

As US forces leave, Somalia unit fears future

The Washington Post

NAIROBI — The United States has invested billions of dollars in Somalia over the past decade, in part to build and train Danab, the only effective, apolitical fighting unit in the country's war against al-Qaida-affiliated al-Shabab.

Now, with hundreds of the U.S. troops who trained them leaving Somalia under orders from the Trump administration, current and former Danab officers are fearful that diminished American supervision will leave the elite division vulnerable to political interference from Somalia's government, which is embroiled in a bitterly disputed election scheduled for February.

In the past, "if the government ever tried to interfere with Danab for political nonsense, the Americans were the ones who said: 'Hey, stop it,'" said Ahmed Abdullahi Sheikh, Danab's top commander from 2016 to 2019. "That was the condition the Americans attached when they started training us, that we'd be apolitical. Without that, our defense mechanism toward our own government doesn't exist."

Sheikh and other officials stressed that although large-scale political interference with the 1,150-member force isn't happening yet, the conditions are ripe.

A Danab officer based in the central Somali city of Galkayo said he has worried for his comrades' reputation as apolitical every

day since the announcement that the Americans were leaving.

"My biggest fear is losing that reputation, that momentum. The trust that people have in us, that we are fighting for our country and not some politician, is our biggest strength. Losing it would be nothing short of disaster," he said, speaking on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. "I don't trust our politicians, just like most people in Somalia don't."

Somalia's defense minister, Hassan Hussein Haji, did not respond to repeated requests for comment. Lt. Cmdr. Christina Gibson, a spokeswoman for U.S. Africa Command, said the U.S. military "will not be ending our important relationship with [Danab]," but that "specific training plans are still being developed and refined."

Somalia's population, while ethnically homogeneous, is split among clans that compete, often violently, for political power. With elections approaching, feuds have grown and President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmaajo" has been accused of replacing officials ranging from his prime minister to election administrators to bolster his shot at reelection. A second Danab officer who spoke on the condition of anonymity said he feared that his superiors could be next.

In the year since Sheikh was removed as Danab's leader, three others have cycled

through, though he said that was due to a combination of politics and operational factors.

Danab has been more successful than other Somali military units in fighting al-Shabab because of far superior training and equipment, but it is greatly outnumbered by al-Shabab, which experts believe has as many as 10,000 active fighters, and a much wider network of informants and supporters.

Somalia continues to weather thousands of al-Shabab attacks big and small every year. While the U.S. military ramped up a drone campaign in recent years — which it says will continue despite troops being "repositioned" to neighboring Kenya and Djibouti and allegations that the campaign has killed dozens of civilians — al-Shabab still controls the majority of Somalia's rural interior and runs an extensive tax racket that keeps it well-funded.

The U.S. military's top official at Africa Command pushed back against the notion that troop repositioning put Somali forces on the back foot.

"To be clear, the U.S. is not withdrawing or disengaging from East Africa. We remain committed to helping our African partners build a more secure future," Gen. Stephen Townsend said in a statement. "We also remain capable of striking Al-Shabab at the time and place of our choosing — they should not test us."

Troops, civilians given year to repay deferred payments

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN

Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Members of the armed forces and federal employees have 12 months instead of four to pay back Social Security taxes that haven't been collected since September, officials said this week.

The so-called payroll tax deferral, which was put in place by the Trump administration for the last four months of 2020 to help workers during the coronavirus pandemic, meant that many working Americans — including service members and federal employees — had an extra 6.2% of money in each paycheck.

But starting with the first pay period of 2021, the extra money has to be paid back. And, on top of that, Social Security taxes will be collected again.

Initially, the money was supposed to be repaid by April 30 in equal amounts, which would have meant a dip in paychecks of 12.4%.

But this week, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service announced the period to collect the deferred tax has been extended until Dec. 31, 2021, meaning the money will be deducted in even amounts over 26 pay periods instead of eight.

The extended period for paying back the money means some troops and civilians

could see smaller paychecks in 2021 — but not as small as they would have been if they'd had to pay back the money over four months.

The deferral affected civilians who made \$4,000 or less per pay period and military members who cleared \$8,666 or less of basic pay per month.

Many private sector employers chose not to be a part of the deferral, which they saw as kicking the can down the road. But participation was mandatory for federal government employees and service members including enlisted personnel, service academy cadets, second lieutenants and majors, most warrant officers and some lieutenant colonels and colonels.

Airman firefighter dies responding to fire

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A 30-year-old Air National Guardsman was killed Sunday responding to a fire that has since been determined to be arson, according to the West Virginia National Guard.

Senior Airman Logan Young, a firefighter assigned to the 167th Airlift Wing in Martinsburg, W.Va., responded to a mutual aid call at a structure fire when he was fatally injured, according to the Guard.

