

Bases chosen for troops to get vaccine

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Military health care workers in South Korea, Germany and Okinawa will be among the first in the Department of Defense who can choose to receive the new coronavirus vaccines once they are officially approved, defense officials said Wednesday.

“The department is strongly encouraging everyone to take it,” Army Lt. Gen. Ronald Place, director of the Defense Health Agency, said during a briefing at the Pentagon.

The Defense Department on Wednesday announced its plan for distributing the allocation of coronavirus vaccines. The department is one of five agencies to be allocated its own supply of the vaccines, along with the Department of Veterans Affairs, the State Department, the Indian Health Service and the Bureau of Prisons.

The department expects to receive its first batch of slightly fewer than 44,000 doses of the vaccines as soon as next week. The doses will be distributed to more than a dozen locations in the United States and

overseas as part of a pilot program to make certain the distribution process is working, defense officials said.

Locations outside the continental U.S. are Allgood Army Community Hospital, Camp Humphreys, South Korea; Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany; Kadena Medical Facility, Kadena Air Base, Okinawa; and Tripler Army Medical Center, Honolulu, Hawaii.

In the U.S., the locations are Darnall Army Medical Center, Fort Hood, Texas; Willford Hall, Joint Base San Antonio, Texas; Madigan Army Medical Center, Joint Base Lewis McChord, Wash.; Womack Army Medical Center, Fort Bragg, N.C.; Navy Branch Health Clinic, Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, Fla.; Base Alameda Health Services, U.S. Coast Guard Base, Alameda, Calif.; Naval Medical Center, San Diego, Calif.; Naval Hospital, Camp Pendleton, Calif.; Naval Hospital Pensacola, Pensacola, Fla.; Armed Forces Retirement Home, Gulfport, Miss.; Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, Md.; Armed Forces Retirement Home, Washington, D.C.; Portsmouth Naval Medical

Center, Portsmouth, Va.; U.S. Coast Guard Base Clinic, Portsmouth, Va.; Indiana National Guard, Franklin, Ind., and New York National Guard Medical Command, Watervliet, N.Y.

The locations were picked based on criteria including having ultra-cold storage for the vaccines, as well as having large numbers of medical and security staff who can receive the initial phase of the vaccine and also monitor the vaccination process, according to Place.

Once the program proves the distribution process works, the Defense Department will begin sending the vaccine to hundreds of other sites in the U.S. and around the world, Place said.

Once the vaccine’s emergency authorization is approved, the Defense Department anticipates people will begin to be vaccinated within 48 hours. The department, however, will not mandate that personnel be vaccinated.

If the vaccine is eventually fully licensed by the FDA, then the Pentagon will look at whether to make it mandatory for service members, he said.

Air Force, Marine quarantine leave days restored

By ERICA EARL
Stars and Stripes

Airmen who were charged for leave while on mandatory coronavirus quarantine may have those days restored, Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force JoAnne Bass said Monday.

The Marine Corps will also reimburse that time, Maj. Kenneth Kunze, a spokesperson for the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, wrote in an email to Stars and Stripes on Wednesday.

Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, service members who traveled for either mission-essential or personal reasons were sometimes required to isolate 14 days as a safety precaution.

Headquarters Air Force posted an order Monday that the two weeks spent on mandatory quarantine would not count against leave days, according to Bass’ post, even if that travel was not mission essential. This

waiver decision was backdated to Nov. 20.

“Sharing this win in case you hadn’t gotten word yet,” Bass said in her Facebook post Monday.

Airmen will be able to recoup all leave days charged for any time in quarantine on or after Aug. 6.

Marines do not have a cutoff date for recovering leave, Kunze said.

Service members in either branch wishing to have quarantine leave days restored will need to work with their squadron or unit commander to get a memo drafted.

For airmen to reclaim leave days charged amid the pandemic, Bass said, the memo needs to include the member’s rank, original leave number, original leave dates and the dates of quarantine. This information should be turned in to the service member’s local financial management flight.

Spokespeople for the Army and the Ma-

rines on Wednesday told Stars and Stripes via email and phone calls that quarantine after travel for any reason, including holiday travel, will not be charged as leave.

The Army did not respond to inquiries about how their reimbursement policies would work, but Kevin Krejcarek, a spokesperson for U.S. Army Japan, said no soldiers under the command have requested reimbursement for leave charged during quarantine.

The conversation around charging leave for quarantine after personal travel began buzzing in October, when Chief Master Sgt. Rick Winegardner of U.S. Forces Japan raised the issue during a question-and-answer session with American Forces Network Radio. Winegardner at the time said USFJ and Indo-Pacific Command were working to simplify the leave policy in time for the holidays.

US bombers fly over Mideast as note to Iran

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a new show of military might, two American bomber aircraft took off from the United States and flew over a swath of the Middle East on Thursday, sending what U.S. officials said was a direct message of deterrence to Iran.

The flight of the two massive B-52H Stratofortress bombers over the region, the second such mission in less than a month, was designed to underscore America's continuing commitment to the Middle East even as President Donald Trump's administration withdraws thousands of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The long-range heavy bombers, which are capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear weapons, are a formidable sight and are flown less frequently in the

Middle East than smaller combat aircraft, such as American fighter jets. Adversaries often complain about bomber flights in their region, deeming them a provocative show of force.

