longer the suckers, folks," Trump said, speaking at al Asad Air Base. "And people aren't looking at us as suckers. And I love you, folks, because most of you are nodding your head this way. We're respected again as a nation. We're respected again."

If Trump proceeds with cutting U.S. troop numbers in Afghanistan, many of the remaining forces are likely to focus on counterterrorism operations or supporting forces that carry them out.

## Parties trade blame amid shutdown impasse

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The partial government shutdown will almost certainly be handed off to a divided government to solve in the new year, as both parties traded blame Friday and President Donald Trump sought to raise the stakes in the weeklong impasse.

As agreement eludes Washington in the waning days of the Republican monopoly on power, it sets up the first big confrontation between Trump and newly empowered Democrats. Trump is sticking with his demand for money to build a border wall with Mexico, and Democrats, who take control of the House on Jan. 3, are refusing to give him what he wants.

Trump raised the stakes on Friday, reissuing threats to shut the U.S.-Mexico border to pressure Congress to fund the wall and to shut off aid to three Central American countries from which many migrants have fled.

"We will be forced to close the Southern Border entirely if the Obstructionist Democrats do not give us the money to finish the Wall & also change the ridiculous immigration laws that our Country is saddled with," he wrote in one of a series of tweets.

The president also signaled he was in no rush to seek a resolution, welcoming the fight as he heads toward his own bid for reelection in 2020. He tweeted Thursday evening that Democrats may be able to block him now, "but we have the issue, Border Security. 2020!"

The shutdown is forcing hundreds of thousands of federal workers and contractors to stay home or work without pay, and many are experiencing mounting stress from the impasse. It also is beginning to pinch citizens who count on certain public services. Gates are closed at some national parks, the government won't issue new federal flood insurance policies and in New York, the chief judge of Manhattan federal courts suspended work on civil cases in-

volving U.S. government lawyers, including several civil lawsuits in which Trump himself is a defendant.

With another long holiday weekend coming and nearly all lawmakers away from the Capitol, there is little expectation of a quick fix.

Incoming acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney said Democrats are no longer negotiating with the administration over an earlier offer to accept less than the \$5 billion Trump wants for the wall. Democrats said the White House offered \$2.5 billion for border security, but that Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer told Vice President Mike Pence it wasn't acceptable.

Democrats brushed off the White House's attempt to cast blame.

"For the White House to try and blame anyone but the president for this shutdown doesn't pass the laugh test," said Justin Goodman, a spokesman for Schumer.

# Trump's visit to Iraq prompts concerns

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's surprise visit to American forces in Iraq and Germany has raised questions about whether he had jeopardized the political neutrality of the U.S. military by surfacing partisan attacks and signing red "Make America Great Again" hats for the troops.

The president's behavior — out of step with that of his predecessors — highlighted the struggle Pentagon leaders face in navigating an avowedly apolitical military through a hyperpartisan era in U.S. politics, particularly under a commander in chief unafraid of breaking with established norms.

The struggle is likely to intensify with the beginning of the 2020 presidential campaign and the departure of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who sought to prevent the military from becoming a pawn in the nation's tribal politics, at times unsuccessfully, before his resignation last week.

Trump defended his conduct late Thursday. "CNN & others within the Fake News Universe were going wild about my signing MAGA hats for our military in Iraq and Germany," he wrote on Twitter. "If these brave young people ask me to sign their hat, I will sign. Can you imagine my saying NO? We brought or gave NO hats as the Fake News first reported!"

Critics also focused on the content of Trump's speeches during his trip. By making overtly political remarks to uniformed troops who were excited to meet their commander in chief, Trump risks the American public seeing the military as a partisan fan base for whatever message he is delivering, the critics said, an image that may play well to his base but undermines the trust all Americans put in their armed forces.

"As long as the message from the president is how wonderful it is that they are doing a service for the country, that's

great," said Charles Blanchard, a former general counsel for the Army and the Air Force during the Clinton and Obama administrations. "But when it turns into a political rally, what do people see? They see enthusiastic soldiers clapping and yelling for a partisan message."

The risk, Blanchard and other experts said, is an erosion of public faith in a military that 74 percent of Americans expressed confidence in during a 2018 Gallup poll, making it by far the most trusted government institution in American public life. One of the ways the military historically has earned that trust is by steering clear of politics and ensuring Americans that uniformed officers will carry out the orders of whatever civilian leadership they elect without bias.

Robert Dallek, a presidential historian, said there's always an element of politics when presidents visit troops overseas but that Trump transgressed the line.

The reason for the norms, according to Rosa Brooks, a law professor and national security expert at Georgetown University, is to ensure that an institution endowed by the American public with tremendous power "isn't being used for partisan ends."

Trump's trip began like any other commander in chief's holiday visit to a conflict zone. He jetted into Iraq without warning, accompanied by first lady Melania Trump, and planned to deliver a rousing show of support to thank the forces for their service.