“Our 167th Airlift Wing family is heartbroken over the tragic loss of Senior Airman Logan Young, and our thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends during this difficult time,” said Col. Marty Timko, the wing commander. “As a first responder answering the call to support a local emergency, a finer example of commit-

ment to service as a citizen-airman could not be found.”

Young, a resident of Martinsburg, is survived by his mother, father, brother and fiancée, according to the Guard.

The fire happened at about 1:56 a.m. at a vacant structure in Berkeley County, according to a post on the West Virginia State Fire Marshal’s official Facebook page. At about 2:34 a.m., a mayday call went out and four firefighters were transported to Berkeley Medical Center for treatment, according to a post on the Berkeley County Public Safety official Facebook page.

Investigators connected the fire to another structure fire at a vacant building about 20 minutes prior in a neighboring county, according to their Facebook post. Investigators determined that both fires were intentionally set. The fire marshal’s office

and West Virginia State Police are still investigating the fire. There is a reward of up to \$20,000 for information that leads to an arrest and conviction of the people responsible for the arson, according to the state fire marshal’s Facebook page.

Young enlisted in the Air Force in 2011 and served on active duty as a military policeman until he transitioned to the West Virginia Air National Guard in 2018 to serve as a firefighter in the 167th Civil Engineer Squadron, according to the Guard. He deployed to the Middle East in 2014 and at the time of his death worked full time as a military authority firefighter.

His military awards include the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Service Medal, Air Force Good Conduct Medal and National Defense Service Medal.

Boeing Max returns to US skies

Associated Press

American Airlines flew a Boeing 737 Max with paying passengers from Miami to New York on Tuesday, the plane’s first commercial flight in U.S. skies since it was grounded after two deadly crashes.

American flight 718 carried 87 passengers on the 172-seat plane, and the return flight from LaGuardia Airport to Miami International Airport held 151 passengers, according to an airline spokeswoman.

Last month, the Federal Aviation Administration approved changes that Boeing made to an automated flight-control system implicated in crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia that killed 346 people. In both crashes, the system pushed the nose down repeatedly based on faulty sensor readings, and pilots were unable to regain control.

The FAA cleared the way for U.S. airlines to resume using the plane if certain changes are made and pilots are provided with additional training, including time in a flight simulator.

Brazil’s Gol airlines operated the first passenger flight with a revamped Max on Dec. 9. Since then, Gol and Aeromexico have operated about 600 flights between them with Max jets, according to tracking service Flightradar24 and aviation-data firm Cirium.

American plans to make one round trip a day between Miami and New York with Max jets through Jan. 4 before putting the plane on more routes. United Airlines plans to resume Max flights in February, and Southwest Airlines expects to follow in March.

All three airlines say they will give customers the chance to change flights if they are uncomfortable flying on the Max.

The Max was grounded worldwide in March 2019, days after the second crash.

Reports by House and Senate committees faulted Boeing and the FAA for failures in the process of certifying the plane. Congressional investigators uncovered internal Boeing documents in which company employees raised safety concerns and bragged about deceiving regulators.

FAA Administrator Stephen Dickson, a former military and airline pilot, operated a test flight in September and vouched for the reworked plane’s safety, saying he would put his family on it. American Airlines President Robert Isom was on Tuesday’s inaugural U.S. flight, according to the airline.

Some relatives of people who died in the second crash, a Max operated by Ethiopian Airlines, contend that the plane is still unsafe. They and their lawyers say that Boeing is refusing to hand over documents about the plane’s design and development.

Nashville man’s girlfriend said he was making bombs

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — More than a year before Anthony Warner detonated a bomb in downtown Nashville on Christmas, officers visited his home after his girlfriend told police that he was building bombs in an RV trailer at his residence, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press. But they were unable to make contact with him, or see inside his RV.

Officers were called to Pamela Perry’s home in Nashville on Aug. 21, 2019, after getting a report from her attorney that she was making suicidal threats while sitting on her front porch with firearms, the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department said Tuesday in an emailed statement. A police report said Raymond Throckmorton, the attorney, told officers that day that he also represented Warner.

Throckmorton told The Tennessean that Perry had fears about her safety, and thought Warner may harm her. The attorney was also at the scene that day, and told officers Warner “frequently talks about the military and bomb making,” the police report said. Warner “knows what he is doing and is capable of making a bomb,” Throckmorton said to responding officers.

Police then went to Warner’s home, located about 1.5 miles from Perry’s home, but he didn’t answer the door when they knocked several times. They saw the RV in the backyard, the report said, but the yard was fenced off and officers couldn’t see inside the vehicle.

Blast at Yemeni airport kills at least 22

Associated Press

SANAA, Yemen — A large explosion struck the airport in the southern Yemeni city of Aden on Wednesday, shortly after a plane carrying the newly formed Cabinet landed there, security officials said. At least 22 people were killed and 50 were wounded in the blast.

The source of the explosion was not immediately clear and no group claimed responsibility for attacking the airport. No one on the government plane was hurt.