"The ability to fly strategic bombers halfway across the world in a nonstop mission and to rapidly integrate them with multiple regional partners demonstrates our close working relationships and our shared commitment to regional security and stability," Gen. Frank McKenzie, the top U.S. commander for the Middle East, said in a statement.

The troop cuts coupled with the impending departure of the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier strike group in the Gulf have fueled allies' concerns that the U.S. is abandoning the region. Those worries are compounded

by fears that Iran may strike out at the U.S. or allies in retaliation for the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh. Iran has blamed the death on Israel, which has been suspected in previous killings of Iranian nuclear scientists.

U.S. officials are also worried about a possible Iranian retaliatory strike on the first anniversary of the U.S. airstrike that killed Iran's top general, Qassem Soleimani, and senior Iraqi militia leaders near Baghdad's airport in early January.

Iranian-backed militias routinely launch rockets near installations in Iraq where U.S. and Iraqi troops are based, and officials worry about a larger, more deadly assault.

"We do not seek conflict," McKenzie said, "but we must remain postured and committed to respond to any contingency."

Weekly jobless claims up to 853K amid virus surge

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of people applying for unemployment aid jumped last week to 853,000, the most since September, evidence that companies are cutting more jobs as new virus cases spiral higher.

The Labor Department said Thursday that the number of applications increased from 716,000 the previous week. Before the coronavirus paralyzed the economy in March, weekly jobless claims typically numbered only about 225,000.

The latest figures coincide with a surging outbreak that appears to be weakening the job market and the economy and threatening to derail any recovery. Consumers thus

far haven't spent as much this holiday shopping season as they have in previous years, according to credit and debit card data. And in November, employers added jobs at the slowest pace since April. Restaurants, bars and retailers all cut jobs last month.

The total number of people who are receiving state-provided unemployment aid rose for the first time in three months to 5.8 million, the government said, from 5.5 million. That suggests that some companies have sharply pulled back on hiring.

All told, more than 19 million people are still dependent on some type of unemployment benefit. And unless Congress acts soon, nearly half of them will lose that aid in just over two weeks. That's when two job-

less aid programs that the federal government created in the spring are set to expire.

The first program provides unemployment benefits to the self-employed and contract workers, who weren't eligible in the past. The second program extends jobless aid for 13 weeks.

Members of Congress and the Trump administration are fighting over a roughly \$900 billion relief package that could extend the programs into the spring, sparing about 9 million unemployed Americans from deeper financial distress.

A bipartisan group of senators has proposed to extend the supplemental aid for four months and add \$300-a-week in federal jobless aid.

Government funds extended to buy more time to talk

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Still spinning their wheels on COVID-19 relief, lawmakers have grabbed a one-week government funding extension that buys time for more talks — though there is considerable disagreement over who is supposed to be taking the lead from there.

Amid the uncertainty, the House easily passed a one-week government-wide funding bill Wednesday that sets a new Dec. 18 deadline for Congress to wrap up both the COVID-19 relief measure and a \$1.4 trillion catchall spending bill that is also over-

due. The 343-67 vote sent the one-week bill to the Senate, where it's expected to easily pass before a deadline of midnight Friday to avert a partial government shutdown.

The measure would give lawmakers more time to sort through the hot mess they have created for themselves after months of futile negotiations and posturing and recent rounds of flip-flopping.

Top GOP leaders said the right people to handle endgame negotiations are the top four leaders of Congress and the Trump administration, focused on a proposal by

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to eliminate a Democratic demand for a roughly \$160 billion aid package for state and local governments.

Top Democrats, meanwhile, are placing their bets on a bipartisan group of senators who are trying to iron out a \$908 billion package. The bipartisan group is getting no encouragement from McConnell, but members are claiming progress on perhaps the most contentious item, a demand by the Kentucky Republican to award businesses and other organizations protections against COVID-19-related lawsuits.

US sues Facebook for ‘predatory’ conduct

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. government and 48 states and districts sued Facebook Wednesday, accusing it of abusing its market power in social networking to crush smaller competitors and seeking remedies that could include a forced spinoff of the social network’s Instagram and WhatsApp messaging services.

The landmark antitrust lawsuits, announced by the Federal Trade Commission and New York Attorney General Letitia James, mark the second major government offensive this year against seemingly untouchable tech behemoths. The Justice Department sued Google in October for abusing its dominance in online search and advertising — the government’s most significant attempt to buttress competition since its historic case against Microsoft two decades ago. Amazon and Apple have also been under investigation in Congress for alleged anticompetitive conduct.

James said at a press conference that “it’s really critically important that we block this predatory acquisition of companies and that we restore confidence to the market.”

The FTC said Facebook has engaged in a “a systematic strategy” to eliminate its competition, including by purchasing smaller up-and-coming rivals like Instagram in 2012 and WhatsApp in 2014. James echoed that in her press conference, saying Facebook “used its monopoly power to crush smaller rivals and snuff out competition, all at the expense of everyday users.”