While the president cheered troops with his visit to Iraq, thanking them for their sacrifices and wishing them a merry Christmas, he otherwise approached his appearance much as he would a political rally or event.

Top officials in the military regularly telegraph the need for political neutrality, traditionally delivering the message around elections.

## Furious Iraq lawmakers demand US troops exit

*Associated Press*

BAGHDAD — President Donald Trump's surprise trip to Iraq has infuriated Iraqi politicians who on Thursday demanded the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

"Arrogant" and "a violation of national sovereignty" were but a few examples of the disapproval emanating from Baghdad following Trump's meeting Wednesday with U.S. servicemen and women at the al Asad Air Base.

Trips by U.S. presidents to conflict zones are typically shrouded in secrecy and subject to strict security measures, and Trump's was no exception. Few in Iraq or elsewhere knew the U.S. president was in the country until minutes before he left.

But this trip came as curbing foreign influence in Iraqi affairs has become a hot-button political issue in Baghdad, and Trump's perceived presidential faux pas was failing to meet with the prime minister in a break with diplomatic custom for any visiting head of state.

On the ground for only about three hours, the American president told the men and women with the U.S. military that Islamic State forces have been vanquished, and he defended his decision against all advice to withdraw U.S. troops from neighboring Syria. He said the U.S. was once again respected as a nation, and declared: "We're no longer the suckers, folks."

The abruptness of his visit left lawmakers in Baghdad smarting and drawing unfav-

orable comparisons to the occupation of Iraq after the 2003 invasion.

"Trump needs to know his limits. The American occupation of Iraq is over," said Sabah al-Saidi, the head of one of two main blocs in Iraq's parliament.

Trump, he said, had slipped into Iraq, "as though Iraq is a state of the United States."

While Trump didn't meet with any officials, he spoke with Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi by phone. A planned meeting between the two leaders was canceled over a "difference in points of view" over arrangements, according to the prime minister's office.

The visit could have unintended consequences for American policy, with officials from both sides of Iraq's politi-

cal divide calling for a vote in Parliament to expel U.S. forces from the country.

The president, who kept to the U.S. air base approximately 60 miles west of Baghdad, said he had no plans to withdraw the 5,200 troops in the country. He said Ayn al Asad could be used for U.S. air strikes inside Syria.

The suggestion ran counter to the current sentiment of Iraqi politics, which favors claiming sovereignty over foreign and domestic policy and staying above the fray in regional conflicts.

"Iraq should not be a platform for the Americans to settle their accounts with either the Russians or the Iranians in the region," said Hakim al-Zamili, a senior lawmaker in al-Saidi's Islah bloc in Parliament.



# Syrian military enters Kurdish-held town

BY SARAH EL DEEB

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Syria's military said Friday it entered the flashpoint Kurdish-held town of Manbij in an apparent deal with the Kurds, who are looking for new allies and protection against a threatened Turkish offensive as U.S. troops prepare to withdraw from Syria.

American troops who still patrol the town and Turkey denied there was any change of forces in the contested area.

The Syrian announcement and the conflicting reports reflected the potential for chaos in the wake of last week's surprise pronouncement by the United States that it was withdrawing its troops from Syria.

Since the U.S. decision, there has been a buildup of forces around Manbij and further east, ushering in new alliances and raising the chances of friction. The Kurds' invitation to Syrian troops is a sign that, faced with the prospect of being overwhelmed by their top rival Turkey, they'd rather Syria's Russian- and Iranian-backed government fill the void left by the Americans.

Meanwhile, a flurry of meetings is expected in the coming days as all sides of the conflict scramble to find ways to replace the departing U.S. troops. They include one Saturday in Moscow, where Russia will host top Turkish officials in a possible sign that the two sides could be working on a deal to avert a Turkish offensive into Syria. Russians officials have said they expect Syrian government troops to replace the U.S. troops when they withdraw.

Turkey considers the U.S.-backed Kurdish People's Protection Units, which now controls nearly 30 percent of Syria, a terrorist group linked to an insurgency within its own borders. Kurdish-controlled Manbij has been at the center of rising tension between the U.S. and Turkey.

On Friday, Syrian troops said they moved into Manbij at the request of its citizens, and raised the Syrian flag in the town. The Kurdish militia said it has invited the Syrian government to take control of Manbij to protect it against "a Turkish invasion."

A Kurdish official said the government deployment has so far been limited to the front line with Turkey-backed fighters,

based north and west Manbij.

The Kremlin, meanwhile, welcomed the Syrian military announcement. Spokesman Dmitry Peskov called it a "positive step" that could help stabilize the area. Russia has signaled it expects the Syrian government to deploy where U.S. forces leave.

Iran hailed the government announcement as a "major step toward establishing the government's authority" over all of Syria.

A resident of Manbij said there were no sign of Syrian troops in the town. And the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the government forces have only reinforced front line positions outside the town held by Kurdish-led forces.

The U.S.-led coalition the announcement that government troops had entered the town was "incorrect," and called "on everyone to respect the integrity of Manbij and the safety of its citizens."

