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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Taliban try to breach Bagram Airfield

BY J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Taliban suicide bombers blasted an under-construction hospital in a bid to reach nearby Bagram Airfield as insurgents tried to storm the base, triggering a battle throughout the day that left at least two Afghan civilians dead and 80 injured Wednesday.

After the initial blasts, attackers hid inside the hospital and fought from there for most of the day before being killed in a series of U.S. airstrikes that evening, a NATO Resolute Support spokesman said.

The attack began with sui-

cide attackers detonating two vehicle-borne bombs at the building site, near the northern corner of Bagram Airfield, the largest U.S. base in Afghanistan, said Wahida Shahkar, spokeswoman for the governor of Parwan province.

“It was a huge and powerful explosion that was felt in almost all the province,” Shahkar said.

The hospital has a gate leading to the base, said Mohammad Mahfooz Alizada, Parwan police chief. Attackers fired from the building as they tried to enter Bagram, he said.

Some attackers remained in the hospital as of 5:30 p.m., Interior Ministry spokesman

Nasrat Rahimi said, a reversal of earlier statements by U.S. and Afghan officials that the firefight had ended quickly.

The two vehicle bombs used by the seven or eight militants left civilians — including women and children — wounded mostly by broken glass and debris, Bagram district governor Abdul Shokour Qudousi said.

Five service members from the coalition nation of Georgia also sustained minor injuries during the attack, a statement by the country’s Defense Ministry said. The Taliban later claimed responsibility for the attack.

The medical facility, former-

ly a South Korean-run hospital, is being rebuilt to help local Afghans, the U.S. military said.

The base has long been a target for militants. In April, a bomb blast outside the base killed three American service members and injured three others. The attack occurred days after the U.S. resumed official talks with the Taliban on a prospective peace deal.

The talks, which had paused in early September, focused on reducing violence and paving the way for negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban, The Associated Press reported Sunday.

Watchdog to review use of GIs at US-Mexico border

The Washington Post

The top government watchdog overseeing the Pentagon will review how U.S. troops have been used on the southern border, saying he has received “several requests” to do so.

Acting Defense Department Inspector General Glenn Fine said his office will examine what the service members are doing, what training they received and whether they have complied with laws, Pentagon policy and operating guidelines they received.

“We intend to conduct this important evaluation as expeditiously as possible,” Fine said in a statement to The Washington Post.

The decision comes after 34 members of the House requested a review in September, according to a letter that Fine sent Rep. Raul Grijalva, D-Ariz., on Tuesday.

“We have carefully reviewed your request — as well as considered other factors — and have decided to initiate an evaluation of U.S. military operations along the southern border,” Fine wrote.

Fine said in a memo to Defense Secretary Mark Esper and other senior defense

officials on Tuesday that he is requesting several different military commands to provide a main point of contact for the project.

Senior officers who received the memo include Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs; Gen. Terrence O’Shaughnessy, the commander of Northern Command; Adm. Craig Faller, the commander of Southern Command; Gen. Joseph Lengyel, the chief of the National Guard Bureau; and Lt. Gen. Charles Luckey, the commander of Army Reserve Command.

Lt. Col. Christian Mitchell, a Pentagon spokesman, said that the service has received the memo and is aware of Fine’s requests.

The assessment of training will examine in part how service members have been trained for potential contact with civilians. It also will scrutinize interaction and coordination between U.S. troops and the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees border security, Fine said in the memo to senior Pentagon officials.

The Trump administration first deployed active-duty service members to augment Homeland Security personnel

and National Guardsmen last year, with President Donald Trump floating the idea in April and following through late in October, just ahead of Election Day.

The move, carried out as a caravan of migrants traveled north through Mexico from Central America, was decried by critics as an unnecessary step that politicized the military and sapped attention from other missions.

While former presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush sent National Guardsmen to the southern border, they stayed away from deploying active-duty forces following a 1997 case in which Marines searching for drug smugglers killed a teen herding goats near the Texas-Mexico border.

At the height of the deployment in late 2018, about 5,900 active-duty troops were along the southern border. Their missions have included spreading thousands of miles of concertina wire and operating surveillance equipment to watch for smugglers. The number of active-duty troops has dropped to about 2,400 in recent months, supplemented by several thousand National Guardsmen.

Wings of Gold awarded to 3 slain sailors

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The three sailors killed Friday in a shooting at Naval Air Station Pensacola in Florida have been posthumously awarded Wings of Gold pins in recognition of their naval aviation careers, the Navy announced.

"It is my honor today to present the Wings of Gold to the families of these three American heroes who were among the first to respond to horrific attacks upon our own naval family and tragically were also our sailors who made the ultimate sacrifice in protecting their brothers and sisters in arms," acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly said Tuesday in a statement.

Modly awarded Ensign Joshua Watson, 23, his naval aviator wings, and Airman Mohammed Haitham, 19, and Airman Apprentice Cameron Walters, 21, their naval aircrewmen wings. The sailors would have received the wings upon completion of their aviation training.