Officials later reported another explosion close to a palace in the city where the Cabinet members were transferred following the airport attack.

AP footage from the scene at the airport showed members of the government

delegation disembarking as the blast shook the grounds. Many ministers rushed back inside the plane or ran down the stairs, seeking shelter.

Thick smoke rose into the air from near the terminal building. Officials at the scene said they saw bodies lying on the tarmac and elsewhere at the airport.

Yemeni Communication Minister Nageib al-Awg, who was also on the plane, told The Associated Press that he heard two explosions, suggesting they were drone attacks. Yemeni Prime Minister Maen Abdulmalik Saeed and the others were quickly whisked from the airport to Mashiq Palace in the city.

Military and security forces sealed off the area around the the palace.

Saeed tweeted that he and his cabinet

were safe and unhurt. He called the explosions a “cowardly terrorist act” that was part of the war on “the Yemeni state and our great people.”

Officials said another explosion hit close to the heavily fortified Mashiq Palace, where the Cabinet members were taken following the explosion at the airport. The source of that blast and whether it occurred before or after the Cabinet members’ arrival were not immediately known. There were no immediate reports of fatalities and the officials said the Cabinet members arrived safely.

The ministers were returning to Aden from the Saudi capital, Riyadh, after being sworn in last week as part of a reshuffle following a deal with rival southern separatists.

US bomber mission meant to deter Iran attacks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States flew strategic bombers over the Persian Gulf on Wednesday for the second time this month, a show of force meant to deter Iran from attacking American or allied targets in the Middle East.

One senior U.S. military officer said the flight by two Air Force B-52 bombers was in response to signals that Iran may be planning attacks against U.S. allied targets in neighboring Iraq or elsewhere in the region in the coming days, even as President-elect Joe Biden prepares to take office.

The officer was not authorized to publicly discuss internal assessments based on sen-

sitive intelligence and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The B-52 bomber mission, flown round trip from an Air Force base in North Dakota, reflects growing concern in Washington, in the final weeks of President Donald Trump’s administration, that Iran will order further military retaliation for the U.S. killing last Jan. 3 of top Iranian military commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

Iran’s initial response, five days after the deadly U.S. drone strike, was a ballistic missile attack on a military base in Iraq that caused concussion injuries to about 100 U.S. troops.

Adding to the tension was a rocket attack

last week on the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad by Iranian-supported Shiite militia groups. No one was killed, but Trump tweeted afterward that Iran was on notice.

“Some friendly health advice to Iran: If one American is killed, I will hold Iran responsible. Think it over,” Trump wrote on Dec. 23.

Because of the potential for escalation that could lead to a wider war, the U.S. has sought to deter Iran from additional attacks.

Strategic calculations on both sides are further complicated by the political transition in Washington to a Biden administration that may seek new paths to dealing with Iran.

Military virus vaccinations gather steam in Europe

Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — The U.S. military stepped up its campaign to vaccinate personnel in Europe against the coronavirus this week as health care workers on the front lines of fighting COVID-19 were inoculated at bases in Germany and the United Kingdom.

Airmen at bases in England and soldiers in Germany were given the Moderna vaccine starting Monday, U.S. European Command said in a statement.

The first person to be vaccinated at the U.S. Army Health Clinic Kaiserslau-

tern Wednesday was clinic commander Maj. Shara Fisher.

“I chose to get the vaccine today in an effort to demonstrate my confidence in its safety and encourage all others to get the vaccine when it’s time,” she said.

The vaccine, which has emergency use authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, is available on a voluntary basis, the military has said.

Next week, Defense Department clinics in Italy, Spain, Belgium and Portugal are expected to receive their first shipment of the Moderna vaccine and begin inoculating personnel, EUCOM said.

“Getting everybody immunized allows us to move back to, essentially, a sense of normalcy in terms of how we interact with each other,” Brig. Gen. Mark Thompson, Commanding General of Regional Health Command Europe, said in the statement.

Once a second dose of the vaccine has been administered in around one month, the Moderna vaccine is 94% effective at preventing the disease caused by the coronavirus and 100% effective at preventing severe illness, the Massachusetts-based company that produces it said in a statement in November.

Colo. guardsman 1st in US with variant

Associated Press

DENVER — A Colorado National Guard member has the first reported U.S. case of a new and seemingly more contagious variant of the coronavirus that has set off alarm in Britain, while a second case is suspected in another Guard member, health officials said Wednesday.

The two were sent on Dec. 23 to work at a nursing home struggling with an outbreak of the virus in a small town outside Denver, said Dr. Rachel Herlihy, the state's epidemiologist.

A state laboratory detected the cases after it began looking for signs of the variant after its spread was announced in England earlier this month, she said. Staff and residents at the nursing home who have tested positive for the coronavirus are having their samples screened for signs of the variant, and so far no evidence of it has been found, Herlihy said.