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the Syrian government move was "a psychological act" and said the situation in Manbij was uncertain.

## US sees 12 percent rise in police officer deaths in 2018

BY ERIC TUCKER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More police officers have died in the line of duty this year in the United States than in 2017, according to data released Thursday. The most common cause of death was gunfire, and vehicular accidents claimed nearly as many officers' lives.

The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund said in a report that 144 federal, state and local officers have died so far in 2018. That figure represents roughly a 12 percent increase from the 129 who died in 2017.

The majority of the officers who died were either shot — 52 this year, up from 46 in 2017 — or fatally injured in car or motorcycle crashes, which accounted for 50 deaths.

Of the officers who were shot, eight were killed during investigative activity and six were killed while responding

to calls of a domestic or public disturbance, according to the report. Two were fatally shot while serving warrants, two died while handling or transporting prisoners and two others were inadvertently shot by other officers.

Craig Floyd, the fund's chief executive officer, called the increase in deaths disappointing after a decline in 2017.

"Sadly this reminds us that public safety is a dangerous job and can come at a very steep price," Floyd said in a statement accompanying the report.

Of the officers who died in traffic-related incidents, 32 were killed in crashes involving another vehicle and 14 were struck while outside their vehicle. An additional four were killed in motorcycle crashes.

The states that experienced the highest number of officer fatalities were Texas, California, Florida and New York, with 11 fatalities each.

## Officer in subway battle: 'I'm trying to survive'

BY MICHAEL R. SISAK  
AND JIM MUSTIAN

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A police officer on patrol alone says he was just "trying to survive" as he fought off homeless men who came at him in a caught-on-video confrontation in a subway station Sunday night.

Officer Syed Ali, an Iraq and Afghanistan veteran, told reporters Thursday that he was flooded with calls and kudos from old Army buddies stationed around the globe as the footage went viral.

The video, viewed more than 5 million times on social media, showed Ali using a baton and kicking at the men, who appeared to be drunk, as they came at him one at a time at the East Broadway station in Manhattan.

"I'm trying to survive. That's the No. 1 thing," said Ali, 36.

Ali, who's married and lives

in Brooklyn, spoke publicly about the altercation for the first time as his three alleged assailants were awaiting arraignment on charges including riot.

"Justice has been served," Ali said.

Juan Nunez, Eliseo Alvarez and Leobardo Alvarado were arrested Wednesday and Thursday after a furor erupted over whether they would even face criminal charges.

At first, police only cited the men for sleeping on the station floor the day after the altercation, not the fight itself. The Manhattan District Attorney's office dropped the matter, citing a policy curbing prosecution of low-level violations.

The initial lack of charges angered Ali's union, the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, which issued a fiery statement on Christmas Day urging that the men "be held accountable for their actions."

# Despite #MeToo, rape cases still confound

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The #MeToo movement is empowering victims of sexual assault to speak up like never before, but what should be a watershed moment for holding assailants accountable has coincided with a troubling trend: Police departments in the U.S. are becoming less and less likely to successfully close rape investigations.

The so-called “clearance rate” for rape cases fell last year to its lowest point since at least the 1960s, according to FBI data provided to The Associated Press. That nadir may be driven, at least in part, by a greater willingness by police to correctly classify rape cases and leave them open even when there is little hope of solving them.

But experts say it also reflects the fact that not enough

resources are being devoted to investigating sexual assault at a time when more victims are entrusting police with their harrowing experiences.

“This is the second-most serious crime in the FBI’s crime index,” said Carol Tracy, executive director of the Women’s Law Project in Philadelphia, “and it simply doesn’t get the necessary resources from police.”

Police successfully closed just 32 percent of rape investigations nationwide in 2017, according to the data, ranking it second only to robbery as the least-solved violent crime. That statistic is down from about 62 percent in 1964, despite advances such as DNA testing.

The FBI provided The AP with a dataset of rape statistics dating back to the early 1960s — a table that includes more complete data than the snap-

shot the bureau releases each fall.

The grim report card has prompted debate among criminal justice experts, with some attributing the falling clearance rate to an antiquated approach to investigations.

“You’d figure with all the new technology — and the fact that the overwhelming majority of victims of sexual assault know their attacker — the clearance rates would be a lot higher,” said Joseph Giacalone, a former New York City police sergeant who teaches at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

Experts agree that sexual assault is one of the most confounding crimes police confront. Many investigations lack corroborating witnesses and physical evidence. A significant chunk of complaints are reported months or years after

the fact. Researchers believe only a third of rapes are reported at all.

Historically, some detectives also discouraged women from pursuing tough-to-prove charges against boyfriends, husbands or close acquaintances. The declining clearance rate could mean that investigators in some places are finally classifying rape investigations properly, said Kim Lonsway, research director at End Violence Against Women International.