"Although this authorization pales in comparison to their immense bravery in the line of fire, this winging represents the symbolic achievement of the coveted goal that all three came to Pensacola to accomplish: to join the long line of naval aviators, flight officers, and aircrewmen who have served the cause of freedom so valiantly for over a century," Modly said.

Rear Adm. Daniel Dwyer, the chief of naval air training who oversees all undergraduate naval aviation training, said the sailors' "selfless acts of heroism" during the shooting "are nothing short of incredible."

"They each embody the warrior ethos we expect and require of all wingmen," he said in the statement. "There is no doubt in my mind they each would have led the charge in their respective naval aviation careers. We are deeply saddened by this tragedy."

DOD to review US procedures for screening foreign students

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon will review vetting procedures for foreign military students following Friday's deadly shooting at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Fla., by a Saudi air force officer.

Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist on Tuesday ordered immediate steps to strengthen vetting and to complete within 10 days a review of policies and procedures for screening foreign students and granting access to bases.

"We will be working very closely with our security cooperation agency, with our embassies, with our military departments as well as across the defense security enterprise to examine existing procedures for granting access to our in-

ternational military student partners," said a senior defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity about the review.

Pentagon officials also will look at the vetting processes for U.S. military personnel, the senior defense official said.

"[The Pentagon] will be looking at both of these side by side and finding ways to strengthen ... best practices," the official said.

The reviews were sparked by the shooting deaths of three sailors Friday by Saudi air force 2nd Lt. Mohammed Alshamrani, 21, who was in the United States for naval aviation training at Pensacola. Alshamrani injured eight others before an Escambia County sheriff's deputy shot and killed him.

There are more than 5,100 foreign nationals from 153

countries in the United States for Defense Department security cooperation-related training.

The Defense Department also has paused all operational training for Saudi students, according to the defense official. However, Saudi students will still be able to access classroom training.

The operational training was already going to stop over the upcoming holiday season, "so we're seeing this as a short-term effort to do a review of our security procedures," the official said.

The Navy announced earlier Tuesday that the service had initiated a "safety stand-down and operational pause" for about 300 Saudi aviation students at three Florida bases.

Saudi report finds radical themes in NAS Pensacola shooter's past

The Washington Post

The Saudi aviation student responsible for a shooting that killed three U.S. sailors on a Florida base last week appears to have embraced radical ideology as early as 2015, well before he arrived in the United States for training, a Saudi government analysis has found.

According to the internal report, a Twitter account believed to have been used by Ahmed Mohammed Alshamrani indicates that four religious figures described as radical appear to have shaped the Saudi air force trainee's "extremist thought." A copy of the report was obtained by The Washington Post.

The attack at Naval Air Station Pensacola has raised concerns about the vetting of foreign military personnel who take part in training

and exchange programs in the U.S., and it has drawn renewed congressional scrutiny of the kingdom.

Officials have scrambled to piece together limited information about Alshamrani, who arrived in the U.S. in 2017 as part of an extended program to become a weapons systems operator. The 21-year-old was shot dead by a sheriff's deputy after opening fire in a classroom. Eight people were wounded.

The report also put forward information that could explain why his Twitter activity was not previously detected. The account now believed to be Alshamrani's, the report said, displayed only parts of his name that are common in Saudi Arabia, and contained no biographical information or photo.

"Of note, the Shamran tribe is one (of) the Kingdom's larg-

est tribes, and countless of its members carry the name of Mohammed," the report said. "As it is not uncommon for extremists and terrorists to use pseudonym of a large tribe to hide their real identity on social media, it was difficult for authorities to properly identify the shooter until he released his manifesto."

A few hours before the attack, a manifesto was posted on Alshamrani's feed decrying what he said were "crimes against Muslims," citing the presence of military troops in Muslim nations, the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and U.S. support for Israel.

A Saudi official cautioned that while Alshamrani's Twitter feed sheds light on his extremist influences, it did not necessarily constitute evidence of what led him to kill.

PACAF: Overflights of South China Sea common, kept quiet

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

While the press regularly covers Navy warships passing through disputed territory in the South China Sea, U.S. military aircraft operating there often fly under the radar.

Pacific Air Forces commander Gen. Charles Q. Brown noted the differing treatment during a recent teleconference from Hawaii.

"We've been flying in and around the South China Sea for really about the past 15 years, and I would probably tell you we've done some as recently as this week," he told reporters on Friday.

There's more media coverage of warships operating in the disputed territory, where China has built up and militarized tiny islets and reefs, because the Navy often advertises those operations in press releases.

Last month, the 7th Fleet announced that the destroyer USS Wayne E. Meyer cruised past the Paracel Islands, a region subject to competing claims by China, Taiwan and Vietnam. The day before, the littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Giffords steamed within 12 miles of Mischief Reef, a low-tide feature in the Spratly Islands.

There haven't been recent announcements about military planes flying in the area. However, Brown said the flights happen on a regular basis and involve Air Force bombers, U-2 Dragon Lady reconnaissance planes and RQ-4 Global Hawk drones as well as Navy P-3 Orion and P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft.

"So, we have quite a bit of activity — air activity — within the South China Sea," he said. "It doesn't probably get as much press as what you hear about with the freedom of navigation and the maritime environment, but we do hear about it because we do get ... calls from [China]."