The FTC fined Facebook \$5 billion in 2019 for privacy violations and instituted new oversight and restrictions on its business. The fine was the largest the agency has ever levied on a tech company, although it had no visible impact on Facebook’s business.

Facebook called the government actions “revisionist history” that punishes successful businesses and noted that the FTC cleared the Instagram and WhatsApp acquisitions years ago.

“The government now wants a do-over, sending a chilling warning to American business that no sale is ever final,” Facebook general counsel Jennifer Newstead said in a statement which echoed the company’s response to a recent congressional antitrust probe.

Facebook is the world’s biggest social network with 2.7 billion users and a company with a market value of nearly \$800 billion. CEO Mark Zuckerberg is the world’s fifth-richest individual and the most public face of Big Tech swagger.

James alleged Facebook had a practice of opening its site to third-party app developers, then abruptly cutting off developers that it saw as a threat. The lawsuit — which includes 46 states, Guam and the District of Columbia — accuses Facebook of anti-competitive conduct and using its market dominance to harvest consumer data and reap a fortune in advertising revenues.

North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein, who was on the executive committee of attorneys general conducting the investigation, said the litigation has the potential to alter the communications landscape in a similar way that the breakup of AT&T’s local phone service monopoly in the early 1980s did.

“Our hope is to restructure the social networking marketplace in the United States, and right now there’s one player,” Stein told reporters.

Hunter Biden tax probe examining his business dealings with China

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department is investigating the finances of President-elect Joe Biden’s son, including scrutinizing some of his Chinese business dealings, a person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press.

The revelations put a renewed spotlight on questions about Hunter Biden’s financial history, which dogged his father’s successful White House campaign and were a frequent target of President Donald Trump and his allies. They also come at a politically delicate time for the president-elect, who is weighing his choice to lead an agency that is actively investigating his son.

There is no indication that the investigation has anything to do with Joe Biden.

The investigation was launched in 2018, the year before the elder Biden announced his candidacy for president. Hunter Biden confirmed the existence of the investigation on Wednesday, saying he learned about it for the first time the previous day.

“I take this matter very seriously, but I am confident that a professional and objec-

tive review of these matters will demonstrate that I handled my affairs legally and appropriately, including with the benefit of professional tax advisors,” he said in a statement.

It is unclear which entities or business dealings might be in the probe, though the person with knowledge of it said at least some of focus was on his work in China. Federal investigators served a round of subpoenas Tuesday, including one for Hunter Biden, according to another person familiar with the investigation.

Investigators did not reach out until recently because of Justice Department practice against taking overt investigative actions in the run-up to an election, one of the people said. The people familiar with the investigation insisted on anonymity to discuss an ongoing probe.

The transition team said in a statement, “President-elect Biden is deeply proud of his son, who has fought through difficult challenges, including the vicious personal attacks of recent months, only to emerge stronger.”

Va. sailor pleads guilty to giving info to Russians

Associated Press

PORTSMOUTH, Va. — A Navy sailor stationed in Virginia pleaded guilty Tuesday to giving a Russian national classified information. Chief Petty Officer Charles T. Briggs also pleaded guilty to making false official statements three times, The Virginian-Pilot reported.

Briggs’ rank was reduced to E-4 and he was sentenced to 18 months, as well as an additional 13 months for the second conviction. The sentences will be served consecutively.

Briggs was accused of acquiring classified information while he was stationed at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska from 2018 to early 2019. Navy officials said he later passed that information on to a Russian national knowing it would be harmful to the United States.

Briggs was also accused of lying about his connections to the Russian national and an Italian citizen. Officials said he also lied about a trip he made to Serbia.

Calif. has surge in deaths, hospitalizations

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — California's coronavirus surge has caused so many hospitalizations and deaths that the numbers brought usually stoic public health officers in major metropolitan areas to pleas — and even near to tears — as they urged people to heed safety rules.

Los Angeles County, the nation's largest with 10 million residents, had a "devastating increase in deaths" from about a dozen a day in mid-November to an average of 43 a day this week, the county's health director, Barbara Ferrer, said Wednesday.

"Over 8,000 people who were beloved members of their families are not coming back," Ferrer said in a choked voice. She called the deaths "an incalculable loss to their friends and their family and the community."

The county reported 3,299 people hospitalized with the virus as of Wednesday, and 23% of them were in intensive care. New COVID-19 admissions were approaching 500 a day, and health officials estimated that could jump to 700 a day by next week.

The county is part of the enormous Southern California region which, along with the San Joaquin Valley, contain more than 60% of the state's 40 million residents. Last week, the two regions were ordered to follow the strictest anti-COVID-19 rules under a new state stay-at-home order that aims to keep hospitals from being overwhelmed.

In Santa Clara County, about 50 ICU beds were available for a population of about 2 million.

Texas

DALLAS — A Texas state official who has been critical of measures Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has enacted to help slow down the coronavirus pandemic said Wednesday that he has tested positive for COVID-19.

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller was among leaders from the right wing of the Texas Republican Party who staged a protest outside of Abbott's home in October. Miller, 65, was among an estimated 200 people gathered outside the governor's mansion to blast Abbott's executive orders, including a continued statewide mask mandate and lockdowns.