Rather than hastily “clearing” certain tough-to-solve cases, she said, some police departments have begun “suspending” them, meaning they remain open indefinitely. That leaves open the possibility there could someday be an arrest.

“This may be an indicator of some positive things,” Lonsway said.

## Storm dumps snow in Dakotas, Minnesota

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Post-holiday travelers were finding driving difficult as a winter storm dumped heavy snow and whipped up gusty winds across parts of the Dakotas and Minnesota on Thursday.

Up to 11 inches of snow had fallen in the Moorhead-Alexandria area of western Minnesota by mid-afternoon Thursday, and it was still snowing, said meteorologist Tyler Hasenstein of the Twin Cities National Weather Service.

The line of snow ended just northwest of the Twin Cities around Elk River, Hasenstein said. The snowfall peaked around 3 inches at the Minneapolis airport, then rain starting early Thursday melted the snowpack.

Officials in North Dakota issued a no-travel advisory for the eastern part of the state due to icy roads and reduced visibility. Blustery winds were causing blizzard conditions in James-

town, N.D., and in northern South Dakota, where transportation officials reported visibility was down to a quarter-mile along a stretch of Highway 10.

Bus service for Fargo, N.D., and neighboring Moorhead, Minn., was suspended Thursday afternoon because of worsening road conditions. Service is expected to resume Friday with a normal schedule.

The National Weather Service issued blizzard warnings for central South Dakota, eastern North Dakota and western Minnesota. The storm was expected to drop more than a foot of snow in the region before ending Friday.

The Minnesota State Patrol tweeted that road conditions are poor across much of western Minnesota. Transportation officials said road conditions across much of the central and northern areas of the state are completely covered with ice and snow, with windy conditions causing even more travel issues.

## Japan says S. Korean ship locked on military plane

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan released video footage Friday it said proved a South Korean warship locked its fire-control radar onto a Japanese warplane off the northeastern coast in the latest move of an escalating row between the Asian neighbors.

The Defense Ministry’s just over 13-minute footage, filmed from the P-1 patrol aircraft, contained voices of Japanese crewmembers asking the destroyer for clarification but getting no response.

Japan alleged that the South Korean destroyer repeatedly locked its targeting radar on the Japanese aircraft Dec. 21 inside of Japan’s exclusive economic waters off the Noto Peninsula. A lock with fire-control radar is considered a hostile act and only one step away from actual firing. South Korea has denied the allegation, saying its warship used an optical camera while rescuing a North Korean fishing boat in distress. Seoul’s Defense Ministry expressed

“deep regret and concern” over Japan’s release of the video a day after the countries’ military officials held a video conference to resolve what Seoul described Tokyo’s “misunderstanding.”

Relations between Japan and South Korea have degraded to their worst in recent years over compensation issues related to sexual abuse of “comfort women” and Korean forced labor during Japan’s colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 through 1945.

The video published on the Tokyo ministry’s website starts showing the gray destroyer sailing near a pair of rubber boats and a North Korean vessel. About six minutes later, one of the crewmembers can be heard saying: “She is emitting FC,” and that it was coming from the destroyer. The pilot moves away from the warship.

The video shows the aircraft detecting more signals from the radar on the South Korean destroyer, but the pilot confirms that a gun is not pointed to their aircraft.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Gun buyback event yields rocket launcher

**MD** BALTIMORE — Baltimore police said a rocket launcher was among the more than 1,000 firearms turned in during recent gun buyback events.

The rocket launcher was traded for \$500, and police have reached out to the military and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to trace its origin. Police spokesman Detective Jeremy Silbert said the unloaded rocket launcher was turned in Dec. 17.

News outlets report interim commissioner Gary Tuggle said Friday that the city had spent \$163,000 so far on the first two events, which netted 509 handguns, 273 rifles and 245 shotguns.

## Clock ticking on \$1.5B lottery prize

**SC** COLUMBIA — The clock is ticking on someone to claim the \$1.5 billion-plus Mega Millions lottery prize from a ticket sold in South Carolina.

The winning ticket with all six numbers drawn Oct. 23 was purchased by someone at a gas station outside Simpsonville.

The State reported the person or group has 180 days to claim the winnings. But as of this week, no one has come forward.

If the money isn't claimed by late April, the money will return to the 44 states that hold Mega Millions lotteries. South Carolina's total from that pot would add up to \$11.2 million, which would go into the state's education fund.

Tax experts say the delay may just be the winner wanting to get his or her financial situation in order.

## Police rescue hawk trapped in station

**NY** NEW YORK — Police in New York City have captured an "early bird" at Penn Station.

The New York Post reported that workers with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority called police for help Sunday night after a red-shouldered hawk that was chasing a pigeon ended up in a transit booth.

Police said Detective Joseph Bucchignano removed the uninjured hawk from the booth, caged it and released it over the Hudson River.

The New York Police Department jokingly tweeted that the hawk "attempted to beat the holiday rush" but it "missed the train."