Brown spoke to reporters, along with Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein, as the pair hosted a symposium involving leaders of air forces from various Pacific nations at PACAF headquarters on Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

Goldfein told reporters the Air Force has maintained its presence in the Pacific even as it has shrunk.

"We're an Air Force that's 300,000 less airmen and about 3,000 less aircraft than we were even back to 1991, and yet, if you look at our footprint and our posture in the Pacific, we haven't changed," he said. "We've come down significantly in Europe. We've changed significantly in the United States. Our footprint in the Pacific has been very steady over time."

Turkey threatens again to block NATO's Baltic plan

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Turkey said it could still block a NATO defense plan for the Baltic states and Poland unless allies develop a security arrangement for the alliance's southern flank that would brand Kurdish YPG forces who fought alongside Americans as terrorists.

Top Turkish diplomatic and defense officials say no compromises have been reached, contradicting an announcement by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg last week during NATO's leaders meeting in London that plans for the Baltics and Poland had been approved.

Baltic leaders last week hailed Turkey for supporting the defense strategy, which had been held up over Ankara's demand that allies designate YPG forces as terrorists — something multiple allies, including the U.S. and France, have balked at.

However, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said no agreement had been reached. Cavusoglu said updated defense plans, both for the Baltics and Turkey, must pass through NATO military councils before going into effect.

"So long as our plan (to designate YPG as a terrorist threat) is not issued, their plan will most certainly not be issued," Cavusoglu told reporters in Rome on Friday. "It would be unfair if some countries supported the plan to defend the eastern flank and at the same time refused to agree on a similar plan for us."

However, Krzysztof Szczerski, an aide to Poland's president, told Reuters on Monday that there was "no going back from the decision made at NATO."

"Decisions were made for both the Polish-Baltic and the Turkish plans and now we are waiting to implement the plans. That's a military matter," he said.

Turkey's insistence on designating the YPG a terrorist group could drive a wedge between members. The Kurdish group was a key part of the U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State in Syria, and French President Emmanuel Macron blasted Ankara for targeting those Kurdish forces.

"When I look at Turkey, they are fighting against those who fought with us shoulder-to-shoulder against ISIS, and sometimes they (Turkey) work with ISIS proxies," Macron said in London.

Ankara: If US sanctions are enacted, access to Incirlik could be affected

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Turkey could kick the U.S. out of Incirlik Air Base if Washington moves forward with sanctions linked to Ankara's incursion into Syria and the purchase of Russian weaponry, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has said.

A separate base that hosts a key U.S. Army radar used for NATO missile defense in Europe also could be made off-limits to the Americans, Cavusoglu said in an interview with Turkey's A Haber news station.

"If the U.S. imposes sanctions against Turkey, then the issue of the Incirlik and Kurecik bases may be on the agenda," said Cavusoglu, who issued a similar warning in July.

Turkey's latest threat came just ahead of talks Wednesday in the Republican-led Senate Foreign Relations Committee to debate legislation that would sanction Turkey for its invasion of northern Syria and its acquisition of a sophisticated Russian air defense system. The U.S. and its

NATO allies have warned that the Russian S-400 system is incompatible with alliance networks.

U.S. lawmakers are considering a bill that would penalize Turkey's energy industry and financial system for the push into northern Syria. The bill also calls for the enforcement of the 2017 Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, which could freeze Turkish assets because of its purchase of the Russian air defense system.

Turkey has already been removed from the Pentagon's F-35 program amid concerns that its operation of Russian air defenses could compromise the fifth generation aircraft's stealth technology. Turkey had planned to buy more than 100 F-35s.

Incirlik has been a key strategic base for the U.S. since the Cold War, but concerns about an increasingly unpredictable Turkey have prompted some former American military leaders to say the U.S. should begin looking for alternative bases in nearby countries like Greece and Jordan.

Shootout paralyzes Jersey City

New York Daily News

The killing started inside a Jersey City, N.J., cemetery, with a police officer gunned down as he tried to stop two suspicious men.

It ended four hours and hundreds of spent bullets later, with the two suspects killed by police Tuesday afternoon after the pair fatally shot three more victims inside a kosher grocery store in a shootout that paralyzed the city.

The unidentified “bad guys,” dressed in black and armed with high-powered rifles, opened fire in a Jersey City neighborhood after fleeing in a stolen U-Haul truck from the Bayview Cemetery, said Jersey City Police Chief Mike Kelly.

Students cowered in nearby schools and pedestrians ran for their lives as the pop-pop-pop of high-caliber gunfire echoed down Martin Luther King Drive throughout the dank afternoon.

“Our officers were under fire for four hours,” said Kelly. “We have no inkling what the motive was yet.”

Police said that terrorism

did not appear to play a role in the killings. Late Tuesday, Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop tweeted that “Based on our initial investigation (which is ongoing) we now believe the active shooters targeted the location they attacked. We have no indication there are any further threats.”

Detective Joseph Seals, 39, a father of five, was pronounced dead at 12:45 p.m., after the officer, dressed in plainclothes, approached one of the suspects, reportedly in connection with a homicide investigation. The heavily armed pair fled in a stolen rental truck, stopping about a mile away and ultimately taking refuge inside the JC Kosher Supermarket.