In a statement Wednesday, Miller said he'd be quarantining at his ranch.

"Not feeling my best, but I've survived rodeo injuries, broken bones, hip, double knee and shoulder surgery, West Nile virus and cancer, and I'm going to beat this too," he said in the statement.

Nevada

RENO — The Washoe County School Board has decided to extend distance learning for middle and high schools in the Reno area until at least Jan. 19 partly because of a shortage of teachers.

Elementary schools will continue to offer in-class instruction for kindergartners through fifth-graders.

The board had decided last month that secondary students would return to a hybrid model on Jan. 4 that combined remote teaching and classroom learning every other day. But on a 5-2 vote Tuesday night, the board agreed to extend the distance learning for another two weeks after the winter break.

Superintendent Kristen McNeill said additional time is needed to put pieces in place, including recruiting more substitutes and to give the health district time to train more contact tracers, according to the Reno Gazette-Journal.

New Mexico

SANTA FE — New Mexico has begun monitoring sewage from prisons and youth rehabilitation facilities to more efficiently detect COVID-19 outbreaks in the southwest of the state, the state Environment Department announced Wednesday.

The agency says the goal is to sample human feces in group-living situations to quickly identify coronavirus outbreaks. The results may be used to more effectively deploy individual testing to pinpoint infections and halt the spread.

Sampling will take place at federal, state and local jails, along with facilities overseen by the state Children, Youth and Families Department. A list of individual facilities was not immediately available.

Environment Department spokeswoman Maddy Hayden said the initial effort comes at a cost of about \$300,000, utilizing federal relief funds. Lexington, Massachusetts-based ERG was contracted to perform the sewage testing.

Mississippi

JACKSON — Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves on Wednesday defended his decision to hold Christmas parties at the Governor's Mansion, despite repeatedly warning residents to avoid social gatherings as coronavirus cases surge.

The Republican governor said he invited family, friends and state officials to the multiple parties, but he expects many will

choose not to attend.

The front part of the Governor's Mansion is a museum that is open by appointment only, and the Reeves family lives in a private portion in the back. Reeves compared the parties to tours that have been happening during the pandemic. No more than 10 people are allowed on each tour of the historic home, and masks are required.

"What I think we are doing by offering the public the opportunity to, for instance, tour the Governor's Mansion, is to offer a sense of normalcy," Reeves said during a news conference.

Reeves, who became governor in January, said that he canceled many social events for the year, including a 16th birthday party for his oldest daughter and an open house traditionally held on the first Friday of December.

Pennsylvania

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf said Wednesday he has contracted COVID-19 and is isolating at home, revealing the diagnosis after several members of his security detail recently tested positive for the coronavirus.

The second-term Democrat said a routine test on Tuesday detected the virus.

"I have no symptoms and am feeling well," Wolf said in a statement. "I am following CDC and Department of Health guidelines."

Wolf's spouse, Frances, has been tested but has not received the result, Wolf said. She is quarantining with him at their home in Mount Wolf, near York.

Wolf is one of several governors who have tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19.

Oklahoma

TULSA — Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum said Wednesday that he's disgusted some cities, particularly in the Tulsa area, have not mandated mask wearing to help slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Cities with mask ordinances listened to medical professionals, Bynum said, suggesting city leaders in some other municipalities who opposed mask mandates took advice from "Facebook epidemiologists who can cite some sham website and claim that makes them an expert on the value of mask wearing."

Many Tulsa suburbs have adopted mask ordinances, but officials in nearby Broken Arrow on Nov. 23 rejected a proposal to strongly encourage mask wearing.

Police go to break-in, find music video shoot

FL PEMBROKE PINES — Police in South Florida descended on what they thought was an armed break-in at a men's clothing store after people were spotted storming in with rifles — but officers arrived to find a music video filming, all with the store owners' knowledge.

The guns were not real and the men holding them were actors in a video, said Amanda Conwell, a spokeswoman for the Pembroke Pines Police Department.

The music video was being filmed inside the men's clothing and accessories store with a film crew while the larger shopping center was closed, The Miami Herald reported, citing a store manager.

A witness saw the events unfolding, and not knowing it was staged, called police, authorities said.

Pembroke Pines officials said the city had not given a permit for the filming, and the shopping center's management team said in a statement that it was also not aware of the video.

Gun shop burglarized for second time in 2 months

SD STURGIS — After operating without incident for five years, a Sturgis gun store was burglarized for the second time in two months.

Sturgis Guns was broken into last weekend, according to a police news release. Authorities arrived to find a broken side window and learned that nine rifles, a BB gun and a scope were stolen, the release said.

The shop was also targeted on Nov. 2, when 14 firearms were stolen.

Tammy Bohn, who owns Sturgis Guns with her husband Justin, said she ordered metal bars after the first burglary, but they hadn't arrived yet.

Chicken wings, pot thrown into prison in footballs

MS LEAKESVILLE — Corrections officials at a South Mississippi prison said they confiscated dozens of illegal cell phones and pounds of marijuana and barbecued chicken wings, some of which were concealed inside footballs and thrown over a prison fence.