## Skier triggers avalanche; man hurt

**WY** JACKSON HOLE — A man was injured in a skier-triggered avalanche in Space Walk Couloir south of Jackson Hole Mountain Resort.

The Jackson Hole News and Guide reported that the man, 31, was rescued Monday evening by helicopter.

Teton County Sheriff-elect Matt Carr said ski patrol first responded to the incident in a steep, rocky couloir, just south of the resort's boundary.

Carr said authorities don't believe the man was ever buried.

Due to fading daylight, the helicopter flew the man directly from the backcountry to the landing zone at the Search and Rescue hangar instead of landing at Teton Village.

Carr said the man, who had a suspected hip injury, was then driven to a nearby hospital.

## Bills fan gets trip to Disney World

**NY** BUFFALO — An avid Buffalo Bills fan from Texas who's battling cancer has been given a trip to Disney World thanks to the efforts of a fan club known as the Bills Mafia.

Ezra Castro, 39, is known as Pancho Billa for his game-day outfit that includes a sombrero and facemask in the NFL team's red, white and blue colors.

The mortician from Dallas has attended numerous Bills games on the road and at New Era Field in Orchard Park, earning him the honor of being named the inaugural member of the Buffalo Fan Wall of Fame.

## Automated library now open day or night

**IN** LAFAYETTE — A new library in northern Indiana that resembles a cross between an ATM and a vending machine has become the state's first 24-hour library.

The fully automated library opened this week inside downtown Lafayette's Red Crown Mini Museum.

The free-standing unit that's about 13 feet wide holds about 340 items on glass-enclosed shelves, including books, audiobooks and movies.

The machine made by EnvisionWare Inc., of Duluth, Ga., is a self-checkout unit and a book return.

Users will scan their library cards, select an item from its inventory and that item will drop into a bin to be collected by the borrower.

Tippecanoe County librarian Jos Holman told the Journal & Courier the mechanical library is the first of its kind for Indiana and is one of two east of the

Mississippi River.

## Christmas trees sought to feed goats

**MI** NEW ERA — That old Christmas tree may look like garbage to you once the holidays are over but it looks like something else to a goat: Dinner.

So the folks at the 700-acre Lewis Farms & Petting Zoo in the western Michigan community of New Era are asking area residents to let them turn the trees into feasts for their goats, BamBam, Becca and twins Bubba and Gump.

The farm owners say once the trees are stripped of ornaments, lights and tinsel, their needles are a healthy meal full of vitamins that help control worms in the goats. And more importantly, at least to the goats, they're delicious.

"The goats can devour a tree in a matter of minutes," Cindy Lewis, who owns Lewis Farms with her husband, Scott, told the Detroit Free Press. "They get very excited."

## Woman killed by falling piece of ice

**NH** HART'S LOCATION — Officials say falling ice struck and killed a Massachusetts woman who was hiking with her family in New Hampshire.

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department said the Wellesley woman, 57, was injured around noon Sunday.

WFXT-TV reported that the woman was hiking with a group of 10 people on the Frankenstein Cliff Trail in Hart's Location when a falling piece of ice struck her in the head.

Multiple agencies responded to the scene, and the woman was taken to a hospital where she later died.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

# Irish getting 1st title shot since '12 loss

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Notre Dame defensive captain Drue Tranquill and leading receiver Miles Boykin weren't even Fighting Irish fans the last time they had a 12-0 regular season. Maybe that was a good thing because those current players didn't have to suffer through how that season ended.

The third-ranked Irish (12-0) are back in championship contention at the end of the season for the first time since a lopsided loss to Alabama in the national title game nearly six years ago. It has now been 30 years since the last of their eight AP national titles in 1988.

"That's something a lot of us take a lot of pride in, kind of bringing a new dawn to Notre Dame football in that tradition," Tranquill said.

"To see Notre Dame on that stage in '12 and to fall short, I think, was probably disappointing to a lot of fans, and certainly provided a lot of air of a lot of people who didn't like Notre Dame around the country," the senior linebacker said Thursday. "We're not trying to be '12. We want to be our own unique team."

Notre Dame is in the College Football Playoff for the first time, and will play its semifinal game Saturday against second-ranked Clemson (13-0) in the Cotton Bowl.

Boykin even admits he was pulling for Alabama that January night in 2013 when the Crimson Tide beat Notre Dame 42-14

for their third national title in four years. Alabama has added two more since then.

"Not one of my proudest moments," said Boykin, who obviously has a different tone now with Notre Dame making its CFP debut.

"It's where we belong. We've been away far too long," he said. "It's unacceptable to be at a place like Notre Dame, and have the history that we have, and not be at a place like this. Everything that we talked about was we've got to put Notre Dame back on the map and change the narrative about us recently."

The Irish made it through this regular season undefeated while playing a schedule that included 10 teams from Power Five Conferences. That included a 36-3 win over then-No. 12 Syracuse at Yankee Stadium in mid-November before a win at Southern Cal on Thanksgiving weekend to reach 12-0 for only the third time in program history.