When police finally made their way inside the store, both suspects were lying dead along with the three victims. Two other city officers were treated for shrapnel injuries and released, and a dramatic video captured one officer rushing to the aid of a wounded officer as gunfire echoes like cannon blasts in the background.

The carnage started in the

170-year-old cemetery, where Seals — assigned to remove guns from the streets with the cease-fire unit — spotted the suspicious van, Kelly said. Once Seals was shot, the two suspects bolted in the U-Haul and headed north.

The pair barely made it a mile when police descended on the van. Then the killers opened fire in the street. Terrified residents ran for cover, although some stayed outside to shoot video with their phones.

“I heard fighting outside, then ‘Boom! Boom! Boom!’” said one worker at the Crown Fried Fish and Chicken store just two blocks from the shooting. “I saw people running outside — men, women, children in the street. These people were scared.”

Dozens of law enforcement agencies — including the NYPD’s elite Emergency Services Units and a department helicopter — descended on the city after the shooting.

Once inside the store, the shooters began firing randomly through the windows at anyone on the street, officials said.

House leaders race to pass spending bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House leaders are racing the clock and bracing for inevitable blowback on an emerging government-wide spending bill that’s likely to largely maintain President Donald Trump’s tactical ability to fund his border wall.

As is often the case, California rivals House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Kevin McCarthy are feuding, this time about a longshot McCarthy bid for a controversial dam project that would provide more water for Central Valley farmers. Progress has slowed, though a top-level meeting between Pelosi, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and the frustrated chairs of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees on Tuesday generated pledges to redouble their efforts.

Nobody wants a shutdown when a stopgap spending bill expires next week, but time is running out and it’s not at all certain that negotiations can close in time for the Senate to process a year-end spending package. Another temporary funding bill, a continuing resolution, could be needed to avert a repeat of last year’s 35-day partial federal shutdown.

At issue is almost \$1.4 trillion for day-to-day operations of federal agencies. This year’s annual appropriations cycle was supposed to be relatively easy after this past summer’s budget and debt deal reversed a sharp set of spending cuts that would have otherwise struck the Pentagon and domestic agencies.

But a Senate GOP move to more than triple a key border wall account to meet Trump’s demands sparked a two-month stalemate. Negotiations are back on track, with most of Trump’s \$5 billion wall demand being returned to other domestic accounts.

Trump has a tactical advantage that allows him to obtain billions for his border wall, because he will refuse to sign a bill that denies his request outright or curtails his powers to transfer money from DOD accounts.

Watchdog: ‘Basic and fundamental errors’ in FBI’s Russia investigation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department’s internal watchdog told Congress on Wednesday that he is concerned that “so many basic and fundamental errors” were made by the FBI as it investigated ties between the Trump campaign and Russia.

Inspector General Michael Horowitz’s testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee comes two days after the release of a report that identified significant problems with applications to receive and renew warrants to eavesdrop on a former Trump campaign aide in 2016 and 2017. Despite those problems, the report also found that the FBI’s actions

were not motivated by partisan bias and that the investigation was opened for a proper cause.

“I think the activities we found don’t vindicate anybody who touched” the warrant applications, Horowitz said.

The partisan responses to his report were on display from the outset of the hearing. The Democratic and Republican leaders of the committee highlighted the findings they found most favorable to the points they wanted to make.

Democrats have seized on the inspector general’s conclusion that the investigation was not tainted by political motivations. But Republicans say the findings show the investigation was fatally flawed. Attorney General William Barr, a vocal

defender of President Donald Trump, said the FBI investigation was based on a “bogus narrative” and he declined to rule out that agents may have acted in bad faith.

Horowitz told senators that the FBI failed to follow its own standards for accuracy and completeness when it sought a warrant from the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to monitor the communications of ex-campaign aide Carter Page.

The report detailed 17 errors and omissions during those wiretap applications, including failing to tell the court when questions were raised about the reliability of some of the information that it had presented to receive the warrants.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Pet potbellied Biscuit escapes on family trip

SC MYRTLE BEACH — A little piggy named Biscuit is headed home.

Police in Myrtle Beach found the 6-week-old potbellied pig behind an area restaurant recently, The News & Observer reported.

He escaped from his family, who was vacationing in the area from North Carolina, police said in a statement.

Officers are working to reunite him with his family, police said.

Bronze vases stolen from cemetery

NE LINCOLN — Dozens of bronze headstone flower vases were stolen from a cemetery in Lincoln.

Police said the theft of 40 vases was reported at Lincoln Memorial Park.

Each vase was valued at \$50, so the loss is estimated at \$2,000, police said.

In October, about a dozen vases were also stolen from the cemetery.

Teacher accused of mistreating child

GA ACWORTH — A special education teacher in the Atlanta area was arrested and accused of making a 5-year-old student sit in his own waste to teach him a lesson on restroom habits.

Teacher Kelly Lewis, 56, was charged with one count of cruelty to children in the second degree stemming from a Nov. 21 incident at Frey Elementary School in Cobb County, news outlets reported.