The confirmed case is in a Colorado man

in his 20s who hadn't been traveling and has mild symptoms, officials said. He's isolating at his home near Denver, and the person with the suspected case is isolating in a hotel on Colorado's Eastern Plains, Herlihy said.

The cases have triggered a host of questions about how the variant arrived in the U.S. and added urgency to the nation's vaccination drive.

The new, mutated version was first identified in Britain, where infections are soaring and the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients has surpassed the first peak seen last spring. The variant has also been found in several other countries.

"There is a lot we don't know about this new COVID-19 variant, but scientists in the United Kingdom are warning the world that it is significantly more contagious," Colorado Gov. Jared Polis said. "The health and safety of Coloradans is our top priority, and we will closely monitor this case, as well as

all COVID-19 indicators, very closely."

The variant is probably still rare in the U.S., but the lack of travel history in the first case means it is spreading, perhaps seeded by visitors from Britain in November or December, said scientist Trevor Bedford, who studies the spread of COVID-19 at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle.

"Now I'm worried there will be another spring wave due to the variant," Bedford said. "It's a race with the vaccine, but now the virus has just gotten a little bit faster."

Public health officials are investigating other potential cases of the variant, which was confirmed by the Colorado State Laboratory, and conducting contact tracing to determine its spread.

Scientists in Britain have found no evidence that it is more lethal or causes more severe illness, and they believe the vaccines now being dispensed will be effective against it.

La. Congressman-elect Letlow dies from virus

Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. — Luke Letlow, Louisiana's incoming Republican member of the U.S. House, died Tuesday night from complications related to COVID-19 only days before he would have been sworn into office. He was 41.

Letlow spokesman Andrew Bautsch confirmed the congressman-elect's death at Ochsner-LSU Health Shreveport.

"The family appreciates the numerous prayers and support over the past days but asks for privacy during this difficult and unexpected time," Bautsch said in a statement. "A statement from the family along with funeral arrangements will be announced at a later time."

Louisiana's eight-member congressional delegation called Letlow's death devastating.

The state's newest congressman, set to take office in Janu-

ary, was admitted to a Monroe hospital on Dec. 19 after testing positive for the coronavirus disease. He was later transferred to the Shreveport facility and placed in intensive care.

Dr. G.E. Ghali, of LSU Health Shreveport, told The Advocate that Letlow didn't have any underlying health conditions that would have placed him at greater risk to COVID-19.

Letlow, from the small town of Start in Richland Parish, was elected in a December runoff election for the sprawling 5th District U.S. House seat representing central and northeastern regions of the state, including the cities of Monroe and Alexandria.

He was to fill the seat being vacated by his boss, Republican Ralph Abraham. Letlow had been Abraham's chief of staff.

Letlow is survived by his wife, Julia Barnhill Letlow, and two children.

UK puts millions more under limits as cases grow

Associated Press

LONDON — The British government on Wednesday extended its toughest coronavirus restrictions to three-quarters of England's population, saying that a fast-spreading new variant of the virus has reached most of the country.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said the government's top infection-warning level, Tier 4, would be expanded beyond London and the southeast to cover large swaths of central, northern and southwest England.

Under Tier 4, restaurants and bars can only offer takeout, people are advised to stay home, mixing of households is prohibited, and nonessential shops are shut.

Hancock said Wednesday's authorization of a second vaccine for use in the United Kingdom was good news, but "sharply rising cases and the hospitalizations that follow

demonstrate the need to act where the virus is spreading."

"It brings forward the day on which we can lift the restrictions," he told lawmakers in the House of Commons. "But ... we must act to suppress the virus now, especially as the new variant makes the time between now and then even more difficult."

Hospitals in the worst-hit areas of London and southern England are becoming increasingly overstretched, with ambulances unable to unload patients at some hospitals where all the beds are occupied. There are more people in hospitals with COVID-19 now than at the first peak of the outbreak in April.

Britain has recorded more than 71,000 confirmed coronavirus deaths, the second-highest death toll in Europe after Italy. The country reported a record number of new confirmed cases on Tuesday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

City tries to find source of mysterious explosions

MA BROCKTON — Fire investigators are trying to determine the source of two loud explosions and accompanying flashes of white light that shook a Massachusetts city last weekend.

The Brockton Fire Department announced a reward of up to \$5,000 through the ArsonWatch reward program for information about the explosions.

The Brockton Fire Department said its Fire Prevention Bureau, city police and Massachusetts State Police are working on determining the source.

ATF looking for potentially live grenade sold at antique mall

NC OCEAN ISLE BEACH — The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives is looking for a hand grenade that was sold at a North Carolina antique mall.

The Charlotte Observer reported that the device may actually be live and ready to explode.

The agency said that the grenade was purchased June 13 from the Fancy Flea Antique Mall in Ocean Isle Beach.