This is coach Brian Kelly's ninth season at Notre Dame. The only assistant coach that has been with Kelly the entire time is defensive line coach Mike Elston, and he is also the only assistant remaining from the 2012 season.

"The program's in as good as a place as it's been and I do believe that we're in a position to sustain it if we continue to recruit. Just signed a great class that will help us continue this trajectory," Elston said. "I do believe that this is a program that will sustain, and that we have all of the pieces in

places to do that."

Still, there seems to be a lingering effect — at least outside the program — about that national championship game loss to Alabama, even though Nick Saban's squads have soundly defeated many opponents in his 12 seasons. Only the Crimson Tide have made the four-team playoff each of the five years in the CFP system.

Among the first questions asked of Kelly during Notre Dame's media session at AT&T Stadium on Thursday was how big a win in the Cotton Bowl would be to put that 2012 loss to rest.

"I put that to rest the next day. That's why we're back here, building our football team, to get an opportunity to compete for a national championship," Kelly said. "We are back here now. We've got to win a football game."

Kelley was then asked if a win would validate the Irish being back on the scene as one of the national powers. The coach's response was that they already are.

But these Irish aren't satisfied with just making the playoff.

"It's really important. This is our goal, this is what we worked for as a team, as a program, this is the pinnacle of college football and we're excited to be a part of it, but we've got a couple of more games to win," defensive lineman Jerry Tillery said. "This isn't good enough in this program. We want it all, so that's what we're going for."

## Bowls roundup

# Taylor, Wisconsin overwhelm Miami

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jonathan Taylor played tour guide for his Wisconsin teammates who had never visited New York. They hit the usual landmarks with trips to Lincoln Center and Times Square. Taylor even gave his buds a taste of the luxe life with a window-shopping jaunt along Fifth Avenue.

"It's real fun to see those guys looking at all those sights," said Taylor, a New Jersey native. "New York has a lot to offer."

Taylor gave the Badgers one more dazzling sight to see, and the nation's leading rusher heads home with his own sweet

souvenir — an MVP trophy.

Taylor ran for 205 yards and a touchdown and topped the 2,000-yard season mark to help Wisconsin rout Miami 35-3 in a chilly Pinstripe Bowl on Thursday night.

"We've got the best back in the country," Wisconsin coach Paul Chryst said.

Taylor, just a sophomore, ripped off runs of 39 and 41 yards at Yankee Stadium and combined with a defense that forced five turnovers to help a Wisconsin (8-5) team ranked fourth in the first AP Top 25 poll salvage its fifth straight bowl victory.

### Texas Bowl

**Baylor 45, Vanderbilt 38:** At Houston, Charlie Brewer threw for 384 yards and two touchdowns, the second a tiebreaking 52-yarder in the fourth quarter, and ran for 109 yards and another score to help the Bears beat the Commodores.

Baylor finished 7-6 a year after it managed just one win in coach Matt Rhule's first season.

Vanderbilt (6-7) was led by Kyle Shurmer, who threw for 286 yards and a touchdown, and Ke'Shawn Vaughn, who ran for two touchdowns and a Texas Bowl-record 243 yards.

### Independence Bowl

**Duke 56, Temple 27:** At Shreveport, La., Daniel Jones threw for 423 yards and five touchdowns, T.J. Rahming caught 12 passes for 240 yards and two scores, and the Blue Devils blew past the Owls.

Duke (8-5) snapped a two-game losing streak, scoring touchdowns on seven straight drives. The Blue Devils flipped a 27-14 deficit in the second quarter to a 56-27 lead by midway through the fourth.

Jones set Independence Bowl records with the five touchdown passes and 423 yards passing.



# AP names James Male Athlete of Year

Associated Press

LeBron James went to the NBA Finals for the eighth consecutive year. He changed addresses again, leaving his Cleveland home for the second time to join the Los Angeles Lakers in the biggest move of free agency over the summer. He remained arguably the most dominant player in basketball, adding even more glitz to a legacy that reached epic status long ago.

It was, by any measure, a fantastic year for James.

And even without a title, it may have been his most significant year.

For the third time, James has been selected as The Associated Press Male Athlete of the Year — after 2018 saw him continue to excel on the court, open the “I Promise” school for at-risk children in his hometown of Akron, Ohio, and further use his voice as an activist who bristled at being told to “shut up and dribble.”

“I would describe it as a success because I was able to

inspire so many people throughout the year,” James said. “I got to go back to China, to Paris, to Berlin, I opened up a school. And all these kids I was able to see, all over the world and in my hometown, I was able to inspire, to make them think they can be so much more than what they think they’re capable of being. That was my outlook for 2018.”

James received 78 points in balloting by U.S. editors and news directors announced Thursday, while Boston Red Sox star Mookie Betts was second with 46. Alex Ovechkin of the Washington Capitals was third, Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes was fourth and Triple Crown winner Justify was fifth.