According to a county arrest warrant, Lewis knew the child had defecated on himself.

She told him she was “going to prove a point” about restroom habits and made the child sit in his soiled clothes for about two hours, the warrant said.

Snowmobiler briefly buried by avalanche

UT SALT LAKE CITY — A Utah snowmobiler said he briefly panicked after an avalanche sent him cartwheeling off his snowmobile and buried him in snow in the mountains near the Idaho border.

Matthew Jensen said his friends dug him out after about a minute under the snow because they spotted his hand sticking out. He said he told himself to relax to avoid using all his oxygen.

The incident occurred on a hill west of Eden basin in northern Utah. Jensen hurt his leg but is otherwise fine, KUTV-TV reported.

Authorities locate fishing boat that sunk

MA NEW BEDFORD — A fishing vessel that capsized and sank miles off Martha's Vineyard with four fishermen aboard was found.

The Leonardo, a 57-foot scalloper based out of New Bedford that went down Nov. 24, was located and identified, according to Massachusetts Environmental Police.

Only one of the four fishermen aboard the Leonardo was rescued. The other three men, Capt. Gerald Bretal, Mark Cormier and Xavier Vega, are considered lost at sea.

The vessel sank around 24 miles southwest of Martha's Vineyard and was found 140 feet down “sitting perfectly upright,” Maj. Patrick Moran told The Standard Times.

11 treated after chemical reaction

AL MONTGOMERY — Medical workers treated nearly a dozen people and firefighters evacuated a building after a chemical reaction caused injuries inside a manufacturing plant.

The Montgomery Fire Department said the incident happened after chemicals became mixed accidentally at Kinpak, a plastic fabrication facility.

Eleven people were affected, and three were sent to hospitals for inhalation injuries that weren't life-threatening.

High school to retire Indians mascot

WI MENOMONEE FALLS — A suburban Milwaukee school board voted to drop Menomonee Falls High School's Indians mascot following passionate debate on both sides of the issue.

The Menomonee Falls School Board voted 5-2 to retire the nickname that some considered racist.

Superintendent Corey Golla had recommended dropping the mascot, saying he doesn't believe it is in the best interest “for our students, our families and our district to continue to compel our students to be represented by a mascot that is regarded as harmful, offensive or disrespectful.”

Police: Man had meth lab inside a church

ME BUXTON — A Maine man was charged with transforming a children's playroom inside a church into a meth lab.

Police arrested Matthew Anderson, 33, after receiving a complaint from a church mem-

ber and discovering items consistent with the manufacture of methamphetamine in the designated playroom at the Buxton United Methodist Church.

The Maine Drug Enforcement Agency charged Anderson with unlawful operation of a methamphetamine lab.

Authorities arrest girl, 12, for posting kill list

FL TALLAHASSEE — Florida authorities arrested a 12-year-old girl after discovering at least two social media posts that threatened to kill fellow students at her middle school.

In one Snapchat post, the Broward County Sheriff's Office said, the girl listed the names of potential victims.

A later post warned that the students were not safe and that they would be killed.

Investigators were made aware of the threats by a parent and student at Falcon Cove Middle School north of Miami.

The girl was later taken into custody and taken to a juvenile center.

Nativity scene depicts family in cages

CA LOS ANGELES — A Methodist church in California unveiled a Nativity scene depicting Jesus, Mary and Joseph as refugees in cages.

The Los Angeles Times reported the display at the Claremont United Methodist Church is stoking debate related to the Trump administration's separation policies at the U.S. southern border.

The display shows classic Nativity figurines of Joseph and Mary in cages on either side of a cage containing the manger of Jesus.

From wire reports

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Reporting
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and Military News

Woods puts himself in Presidents Cup

Associated Press

The role of Presidents Cup captain typically is reserved for players in the twilight of their careers.

Nothing is typical about Tiger Woods.

Six months after he was appointed U.S. captain, he won the Tour Championship and nearly captured the FedEx Cup. While picking out team uniforms and choosing vice captains, Woods won the Masters. As he was contemplating which four players to take as captain's picks, he won in Japan for his record-tying 82nd career PGA Tour victory.

Captain or player for the Dec. 12-15 matches at Royal Melbourne in Australia?

Both.

"It's a lot of moving parts, but something I've been looking forward to for a long time," Woods said.

He is the first playing captain since Hale Irwin in the inaugural Presidents Cup in 1994, and the first captain to pick himself. Irwin won at Hilton Head that

year at age 49 and qualified for the team. Woods won twice this year and is No. 7 in the world, filling out a U.S. team with all 12 players among the top 25 in the world ranking.

And with that, the long odds facing the International team got a little bit longer.

Not even the Ryder Cup with all its history started out so one-sided. The International team, cobbled together with players from countries outside Europe, has managed only one victory in the 25-year history of this event. It was such a blow-out last time at Liberty National that the Americans were one match away from ending it on Saturday.

Leading the way for the International team is Ernie Els, who has finished runner-up to Woods more than any other player.

The Big Easy cares more about opportunity than history.