"The grenade, thought to be inert, may contain materials that could degrade (and) explode," the ATF statement said.

Photographer questioned near Army base, files complaint

VA ARLINGTON — A Black real estate photographer who was hired to take pictures of a home in Virginia filed a complaint with police after officers questioned him and demanded his identification.

The Washington Post reported that the incident occurred last week in Arlington.

The photographer, Marlon Crutchfield, is a former U.S. Capitol Police officer, Army veteran and licensed real estate agent.

Crutchfield was sitting in his car waiting for his appointment near the U.S. Army's Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall. He said a white man alerted base security.

Arlington police said that they responded to a report of a suspicious person who was taking photos of a base entrance.

'Frost quakes' may be cause of loud booming noises

WI MILWAUKEE — Meteorologists believe that mysterious sounds reported in southeastern Wisconsin may have been caused by a rare natural phenomenon known as "frost quakes," which happen when moisture in the ground suddenly freezes and expands.

The Journal Sentinel reported Muskego police received reports of loud booming noises in the city but were unable to determine the source of the sounds.

Scientists say that if conditions are just right, the soil or bedrock breaks like a brittle frozen pipe, generating mysterious noises that range from an earthquake-like rumble to sharp cracking noises sometimes mistaken for falling trees.

Couple tries to solve holiday card mystery tied to their home

FL TAMPA — A couple near Tampa is looking for the name of an 85-year-old woman who sent them an unsigned Christmas card detailing the good times she spent in their house when she was a child.

The woman wrote in the card she mailed to Jeremy Beauchamp and his husband, Dale, that some of the best years of her life were spent in the house in the Seminole Heights neighborhood.

They hope to meet the woman who sent the card. "We've done marriage records, we did the census," Beauchamp told the television station. "I mean you name it, we started going through it."

"Then we found that there was at one time during the census a 9-year-old girl that lived here at the same time period that this person was talking about," Beauchamp said.

The couple sent a card back to the address where they believe the woman may live. He said they'd love to let her come back to visit.

Girl becomes area's first female Eagle Scout

ID RIGBY — When then-14-year-old Alexis Sharp went to Scout Camp in Island Park in July 2019, it was the first year girls were able to attend. Of the more than 400 people there, approximately 12 of the Scouts were girls.

On Dec. 14, Alexis, now 15, became the Grand Teton Council's first female Eagle Scout when she completed her board of review. A total of four girls in Idaho have now passed their Eagle Scout board of review. She is one of just a handful of girls in the country to have achieved the honor.

Becoming an Eagle Scout is no easy feat. It includes passing a number of requirements, including earning 21 merit badges (Alexis has 77), serving in a leadership role for six months, carrying out a significant service project in the community and passing a board of review. Only 6% of Scouts achieve this rank.

For her final project, Alexis built a mountain bike trail for the Rigby High School mountain bike team.

Woman slips handcuffs in rear seat, wrecks police cruiser

MI LOCKPORT TOWNSHIP — A police cruiser was stolen and wrecked in southwestern Michigan by a 25-year-old woman who slipped from handcuffs after being arrested earlier for drunken driving.

The woman had been taken into custody after a crash in Lockport Township, authorities said.

She was placed in the rear seat of a St. Joseph sheriff's office vehicle. After getting free of the handcuffs, she climbed through a partition and into the driver's seat as deputies searched her vehicle.

The sheriff's office said she drove off in the cruiser but struck a utility pole and several trees. She was caught after trying to run away. She was jailed on numerous charges.

— From The Associated Press

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Big 3 still hoard most of the talent

Associated Press

Notre Dame coach Brian Kelly is clearly tired of the question: Do the Fighting Irish have something to prove as they again prepare to take on one of college football's elite teams in the College Football Playoff?

"No, I mean, we're knocking on the door every year playing really good teams and great opponents," Kelly said. "I don't know why this narrative continues to pop up when we're always in the games."

What often gets categorized as a Notre Dame problem is actually a major college football problem. A tiny group of teams have bolted away from the field simply because they are accumulating far more talent than their competitors.

The elite high school players are clustering at a small number of schools and creating an almost insurmountable gap between the very best and the rest.

No. 4 Notre Dame heads into its latest referendum game against No. 1 Alabama on Friday in the Rose Bowl semifinal in Texas as a nearly three-touchdown underdog. In the other semifinal, a more fair fight is expected between No. 2 Clemson and No. 3 Ohio State at the Sugar Bowl.

Kelly has raised Notre Dame football to its highest level since Lou Holtz led the school to its last national title in 1988. The Irish are 43-7 over the last four years.

Still, Notre Dame drags into the playoff the recent memories of a BCS blowout against the Crimson Tide in 2013, a lopsided

semifinal loss to Clemson two seasons ago and overall a six-game losing streak in BCS/New Year's Six games that dates to the 2000 Fiesta Bowl.