The footballs and other packages cleared South Mississippi Correctional Institution's double 18-foot-high fences and were detected by the prison's sensing technology, officials said in a press release.

The contraband was split into 25 packages, which included 38 cellphones, cigars, 20

pounds of tobacco and rolling papers, 4 pounds of marijuana and 7 pounds of barbecued chicken wings.

Deputies: Man accused of fatally shooting 2 dogs

FL DELAND — A Florida man is facing animal cruelty and child abuse charges after killing two of his fiancée's dogs, Volusia County Sheriff's officials said.

William Petty, 49, was arrested a day after the incident occurred in DeLand, the news release said.

A 16-year-old boy told investigators that Petty loaded up two of her dogs and drove them to a wooded area. He pulled out a revolver and shot the female dog in the head. He then handed the teen the gun and told him to shoot the other dog, the release said.

The teen said he shot into the ground and Petty took the gun back and shot the other dog. He then tossed both dogs into the woods, the release said.

Petty was arrested on two counts of felony cruelty to animals, two counts of unlawful disposal of a dead domestic animal, child abuse and carrying a concealed weapon in the commission of a felony.

Social media helps man, 92, find college varsity jacket

NC WINSTON-SALEM — More than 60 years after Mal Osborn earned a varsity letter jacket from the University of Maine as a track runner, he still wore it. That is until the 92-year-old lost it in October.

Osborn, who has lived in Winston-Salem since 1964, told his daughter, Beverly Amick, that he couldn't find the treasured jacket, the Bangor Daily News reported. Amick and other relatives retraced Osborn's usual routes but didn't find it.

Amick then posted a photo of Osborn on Facebook wearing the jacket at a Master's swimming competition in 2016 and asked for help finding it.

Amick said she got an email from a woman who lived near her father and had found the coat in her yard, covered with leaves.

Osborn has been sporting the jacket since Amick had it dry-cleaned and returned it to him, she said.

African American music museum to open next month

TN NASHVILLE — A new museum in Tennessee that focuses on African American music will open next month, officials said.

The National Museum of African American Music will host a socially distanced ribbon cutting Jan. 18 when it officially opens in Nashville, news outlets reported. Members of the museum will be able to take tours Jan. 23-24 and the facility will open to the public Jan. 30.

Due to rising cases of the coronavirus, the museum said it would limit the number of people inside the museum and all visitors would be required to wear masks.

Suspects use police lights in 'traffic stop' thefts

LA NEW ORLEANS — A suspect was accused of pretending to be a New Orleans police officer to pull a car over using red and blue flashing lights before stealing the driver's handgun, according to authorities.

Two men pulled the car over in an SUV with what appeared to be emergency lights mounted on the dashboard, New Orleans police said.

One of the suspects was wearing a face mask and jacket with New Orleans police badges when he approached the stopped driver, asked for a license then asked whether the motorist had weapons in the vehicle, investigators said. The driver handed over a gun, and the suspects sped off with it, according to police.

A similar encounter was reported less than 5 miles away, officials said.

Man accused of trying to bilk woman out of \$40K

MD WESTMINSTER — A Maryland sheriff's office arrested a Virginia man for trying to bilk a woman out of nearly \$40,000 by telling her that her nephew had been arrested.

The Carroll County Sheriff's Office said in a news release that a woman received a phone call telling her that her nephew had been arrested and that it would take \$29,000 to get him out of jail, the Carroll County Times reported. A man who investigators said was working with the caller arrived at the woman's home in Sykesville and collected the cash.

The next day the woman was told she would have to get another \$10,000, the sheriff's office said. A bank teller questioned the withdrawals and called police. When a man returned to the home on Saturday to collect the additional money, he was arrested.

The sheriff's office filed multiple charges against Michael Odell Anderson, 62, of Dunn, Va., including theft of between \$25,000 and \$100,000.

From The Associated Press

Rhattigan a late bloomer for Army

Associated Press

Army linebacker Jon Rhattigan is right where he always wanted to be as the biggest game of his life looms. It just took a little longer than he imagined.

A football captain in high school in Naperville, Ill., Rhattigan's first three years with the Black Knights went like this: no varsity action in 2017; played in one game in 2018, the season finale in the Armed Forces Bowl; appeared in all 13 games last year and registered six tackles while playing on special teams.

Not an easy row to hoe.

"Toughness and humility. That was the first three years," Rhattigan said. "It was a grind, as college football should be. I think this program, especially, is built on toughness and humility, and I think that's a great way for me to describe the first three years. I was fine in my role on the team and doing the best I could each year. Thankfully, that role has changed."

Has it ever.

This year, Rhattigan has been a key as a starter on a defense ranked fourth nationally (289.3 yards allowed per game) under first-year coordinator Nate Woody. Rhattigan leads the Black Knights in tackles with 67, eight of them for losses, and he's tied for the team lead with two interceptions, one that he returned for a touchdown. On Monday he was named one of 18 semifinalists for

the Bednarik Award, presented annually to the nation's top defensive player, a nice start to the week as Army (7-2) prepared to play Navy (3-6) at Michie Stadium on Saturday.