"People are not giving us much of a chance," Els said. "I mean, the whole of the U.S. team is in the top 20. We have one

player in the top 20, and that's just the way it is. But somebody is going to win 15½ points. And at the end of the day, that's our aim — try and get 15½ points somehow off of this unbelievably talented team."

In his favor is the course and the home crowd.

Royal Melbourne is where the International team registered its only victory in 1998, a beating so thorough that Nick Price won the decisive point in the second of 12 singles matches. That was as good as it would get.

The Americans won big two years later and have been winning ever since except in 2003 in South Africa. That was declared a tie after Woods and Els went toe-to-toe for three sudden-death playoff holes until it was too dark to continue.

Woods won the clinching point at Royal Melbourne in 2011, but it was that one loss — Woods doesn't forget easily — that he keeps bringing up to his heavily favored team.

"I think it helps having Tiger

as a captain, who's been on a team that has lost at Royal Melbourne," Gary Woodland said. "He's talked a lot about that to us. We have five rookies trying to make a name for ourselves, too. And we're playing for Tiger Woods, which is pretty cool."

Not only are they playing for Woods, they are playing with him.

Woods was 149th in the world when he was appointed captain, with four back surgeries since his last victory, which some thought might have been his last. Now he is among the top 10 in the world, the Masters champion, a winner in the last PGA Tour event he played.

Woods first carried a radio and rode in a cart as an assistant captain at the 2016 Ryder Cup, and he was an assistant at the last Presidents Cup. His text messages on potential pairings and strategy are relentless. Players who have been around him say he prepares as hard as he ever did for a major.

Source: Yanks, Cole agree to \$324 million, 9-year deal

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The New York Yankees landed the biggest prize of the free agent market, adding Gerrit Cole to their rotation with a record \$324 million, nine-year contract on Tuesday night, a person familiar with the deal told The Associated Press.

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

Cole's deal established marks for pitchers in total dollars, topping the \$245 million, seven-year contract Stephen Strasburg finalized a day earlier to remain with the World Series champion Washington Nationals.

Its \$36 million average is a record for any player, beating the \$35.5 million in outfielder Mike Trout's \$426.5 million, 12-year deal with the Los Angeles

Angels that started last season. Cole gets an even \$36 million annually and can opt out after the 2024 season. He also has a full no-trade provision.

Agent Scott Boras negotiated the deals for Cole and Strasburg.

A 29-year-old right-hander, Cole was baseball's most dominant pitcher for much of 2019 and helped the Houston Astros come within one win of their second World Series title in three seasons.

"Obviously, when you are talking about a player at the level of Gerrit Cole, in a lot of ways that's a game-changing type talent," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said. "This is a guy that's really hungry, really driven."

New York has not won the World Series since 2009 and sought an ace to head a rotation that already includes Luis

Severino, Masahiro Tanaka, James Paxton and J.A. Happ or Domingo German, who may be suspended at the season's start under baseball's domestic violence policy.

General manager Brian Cashman executed the move out of the same playbook he used after the 2008 season, when he gave CC Sabathia a \$161 million, seven-year deal to lead a staff and establish a clubhouse presence.

Cole will complement a young core of hitters that includes Aaron Judge, Gleyber Torres and Gary Sanchez, entering a window when New York thinks it can compete consistently for championships.

Cole was drafted by the Yankees in the first round with the 28th overall pick out of high school in 2008 but chose to go to UCLA, then was drafted first overall by Pittsburgh three

years later. Traded after the 2017 season, he transformed his career in two seasons with the Astros.

After going 59-42 with a 3.50 ERA in five seasons with the Pirates, he blossomed under the analytics-focused staff of the Astros. He increased the usage of his four-seam fastball and curveball, virtually dropping his two-seam sinker while attacking the top of the strike zone more often.

He went 15-5 with a 2.88 ERA in 2018, then 20-5 with a 2.50 ERA and a major league-high 326 strikeouts last season, finishing second to teammate Justin Verlander in AL Cy Young Award balloting. Just 4-5 in late May, he went 19-0 over his next 25 starts before losing the World Series opener. He won Game 5 and was available to pitch in Game 7 but was never used.

College basketball roundup

Louisville becomes fourth No. 1 to fall

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Louisville became the fourth No. 1 team to lose this season, falling to Texas Tech 70-57 Tuesday night as Davide Moretti scored 18 points and hit successive three-pointers at Madison Square Garden.

The Cardinals joined Michigan State, Kentucky and Duke as top-ranked squads to lose, three of them to unranked teams.

Louisville (9-1) easily played its worst game of the season, shooting an abysmal 34% from the floor and leading scorer Jordan Nwora had only 14 points. Coach Chris Mack let loose his frustration in the Jimmy V Classic game in the final 90 seconds and was whistled for a technical.

Texas Tech (6-3) played without leading scorer Jahmi'us Ramsey (17.3 points) for the third straight game because of a hamstring injury, and ended a three-game losing streak. The Red Raiders lost four of their top five scorers off the team that took

Virginia to overtime before losing in the NCAA championship game last season.

No. 2 Kansas 95, Wisconsin-Milwaukee 68: Devon Dotson had 22 points and nine assists while Udoka Azubuike added 15 points and 17 rebounds for the host Jayhawks.