"No, we haven't won a national championship, that's correct," Kelly said. "I'm not changing the record. But we are there every single year and we're grinding it out just like everybody else. And only one team gets to celebrate at the end of the year."

No team has celebrated more than Alabama. Under Nick Saban, the Crimson Tide have won five national titles since 2009. The dynasty is fueled by unprecedented success in recruiting. According to 247 Sports' talent composite, the Tide had the second-most talented roster in college football this season behind Georgia after being No. 1 last year, two the year before and first two seasons before that.

Alabama came into the season with 12 former five-star recruits — including running back Najee Harris and linebacker Dylan Moses — and 58 former four stars on its roster. Alabama has signed 41 top 100 recruits from 2017-20.

Ohio State stacks up pretty well with the Tide this season, with 14 former five stars — including quarterback Justin Fields — and 52 four stars. The Buckeyes have signed 25 top 100 recruits from 2017-20. They have also won four straight Big Ten titles.

Clemson's numbers: 11 former five-stars — the most important among them being quarterback Trevor Lawrence — 35 four-

stars and 23 top 100 signees from 2017-20. The Tigers are up to six straight Atlantic Coast Conference championships.

"I do think we both identify the same players from the same parts of the country," Ohio State defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs said of Clemson. "The elite players have some really good choices, and those schools, they're all battling for those guys."

Notre Dame tries to recruit at that level, too. But the results are just not the same.

The Irish came into this season with the eighth-most talented roster in the country, right behind Florida and ahead of Oklahoma, which is dominating the Big 12 with six straight championships but has yet to win a playoff game.

In fact, 247's ratings have this as the most talented Notre Dame roster since the recruiting website started tallying up scores in 2015. The Irish are still way short of the other three playoff teams.

Notre Dame has two former five-star recruits in fifth-year senior guard Tommy Kraemer and freshman tight end Michael Mayer, and 44 four-star recruits. From 2017-20, the Irish signed 14 top 100 players.

Lack of parity in college football is nothing new. The last time a school won its first national championship was Florida in 1996. But the playoff has magnified and maybe even exacerbated the imbalance.

Only six teams have won playoff games, with Clemson (six) and Alabama (five) leading the way.

Monken had options but found his niche at Army

Associated Press

WEST POINT, N.Y. — When Army came calling at Jeff Monken's door, departing for the north was not on his mind. He was content as head coach at Georgia Southern, fresh from pulling off one of the biggest college football upsets in recent memory — 26-20 over the Florida Gators in "The Swamp."

"I had a great job where I was and hadn't really thought about it (leaving)," said Monken, who coached Georgia Southern for four seasons and guided the program into the top level of college football in that final year.

Having been an assistant at Georgia Southern, Navy, and Georgia Tech under Paul Johnson, where he learned the nuances of the triple option, Monken was the perfect candidate.

And there was this.

"I have a great admiration for our military and to consider being in a leadership position at what I think is the world's best leadership laboratory, West Point, that really captured my interest," said Monken, who will lead the Black Knights (9-2) against West Virginia (5-4) in the Liberty Bowl in Tennessee on Thursday. "I didn't serve in the military, and so I guess in some way I feel like it's my opportunity to serve and develop and prepare the next generation of leaders for our Army. I know what we teach in our program is going to go a lot farther than our locker room."

His players have responded remarkably well. Milestones accomplished as Monken's seventh season comes to a close include: won the Commander-in-Chief's Trophy, the annual round-robin with Navy and Air

Force, in back-to-back seasons (2017-18) for the first time in program history; won an academy-record 11 games in 2018 and finished ranked No. 19 by the AP, and also earned the Lambert Trophy as the top team in the East for the first time in 60 years; guided the Black Knights to three unbeaten seasons at Michie Stadium; beat Navy in 2016 for the first time since 2001 and now has won four of five against the Mids, in the end the standard for keeping the job.

To put that in perspective as the 53-year-old Monken strives to complete a third season with double-digit victories and notch his 50th win at West Point, consider this: Two decades ago, Army finished 1-10 to begin a four-year stretch that produced just five wins in 47 games, capped by a 0-13 season in 2003, still the worst in NCAA history.

Padres get Darvish in trade with Cubs

Associated Press

CHICAGO — San Diego Padres general manager A.J. Preller reunited with an old friend in another blockbuster move Tuesday night.

The aggressive Padres got Yu Darvish in a trade with the Chicago Cubs, adding another ace to their rotation after announcing a deal for Blake Snell earlier in the day. During his time in Texas' front office, Preller scouted Darvish before the Rangers acquired the Japanese right-hander in 2012.

"His last season and a half has been as productive as anybody in the game. He's a force," Preller said Tuesday night. "So I think getting back on the phone with him, catching up for a few minutes, real-

ly looking forward to being around him every single day again."