On the court, James remained dominant. He averaged 28.7 points, 8.8 rebounds and 8.4 assists in 2018 between his time with the Cavaliers and Lakers, playing in 102 games through Thursday.

“In addition to being on everyone’s short list as one of the league’s all-time greatest

players, LeBron is among the hardest-working players and is a thoughtful and impactful leader,” NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said. “He serves on the executive committee of the Players Association even as he builds an impressive media company of his own. And what’s most inspiring, and no surprise given his talent and focus, is how he’s done all of this while embracing his unique opportunity to positively impact communities in need.”

James becomes the third man to win the award at least three times, joining Lance Armstrong (a four-time winner from 2002 through 2005), Tiger Woods (1997, 1999, 2000 and 2006) and Michael Jordan (1991, 1992 and 1993).

Armstrong won the Tour de France in each of his years as the AP recipient, though he was later stripped of the titles in a doping scandal. Woods won at least one major and was the PGA’s Player of the Year in all four of his AP-winning years. Jordan’s three awards coincided

with his first three NBA championships in Chicago. And James’ first two times getting the award were in 2013 and 2016, years where his fingerprints mused up the Larry O’Brien Trophy in a title celebration.

And James’ closest rivals in the AP balloting this year — Betts and Ovechkin — also won titles in 2018.

James’ year included no championship, no scoring title, no MVP award. But some of the people closest to James still considered 2018 to be his finest year yet.

“I like to talk about generations,” said Miami guard Dwyane Wade, one of James’ best friends. “There will never be another Michael Jordan because he was the first to be a global superstar, the first to take the NBA to another level. There will never be another LeBron James, and a lot of it is from what he’s done away from the game. His understanding his voice has been so refreshing and so important to the culture and his friends.”

## Williams recognized for comeback after childbirth

Associated Press

She showed up in Paris wearing a black catsuit, a reminder that nobody can command the Grand Slam stage quite like Serena Williams.

She reached the finals at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open, proving again how well she can play no matter how little she practices.

Williams didn’t win those or any other tournaments, which in every other situation might have made for a forgettable year.

In 2018, it was a remarkable one.

Her rapid return to tennis after a health scare following childbirth was a victory in itself, and for that, Williams was voted The Associated Press Female Athlete of the Year for the fifth time.

Williams received 93 points in balloting by U.S. editors

and news directors announced Wednesday, while gymnast Simone Biles was second with 68. Notre Dame basketball player Arike Ogunbowale was third, while Olympic snowboarder Chloe Kim and swimmer Katie Ledecky, the 2017 winner, rounded out the top five.

All of those players won a title or titles in 2018, while Williams had to settle for just coming close a couple of times.

Now 37 and a new mother facing some players who weren’t even born when she turned pro in 1995, Williams isn’t the same person who ruthlessly ran her way to 23 Grand Slam singles titles — the last of which came at the 2017 Australian Open when she was pregnant.

“I’m still waiting to get to be the Serena that I was, and I don’t know if I’ll ever be that, physically, emotionally, men-

tally. But I’m on my way,” Williams said on the eve of the U.S. Open final. “I feel like I still have a ways to go. Once I get there, I’ll be able to play even hopefully better.”

The award has been won more only by Babe Didrikson Zaharias, whose six wins included one for track and five for golf.

Williams’ previous times winning the AP honor, in 2002, 2009, 2013 and 2015, were because of her dominance.

This one was about her perseverance.

Williams developed blood clots after giving birth to daughter Alexis Olympia Ohanian Jr. on Sept. 1, 2017, and four surgeries would follow. She returned to the WTA Tour in March and played in just a pair of events before the French Open, where she competed in a skin-tight, full-length black

catsuit.

She said the outfit — worn partly for health reasons because of the clots — made her feel like a superhero, but her game was rarely in superstar shape. She had to withdraw in Paris because of a right pectoral injury and didn’t play again until Wimbledon, where she lost to Angelique Kerber in the final.

Williams came up short again in New York, where her loss to Naomi Osaka in the final will be remembered best for her outburst toward chair umpire Carlos Ramos, who had penalized Williams for receiving coaching and later penalized her an entire game for calling him a “thief” while arguing.

That loss leaves her one major title shy of Margaret Court’s record as she starts play next year.

## NBA roundup

# Harden powers Rockets past Celtics

Associated Press

HOUSTON — James Harden had 45 points and six assists, Clint Capela added 24 points and 18 rebounds, and the Houston Rockets beat the Boston Celtics 127-113 on Thursday night for their eighth win in nine games.

Harden, who was playing on a bruised left calf, had 17 points in the first quarter and finished 11-for-26 from the field, including 9-for-18 on three-pointers. Eric Gordon scored 20 points for Houston, which shot 48 percent while improving to a season-high four games above .500. Houston finished 18-for-45 on three-pointers.

Harden has scored at least 30 points in eight straight games, the longest such streak since Russell Westbrook had eight straight 30-point games in November 2016. Harden has scored at least 35 points in six straight games, the longest streak since Carmelo Anthony had six straight in April 2013.