Ochai Agbaji also had 22 points for Kansas (8-1), which built a 40-12 lead in the first half and cruised the rest of the way to its 26th consecutive home win. It also gave the Jayhawks 300 for the decade, joining Gonzaga (304) as the only Division I schools to have reached the milestone before the calendar flips to January.

Penn State 76, No. 4 Maryland 69: The host Nittany Lions became the fifth unranked team to beat a top-5 program in this upset-filled season, getting 15 points and 11 rebounds from Mike Watkins to beat the Terrapins.

Lamar Stevens added 15 points and 10 rebounds, Myreon Jones scored 14, Izaiah

Brockington scored 14 and Myles Dread had 12 for Penn State (8-2, 1-1 Big Ten), which led for all but 1:54.

No. 11 Baylor 53, No. 18 Butler 52: Mark Vital blocked Kamar Baldwin's potential go-ahead shot with 1.5 seconds left and the host Bears handed the Bulldogs their first loss.

It was the second win in a row, and third this season, for Baylor (8-1) over a Top 25 team.

Northern Iowa 79, No. 24 Colorado 76: Spencer Haldeman stole a pass and raced down the floor for a tiebreaking layup with 49 seconds remaining to send the Panthers past the host Buffaloes.

Northern Iowa (9-1) defeated a ranked team for the first time since topping No. 25 Wichita State 53-50 on Feb. 13, 2016. The Panthers had lost their previous seven encounters against ranked opponents.

NBA roundup

Heat get hot in overtime to close out win over Hawks

Associated Press

MIAMI — Duncan Robinson tied a franchise record with 10 three-pointers, Bam Adebayo and Jimmy Butler each had triple-doubles and the Miami Heat scored 22 unanswered points down the stretch to beat the Atlanta Hawks 135-121 in overtime on Tuesday night.

Kendrick Nunn scored 36 points, one off the Heat rookie record. Adebayo finished with a career-high 30 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists. Butler had 20 points, a career-high 18 rebounds and 10 assists.

And Robinson scored 34 points, on a night when Miami moved to 11-0 at home.

Tyler Herro, 19, made three three-pointers in overtime, plus another with 7.1 seconds left in regulation just to help the Heat get into the extra session. Of his five field goals in the final 6 minutes, four of them were assisted by Butler.

"I don't shy away from taking the big shot," Herro said.

76ers 97, Nuggets 92: Joel Embiid threw the ball over his shoulder into the basket and celebrated the no-look shot with a little shake and shimmy for the crowd in a win over visiting Denver.

It was vintage Embiid — and something the fun-loving center wants to do more.

Yes, the 76ers are winning. But their star big man wants to be in the middle of it.

Embiid scored 22 points, including two key free throws with 15.3 seconds left, and Tobias Harris added 20 to keep Philadelphia perfect at home.

Matisse Thybulle added 13 points for the Sixers, who are 13-0 in Philadelphia. They have won three straight and seven of eight.

Embiid added 10 rebounds but once again struggled offensively down the stretch. After being benched late in Philadelphia's 110-104 win over Toronto on Sunday for committing three straight turnovers, he

missed a three-pointer, a jumper and committed a turnover in crunch time before making the two big foul shots.

Fortunately for the 76ers, their defense clamped down on Denver down the stretch.

"I need to be myself," Embiid said. "When I'm having fun, I dominate."

Embiid said he has cut back on the extracurricular activity while trying to be more mature since his two-game suspension for fighting Karl-Anthony Towns on Oct. 30, which was followed by a postgame barrage of insults on social media.

Embiid, however, let loose after his improbable shot ended the third quarter with Philadelphia ahead 83-76, and the crowd loved it.

"I need to do it more," he said.

Hornets 114, Wizards 107: Devonte Graham scored 29 points, Miles Bridges hit a big three-pointer with 7.7 seconds left and host Charlotte beat

Washington in a game that featured 20 lead changes.

Terry Rozier scored 17 points, Bridges had 16, P.J. Washington added 15 and Cody Zeller and Bismack Biyombo both had double-doubles as the Hornets wrapped up a five-game home-stand with a 2-3 record.

David Bertans scored a career-high 32 points and made eight three-pointers for Washington. Rui Hachimura added 18 points and 12 rebounds for the Wizards, who have lost six of seven.

Trail Blazers 115, Knicks 87: Damian Lillard had 31 points, including eight three-pointers, and host Portland handed New York its 10th straight loss.

Hassan Whiteside added 17 points and 15 rebounds, and the Trail Blazers ended a two-game skid. Portland led by as many as 32. Julius Randle had 15 points for the Knicks, who have won just four games, fewest in the NBA.

Eichel extends point streak, lifts Sabres

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Buffalo Sabres are following Jack Eichel's lead and starting to find some consistency in their play.

Eichel scored two goals to extend his NHL-leading point streak to 14 games, and the Sabres beat the St. Louis Blues 5-2 on Tuesday night for their second straight win.

Sam Reinhart, Johan Larsson and Zemgus Girgensons each had a goal and an assist, and Linus Ullmark made 28 saves as the Sabres won consecutive games for the first time since opening the season with an 8-1-1 stretch.