"I think he made up his mind in the off-season that he was going to be a leader for us," Woody said. "He stepped up and took on a role that we desperately needed. I can't tell you how tremendous of an asset he's been."

Rhattigan simply had to wait his turn. He was behind two-year captain Cole Christiansen on the depth chart, and Christiansen is now in the NFL with the Chargers.

"I guess it just happens," Army coach Jeff Monken said. "You don't always find yourself at the top of the depth chart right away. We knew he was a good player, but I felt like we had some good players there that were playing, too."

Rhattigan's high school coach said his former star understood the process and never once griped.

"It's tough when you're not playing, but I never heard him once get down on himself or the team or anything like that," Naperville coach Bill Ellinghaus said. "He knew that he was behind a really, really unique player and he was willing to put the work in to be as good as he could be when the time was right. When I talked to him last summer, he said, 'You know what? I think it's my

time.'"

Growing up with two older, athletic brothers — brother Joe was a star tailback at Princeton — taught Rhattigan valuable lessons that have served him well at West Point.

"If there's one thing that Jon is really good at, it's enduring those kinds of things," said Rhattigan's father, T.J. "He was in the shadow of both of his older brothers most of his life. He's a survivor. He perseveres. He just will not quit. I'm sure it was difficult for him. He wouldn't say anything."

Rhattigan, at 6-foot-1 and 245 pounds, had several offers from both the Ivy League and Mid-American Conference and some interest from Big Ten schools before suffering a torn knee ligament early in his junior year in high school. He rebounded with a solid senior year and chose West Point during a trip east to visit several schools.

After a stop at Brown of the Ivy League, it was on to West Point to the surprise of his father, whose attempt to dissuade him failed.

"I said, 'What are you doing? You're not going to go to West Point. You don't know what you're getting yourself into,'" T.J. Rhattigan recalled. "And he said, 'We have to go. This coach, when everybody else gave up on me (because of the injury, long-time Army assistant) Tucker Waugh kept calling.'"

Gators perfectly happy being one-dimensional

Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Florida coach Dan Mullen doesn't even really bother trying to run the ball anymore.

Sure, the sixth-ranked Gators hand it off here and there, mostly when they're leading and/or trying to run out the clock. But they're as one-dimensional as any Florida team in nearly two decades. And no one is complaining.

Not Mullen. Not quarterback and Heisman Trophy front-runner Kyle Trask. And surely not any of Trask's receivers, a group widely considered the best in the country.

The pass-happy Gators are simply happy passing.

Florida (8-1) enters Saturday's regular-season finale against reigning national champion LSU (3-5) with the nation's 103rd-ranked ground game. The Gators are averaging 126.2 yards rushing, the program's least-productive ground attack since coach Steve Spurrier's final season in Gainesville in 2001.

That was Spurrier's best passing team in his 26 years as a head coach, spanning Duke, Florida and South Carolina. With Rex Grossman at the helm, the Gators led the nation by averaging 405.2 yards through the air.

Trask and the Gators aren't quite there, but they aren't far behind. And the ground game has been a victim of their own pass-

ing prowess.

"If I want to go put our energy into it, I'm sure we can figure it out," Mullen said.

Mullen even threatened to open in the wishbone against the Tigers, just to prove to naysayers that Florida can run the ball if it wants.

No one is criticizing the Gators for being so pass-heavy, especially after pedestrian offenses becoming close to a pastime in Gainesville under former coaches Will Muschamp and Jim McElwain.

Florida fans are enjoying the air show. Trask's 376.7 yards passing per game lead the Football Bowl Subdivision. He also tops the nation with 38 touch-

down passes, eight more than his closest competitor and the third-highest total through nine games in FBS history.

Only Houston's Andre Ware (40 in 1989) and Hawaii's Colt Brennan (39 in 2006) had more at this point in a season. Trask has put up his numbers against an SEC-only schedule — few, if any, cupcakes.

The Gators also boast star tight end Kyle Pitts, dynamic playmaker Kadarius Toney and fellow receivers Trevon Grimes, Jacob Copeland and Justin Shorter. And Mullen has freshmen receivers Trent Whittemore, Xzavier Henderson and Ja'Quavion Frazier waiting their turn.

Waller gives Raiders defense for blitz

Associated Press

When the New York Jets kept sending blitzes at Derek Carr, the Las Vegas quarterback kept looking Darren Waller's way.

For good reason.

The athletic tight end has proven to be one of the most difficult matchups in the NFL, with the speed to get loose from bigger linebackers and safeties, and the size to outmaneuver smaller cornerbacks.

"Whenever you know you have a guy that it's man-to-man coverage and you know he can win, you can confidently, against any blitz, take your drop, step up and throw him the ball," Carr said Wednesday. "The knowledge that before you take that snap, you know you have a guy that can win like that, it makes all the difference in the world. You can play more confidently at the position."

Waller had 13 catches for 200 yards and two touchdowns Sunday against the Jets, becoming the fourth tight end with at least 200 yards receiving and two TDs in a single game.