Kyrie Irving had 23 points

and 11 assists, Marcus Morris added 19 points before being ejected midway through the fourth quarter, and Jaylen Brown had 18 points off the bench for Boston, which shot 47 percent but was outrebounded 54-38.

**Kings 117, Lakers 116:** Bogdan Bogdanovic made a three-pointer at the buzzer and host Sacramento rallied from 15 points down in the fourth quarter to beat Los Angeles in its first game this season without LeBron James.

Bogdanovic finished with 23 points and De'Aaron Fox added 15 points, 12 assists and nine rebounds. Willie Cauley-Stein had 19 points and eight rebounds, while Iman Shumpert scored 18 points and matched his career high with six threes.

James was held out with a groin injury, ending his consecutive games played streak at 156. The four-time MVP was injured during the Lakers' 127-101 victory over two-time defending NBA champion Golden

State on Christmas when he slipped while going for a loose ball.

**Trail Blazers 110, Warriors 109 (OT):** Damian Lillard hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 6.3 seconds left in overtime and scored 21 points in his final regular-season game at home in Oakland, sending Portland past Golden State in a wild one.

Kevin Durant missed a 13-footer off the front rim as the final buzzer sounded but finished with his second triple-double of the season: 26 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds.

Jusuf Nurkic had 27 points and 12 rebounds for the Blazers.

**76ers 114, Jazz 97:** JJ Redick scored 24 points and Joel Embiid had 23 points, 15 rebounds and five blocks to help visiting Philadelphia cruise past Utah.

Ben Simmons, who was selected over Utah's Donovan Mitchell as Rookie of the Year last season, had his fifth triple-double of the season with

13 points, 14 rebounds and 12 assists.

Mitchell scored 23 points, Dante Exum added a season-high 20 and Rudy Gobert had 17 points and 15 rebounds for the Jazz.

**Bucks 112, Knicks 96:** Giannis Antetokounmpo had 31 points and 14 rebounds, Khristian Middleton added 25 points and host Milwaukee beat New York for its sixth win in seven games.

The Bucks swept the home-and-home series, having won at New York 109-95 on Christmas.

Luke Kornet, making his first start of the season in place of Enes Kanter, tied a career high with 23 points, and Noah Vonleh added 15 points and 13 rebounds for the Knicks. New York, playing without leading scorer Tim Hardaway Jr. because of an illness, lost its sixth straight.

## NHL roundup

# Devils' Blackwood stops 40 shots, earns first NHL win

Associated Press

BOSTON — Mackenzie Blackwood stopped 40 shots for his first NHL victory, Blake Coleman scored twice and the New Jersey Devils beat the Boston Bruins 5-2 on Thursday night.

Damon Severson scored 25 seconds into the game and Kyle Palmieri added his team-high 19th goal for the Devils, who won on the road for just the fourth time this season.

Nico Hirschier had a goal and an assist and Andy Greene had a pair of assists as New Jersey got its first win in Boston in five years.

Patrice Bergeron and Chris Wagner scored for Boston, and

Jaroslav Halak had 28 saves.

Severson's early goal on a wrist shot from the right circle gave the rookie Blackwood a lead the Devils never relinquished.

Blackwood, who was making his second career start, stopped 18 of 19 shots in the second period to help stave off the Bruins.

**Penguins 5, Red Wings 2:** Phil Kessel scored two power-play goals and Derick Brassard added two scores as host Pittsburgh ran its winning streak to four games.

Patric Hornqvist scored his 13th of the season. Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin each finished with two assists. Crosby has registered points in nine of

his last 11 home games and has 24 points in his last 18 games. Matt Murray stopped 27 shots for his fourth straight win since returning from a lower-body injury.

**Capitals 3, Hurricanes 1:** T.J. Oshie scored his 11th goal and John Carlson had an empty-netter as host Washington won its third straight game.

**Blue Jackets 4, Rangers 3 (OT):** Pierre-Luc Dubois scored 31 seconds into overtime and visiting Columbus won its fifth straight victory.

**Blackhawks 5, Wild 2:** Patrick Kane had a hat trick, Brandon Saad scored twice and host Chicago picked up its fourth win in five games.

**Canucks 4, Oilers 2:** Elias

Pettersson and Antoine Roussel each had a goal and an assist for visiting Vancouver.

**Lightning 6, Flyers 5 (OT):** Alex Killorn scored 18 seconds into overtime and host Tampa Bay, after blowing a three-goal lead in the third period, extended its point streak to 13 games.

**Blues 4, Sabres 1:** Robert Thomas had a goal and an assist and Jake Allen made 30 saves to lead St. Louis past visiting Buffalo.

**Stars 2, Predators 0:** Anton Khudobin made a career-high 49 saves to lead Dallas over slumping host Nashville.

**Flames 4, Jets 1:** At Winnipeg, Johnny Gaudreau had a hat trick as Calgary ended a three-game winless streak.