"We're starting to form an identity," said Eichel, noting the confidence instilled in the team by first-year coach Ralph Krueger. "It's evident the way we can play every night to give ourselves a chance to win."

Troy Brouwer and Alex Pietrangelo had goals for the Blues, who have lost three in a row following a four-game winning streak. Jake Allen stopped 28 shots.

Eichel put the Sabres ahead 3-2 about six minutes into the third period. The Sabres' captain handled the puck behind the net

for several seconds before skating to the left slot and sending a wrist shot to the far corner.

The 14-game point streak for Eichel is the second-longest in the NHL this season, behind a 15-game stretch from Chicago's Patrick Kane. Eichel has 12 goals and 13 assists during the streak.

Eichel had 10 goals at this point last season and finished with 28.

"It's something I worked on this summer," Eichel said. "It was a big focus of mine, trying to score more goals in this league."

Krueger praised Eichel for playing an all-around game while leading the Sabres' attack.

"It's the two-way Jack Eichel that I'm speaking about here, and people are starting to realize how he can finish a game for you," Krueger said. "His faceoff percentages are getting better all the time and his confidence without the puck and what needs to happen with his reads are just improving daily."

Eichel scored into an empty net with two seconds remaining for his 20th goal of the season. Girgensons also scored an empty-netter in the final minute.

Pietrangelo scored his 100th career goal and seventh of the season to tie the score for the Blues in the opening minutes of the third. David Perron set up the goal with a slick move, dropping Sabres defenseman Henri Jokiharju to the ice when he faked a shot and brought the puck to his backhand. Pietrangelo received a pass from Perron in the right circle and scored on a one-timer.

The Blues couldn't capitalize on several good scoring chances in the second period. Ivan Barvashev, Brayden Schenn and David Perron each hit the post on shots.

"We score in the second, a couple goals, it's a different game," Blues coach Craig Berube said. "We hit three posts. That's the difference."

Ullmark also made a spectacular sliding save on a one-timer from Schenn in the second period.

While Buffalo has struggled of late with Carter Hutton in goal, Ullmark is 5-1-1 with a .923 save percentage in his last seven games.

"He was tremendous tonight, as he's been lately," Eichel said. "He's been the backbone of this team. He's give us a chance to win every night."

NHL roundup

Jarry's shutout streak ends as Canadiens top Pens

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Tomas Tatar's 10th goal of the season ended Tristan Jarry's franchise-record shutout streak and sparked the Montreal Canadiens to a 4-1 victory over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Tuesday night.

Jarry's shutout run ended at 177:15 on Tatar's power-play goal 12:24 into the second period that tied the game. Joel Armia beat Jarry less than four minutes later to put the Canadiens in front to stay and Shea Weber scored with just 15 seconds left in the period.

Montreal won for the fourth time in its last 12 meetings with the Penguins.

Lightning 2, Panthers 1: Steven Stamkos and Alex Killorn scored to lead Tampa Bay to a win at Florida.

Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 27 shots for the Lightning.

Evgenii Dadonov had the goal for the Panthers. Sergei Bobrovsky made a season-high 46 saves in his third straight start.

Jets 5, Red Wings 1: Blake Wheeler, Andrew Copp and Patrik Laine scored in a two-minute span in the second period and host Winnipeg dealt Detroit its 12th straight loss.

Wheeler began the barrage at 16:43 of the second when he beat Eric Comrie, who was making his first start in goal since the Red Wings acquired him in a trade with Arizona on Nov. 30.

Predators 3, Sharks 1: Calle Jarnkrok had a goal and an assist in the third period, Juuse Saros made 24 saves and host Nashville beat slumping San Jose.

Nick Bonino and Ryan Johansen also scored in the third for the Predators.

Ducks 3, Wild 2 (SO): Rickard Rickell and Max Comtois scored in the shootout and Anaheim beat Minnesota for its first win in six road games.

Rakell and Cam Fowler scored for the Ducks in a dominant first period during which they had a 14-1 advantage in shots on goal and the Wild lost center Eric Staal to an injury.

Stars 2, Devils 0: Ben Bishop made 26 saves, 16 in the third period, and host Dallas beat New Jersey, hours after head coach Jim Montgomery was fired.

Hurricanes 6, Oilers 3: Sebastian Aho scored two goals and Carolina won at Edmonton.

Nino Niederreiter, Ryan Dzingel, Jordan Martinook and

Dougie Hamilton also scored for the Hurricanes (19-11-1), who have won three straight.

Flames 5, Coyotes 2: Sean Monahan scored for the fourth straight game, Cam Talbot stopped 46 shots and Calgary extended its winning streak to six straight games under interim coach Geoff Ward with a win at listless Arizona.

Maple Leafs 4, Canucks 1: John Tavares had two goals and an assist and Toronto won at Vancouver.

Golden Knights 5, Blackhawks 1: Marc-Andre Fleury made 28 saves in his return to the lineup and host Vegas beat Chicago.

Kings 3, Rangers 1: Tyler Toffoli had a goal and an assist, and host Los Angeles snapped a four-game losing streak by beating New York.