Waller racked up 10 of those catches for 115 yards when new York blitzed. But he even made contributions when he wasn't getting open for receptions. Waller stayed in to block to give Carr time to beat an all-out

blitz in the closing seconds for the game-winning 46-yard TD pass to Henry Ruggs III.

"The dude is unbelievable," Carr said. "He gets the credit because the fantasy stat people love him, but especially on stuff like that, he doesn't get nearly enough credit for what he can do in the run and pass game protection-wise. He's the complete package. I think he's the best in the league."

Waller's journey to stardom has been an inspiring one.

After nearly squandering his career in Baltimore because of a drug addiction, he has developed into one of the most dependable pieces on the Raiders.

Waller was suspended four games in 2016 and all of 2017 because of drug violations. He spent most of 2018 on the Ravens' practice squad before the Raiders plucked him away late that season.

He blossomed into one of the top tight ends in the league last season with 90 catches for 1,145 yards, which helped him earn a long-term deal with the Raiders.

He has built on that this year, ranking second among all tight ends with 77 catches for 742 yards to go along with seven TDs.

"I feel like this season I've improved as a player and a person," Waller said. "Of

course, there's been games where the numbers weren't what people may have expected. Every week my mindset is whether I have 20 yards or 200, I still come to work the next week with the same mindset each day and stay on top of my habits and let the results take care of themselves."

Waller has been Carr's security blanket this season, getting 27.9% of the quarterback's targets, the highest mark of any tight end and fifth-highest in the league.

While many of those passes have been of the short variety, contributing to Waller's rather pedestrian 8.5 yards per catch over the first 12 weeks, he was able to deliver some big plays against the Jets.

Six of his catches went for at least 15 yards, including a 38-yard touchdown. The only other Raiders player with that many catches for at least 15 yards in a single game in the past 30 years was Tim Brown, who did it three times in the 1990s.

"We're looking to get Waller the ball as many times as possible because he's a great player," coach Jon Gruden said. "The opportunity presented itself. They blitzed 40 times and a lot of those blitz coverages involve man-to-man coverage, so you try to go to your top dog and that's what we did on several of those occasions."

Jaguars rookie RB Robinson looks like the 'real deal'

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla.— Jacksonville's next regime won't have to start from scratch. The Jaguars have a surprising number of building blocks in place, none more impressive this season than running back James Robinson.

The undrafted rookie from Illinois State has been the team's top newcomer and most consistent player, and it's not even close.

Robinson had 968 yards rushing through 12 games, the third-most in the NFL behind Tennessee's Derrick Henry and Minnesota's Dalvin Cook.

Robinson and Henry, who will be on opposite sidelines Sunday when Jacksonville (1-11) hosts the Titans (8-4), are two of three players to top 100 yards from scrimmage in at least seven games this season.

"James is the real deal," Jaguars quarterback Mike Glennon said. "He's a legit starting running back in the NFL. The thing I love about James is he never has lost yards. He's always falling forward. He turns what

could be second-and-10s into second-and-6s, and those add up over time.

"He keeps the game in manageable situations, and he's a special talent. How he fell to out of the draft, I have no clue. We are lucky to have him because he's one of the better backs in the League."

The ultraquiet Robinson leads all rookies in rushing and yards from scrimmage (1,278), and he ranks second in total touchdowns (nine). He needs 32 yards against Tennessee to become the first undrafted rookie in NFL history to reach 1,000 yards rushing through the first 14 weeks of a season.

Only three previous undrafted rookies have surpassed 1,000 yards rushing: Indianapolis' Dominic Rhodes (1,104 in 2001), Denver's Phillip Lindsay (1,037 in 2018) and Tampa Bay's LeGarrette Blount (1,007 in 2010). Only Lindsay made the Pro Bowl, and none of the three were named NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year.

Robinson has an outside shot at both.

"He's almost not human the way he, week in and week out, is able to perform and keep his body healthy," Jacksonville receiver and fellow rookie Collin Johnson said. "It's just impressive and motivating, too, seeing an undrafted guy come in here and put up the numbers he's doing and being such a good teammate.

"It's motivating. He's a great guy for our locker room and just a beast."

Pass rusher Josh Allen, linebacker Myles Jack, safety Daniel Thomas, receivers DJ Chark, Johnson and Laviska Shenault, and defensive tackles DaVon Hamilton and Doug Costin are part of a young nucleus that gives the team hope moving forward.

Robinson might be atop the list.

He has six consecutive games with more than 90 yards from scrimmage, the longest active streak in the NFL.

"I'm not worried about him slowing down," said coach Doug Marrone, who also raved about Robinson's work ethic and demeanor.

Top 25 roundup

No. 2 Bears roll in delayed home opener

Associated press

WACO, Texas — Davion Mitchell and No. 2 Baylor came into this most unusual season ready for unexpected changes. The unbeaten Bears have responded well when they actually get a chance to play.

Adam Flagler scored 11 of his 14 points before halftime as Baylor took control early on the way to an 83-52 win Wednesday night over Stephen F. Austin. It was the home opener for the Bears — a day later than scheduled and against a different opponent than planned.

“We’re just blessed to have this opportunity. I mean, we kind of knew how this season was going to go,” said Mitchell, who had 11 points, seven assists and four steals.