The Padres got Darvish, catcher Victor Caratini and cash from the Cubs for right-hander Zach Davies and four young minor leaguers. The switch-hitting Caratini caught Darvish in Chicago and batted .241 with 16 RBIs last season.

"We've had interest in Victor for a few years now," Preller said. "I think he's been a guy that, just on his own, we feel like is a quality catching option for us."

Davies went 7-4 with a 2.73 ERA in 12 starts for San Diego this year. The package of prospects headed to Chicago includes Owen Caissie, an 18-year-old outfielder who was

selected by the Padres in the second round of this year's amateur draft.

The 34-year-old Darvish was 8-3 with a 2.01 ERA in 12 starts for Chicago during the pandemic-shortened season, finishing second in the NL Cy Young Award race. He has three years and \$59 million left on the \$126 million, six-year deal he signed with the Cubs before the 2018 season.

San Diego also completed a big trade with Tampa Bay for Snell. The 2018 AL Cy Young Award winner was sent from the Rays to the Padres for a package of four players: right-handers Luis Patiño and Cole Wilcox, and catchers Francisco Mejía and Blake Hunt — all well-regarded youngsters from

a San Diego system that's been stocking the farm for years.

The Padres made the playoffs this year for the first time since 2006, but their injury-depleted rotation was in shambles when the postseason arrived. They beat St. Louis in the first round before getting swept in three Division Series games by their NL West rivals, the World Series champion Los Angeles Dodgers.

Mike Clevinger, acquired from Cleveland in August, isn't expected back from Tommy John surgery until 2022, but the Padres have other quality starters in Dinelson Lamet and Chris Paddack. Left-hander MacKenzie Gore is one of baseball's top pitching prospects.

Oklahoma State holds off Miami to win Cheez-It Bowl

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Oklahoma State went to the air early and often to finish its season on a high note.

Spencer Sanders threw for 305 yards and four touchdowns, and the Cowboys held off No. 18 Miami for a 37-34 victory in the Cheez-It Bowl on Tuesday.

Oklahoma State (8-3) called 15 consecutive pass plays to open the game and stormed out to a 21-0 lead. Sanders threw TD passes of 30 and 32 yards to Brennan Presley, and LD Brown had a 2-yard touchdown run.

"Our game plan going in was to try to offset some of the speed and strength they have in the front six," Cowboys coach Mike Gundy said. "They are a fast, athletic team. We wanted to throw the ball 25 times in the first half."

Sanders also led the team with 45 yards rushing and was named Most Valuable Player.

"That MVP doesn't just go to

me," Sanders said. "The defense stopped them when they needed to stop them. We scored when we needed to score. I told them that this MVP is for everyone."

Presley caught a third touchdown pass in the fourth quarter to put Oklahoma State up 37-26. He finished with six receptions for 118 yards. Tay Martin had six catches for 73 yards, and Dillon Stoner also caught a touchdown pass.

"We have a bunch of weapons," Sanders said. "We have guys you haven't even seen yet and guys that didn't get many touches. Putting Brennan with that group makes it that much better."

The Hurricanes (8-3) got on the board in the second quarter when D'Eriq King threw a 10-yard touchdown pass to Brevin Jordan. But King left with a right knee injury with 4:06 remaining in the first half. Miami coach Manny Diaz said he will be evaluated Wednesday.

King, who transferred to

Miami from Houston before the season, announced last week that he would be returning to Miami and for a sixth season of college football.

"It's harsh ... a year that's had so much adversity, for a guy that's done everything right," Diaz said. "Hopefully we'll get good news tomorrow."

The Hurricanes rallied behind backup quarterback N'Kosi Perry, who threw for 228 yards and two touchdowns. Cam'Ron Harris' 42-yard touchdown run made it 21-19 in the third quarter, but Jordan came up short on the 2-point conversion.

"The guys rallied around N'Kosi and did a great job," Diaz said. "He looked like a guy that played a lot of ball and the team had confidence that they could move the ball with him."

Alamo Bowl

No. 20 Texas 55, Colorado 23: At San Antonio, sophomore signal-caller Casey Thompson came off the bench and passed

for 170 yards and four touchdowns, and the No. 20 Longhorns overcame Sam Ehlinger's shoulder injury to beat the Buffaloes.

Freshman running back Bijan Robinson had 183 yards on 10 carries with a TD for Texas (7-3). He was selected the bowl's offensive MVP.

The Longhorns are undefeated in four bowl games under Tom Herman, who is unbeaten as a head coach in five bowls overall.

Ehlinger missed the second half after sustaining a shoulder injury in the second quarter. Herman said he was uncertain when the injury occurred, but Ehlinger returned to the field in the third quarter in war-mups, with his right arm in a sling. There was no immediate word on the extent of his injury.

The NCAA is offering athletes an extra year of eligibility given the unusual circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is unknown if Ehlinger will return.