It was the first game for the Bears (4-0) since a much-anticipated showdown against No. 1 Gonzaga was called off only 90 minutes before tipoff Saturday, and after expected home-opening opponent Nicholls State had virus issues like the Bulldogs did.

“Well, I think they laugh every time I give them updates. Like, what do we got now?” coach Scott Drew said. “When you know it’s game day and the ball is going to get tipped, you’ve got to make the most of it, because I can tell you they’d much rather be playing games right now than practicing.”

Five players scored in double figures as Baylor played for the first time since an 82-69 win over then-No. 5 Illinois at the Jimmy V Classic in Indianapolis a week earlier. That was the only one of the first six games on their initial schedule that the Bears have played.

Cameron Johnson had 11 points for the Lumberjacks (3-1), the defending Southland Conference champions who had their 18-game winning streak snapped. Gavin Kensmil added 10 points.

Flagler’s three-pointer in the closing seconds of the first half was the Bears’ third three in a row — LJ Crayer and Matthew Mayer had the others — as part of a half-ending 11-2 run that put them up 38-22.

“Coming off finals, I was obviously worried about the players’ energy and rhythm with not practicing as much,” Drew said. “But I thought they did a great job. That run at the end of the first half and the beginning of the second half was really the difference.”

The Lumberjacks had 17 turnovers by halftime and finished with 35 that led to 40 Baylor points. Mitchell drew several charges on the defensive end.

No. 13 Wisconsin 73, Rhode Island 62: Brad Davison scored 23 points and the host Badgers won a nonconference game with the Rams that was added to the schedule two days ago.

Wisconsin (4-1) originally was slated to host No. 25 Louisville on Wednesday as part of the Big Ten/ACC Challenge, but the Cardinals canceled their second consecutive game following a positive COVID-19 test within the program. Rhode Island was added as a replacement Monday.

Micah Potter had 13 points and Aleem Ford scored 11 for the Badgers, who bounced back from a 67-65 loss to Marquette on a buzzer-beating tip-in of a missed free throw Friday.

Jeremy Sheppard had 13 points for the Rams (3-3).

No. 13 Texas 74, Texas State 53: Freshman Greg Brown scored 18 points and the host Longhorns’ won their final nonconference tuneup before the start of Big 12 play.

Texas (5-1) had nine dunks on 12 baskets in the first half. Jericho Sims started the scoring with a slam and the floodgates

opened from there.

Mason Harrell scored 14 points for the Bobcats (3-2).

No. 17 Texas Tech 51, Abilene Christian 44: Kyler Edwards scored 19 points and the host Red Raiders avoided a major upset in a defensive struggle.

Texas Tech (5-1) trailed with seven minutes remaining before Edwards made one of two free throws to get even.

Nimari Burnett, who scored 10 points, made a pair to put the Red Raiders up for good at 38-36.

The Wildcats’ reputation for strong defense held up well, with Texas Tech shooting 28% while having a difficult time getting open looks and missing many of the ones they did get.

Coryon Mason scored 14 points for Abilene Christian (5-1), a Southland Conference team that made the move from Division II less than 10 years ago.

No. 19 Richmond 78, Northern Iowa 68: Tyler Burton had 21 points and 13 rebounds and the host Spiders used a 21-6 run in the second half to pull away.

Grant Golden added 17 points and 11 rebounds for Richmond (4-0). Blake Francis scored 16 points and Jacob Gilyard had 12 points and 11 assists.

Tywhon Pickford scored 16 points for the Panthers (1-4), Austin Phyfe had 15, and Trae Berhow 13.

No. 20 Florida State 69, Indiana 67 (OT): Scottie Barnes banked in a runner with two seconds left in overtime to lift the Seminoles past the Hoosiers in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge for their 25th straight home victory.

The freshman had nine points, five assists, four rebounds and four steals for Florida State.

Freeman leads 3 Braves named to All-MLB squad

Associated Press

NEW YORK — National League MVP Freddie Freeman was one of three Atlanta Braves selected to the All-MLB first team on Wednesday night.

The slugging first baseman was joined by Braves designated hitter Marcell Ozuna and starting pitcher Max Fried.

San Diego had two players on the top team: shortstop Fernando Tatis Jr. and third baseman Manny Machado.

Cy Young Award winners Trevor Bauer of the Cincinnati Reds and Shane Bieber of the Cleveland Indians also made the first team. Chicago Cubs right-hander Yu Darvish and New York Mets ace Jacob deGrom rounded out the five starters.

The rest of the first team featured Kansas City catcher Salvador Perez, New York Yankees second baseman DJ LeMahieu, and outfielders Mookie Betts from the World Series champion Los Angeles Dod-

gers, Mike Trout of the Los Angeles Angels and Juan Soto of the Washington Nationals. The relievers were Tampa Bay’s Nick Anderson and Oakland’s Liam Hendriks.

AL MVP José Abreu of the Chicago White Sox was the first baseman on the second team, which also included Philadelphia catcher J.T. Realmuto, Rays second baseman Brandon Lowe, Dodgers shortstop Corey Seager and Indians third baseman José Ramírez.