NBA ROUNDUP

Bucks rout Heat with record 29 three-pointers

Associated Press

MIAMI — The Milwaukee Bucks made an NBA-record 29 three-pointers in their 144-97 romp over the Eastern Conference champion Miami Heat on Tuesday night.

Milwaukee shot 29-for-51 from beyond the arc, two nights after going 7-for-38 in a loss to New York.

The Bucks used 13 players and 12 made at least one three-pointer — two-time reigning MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo was the only one who didn't. Khris Middleton had four threes and scored 25 points, Jrue Holiday made six during his 24-point effort and Donte DiVincenzo was 5-for-6 from deep to finish with 17 points.

Antetokounmpo had only nine points.

The record-breaking shot was made by Sam Merrill, who got the 28th three-pointer with 6:07 remaining, giving the Bucks a 131-86 lead.

The previous record for threes in a game was 27, set by Houston against Phoenix on April 7, 2019.

76ers 100, Raptors 93: Joel Embiid had

29 points, 16 rebounds and one scare when he briefly left the game with an injury, leading host Philadelphia past winless Toronto.

Embiid had the 76ers holding their breath when the big man left with some sort of leg injury. He went down early in the third quarter and grabbed the back of his lower right leg as he stood up. Embiid, who missed Sunday's loss against Cleveland with back stiffness, walked gingerly to the locker room.

Clippers 124, Timberwolves 101: Lou Williams led his teammates in double figures with 20 points and host Los Angeles routed Minnesota in a game missing stars for both teams.

Los Angeles bounced back from a 51-point shellacking against Dallas two days earlier despite playing without Kawhi Leonard for the second straight game because of a mouth laceration. Timberwolves big man Karl-Anthony Towns sat out with a dislocated left wrist.

Celtics 116, Pacers 111: Jayson Tatum scored 27 points and Boston rallied from 17 down in the third quarter to win at Indiana.

Bulls 115, Wizards 107: Zach LaVine scored 23 points, including nine straight in the third quarter, and Coby White added 18 to lead visiting Chicago past winless Washington for its first victory of the season.

Knicks 95, Cavaliers 86: Julius Randle had 28 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists for his first triple-double in two years, leading New York to a win at Cleveland.

Warriors 116, Pistons 106: Stephen Curry scored 31 points and Andrew Wiggins added 27 to lift Golden State to a victory at winless Detroit.

Magic 118, Thunder 107: Nikola Vucevic had a season-high 28 points and 10 rebounds as unbeaten Orlando won at Oklahoma City.

Suns 111, Pelicans 86: Jae Crowder scored a season-high 21 points, Cameron Johnson added 18 and host Phoenix rolled to a lopsided win over New Orleans.

Kings 125, Nuggets 115: Tyrese Haliburton scored eight of his 13 points in the fourth quarter as host Sacramento pulled away to beat Denver, spoiling a record-setting night for Nuggets big man Nikola Jokic.

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

Tulsa slips past No. 5 Houston with late free throws

Associated Press

TULSA, Okla. — Brandon Rachal hit two free throws with a tenth of a second remaining and finished with 22 points as Tulsa topped unbeaten No. 5 Houston 65-64 on Tuesday night.

After Caleb Mills made a 7-foot floater with six seconds left to give Houston its first lead in the final 13 minutes of the game, Rachal took a pass, drove the length of the court and was fouled by center Brison Gresham at the rim a fraction of a second before time expired. Rachal went to the line and calmly made both free throws.

The victory was Tulsa's first over a top-5 team since winning at UCLA in 1996.

The victory lifted Tulsa to 2-1 in the American Conference and 5-3 overall. Houston (2-1, 7-1) had won its first seven games handily, the closest being a nine-point victory over UCF. Quentin Grimes led the Cougars with 19 points and seven re-

bounds.

No. 1 Gonzaga 112, Dixie State 67: Corey Kispert scored 25 points, Joel Ayayi added 21 points and 11 rebounds, and the host Bulldogs beat the short-handed Trailblazers.

Oumar Ballo added 17 points on 6-for-6 shooting for Gonzaga (9-0), which has won 43 consecutive home games, the longest streak in the nation.

No. 2 Baylor 93, Central Arkansas 56: MaCio Teague scored 20 points on 9-for-13 shooting, preseason AP All-America guard Jared Butler had 17 points and the host Bears remained undefeated.

No. 9 West Virginia 75, Northeastern 51: Derek Culver scored 18 points, Oscar Tshiebwe had 12 points and 15 rebounds and the host Mountaineers capitalized on their size advantage to beat the Huskies.

No. 10 Iowa 87, Northwestern 72: Jordan Bohannon scored 24 points, CJ Fredrick added 19 and Luka Garza finished

with 18 as the host Hawkeyes beat the Wildcats.

No. 13 Texas Tech 79, Incarnate Word 51: Kevin McCullar scored 11 points in his season debut coming off an ankle injury and the host Red Raiders cruised in a tuneup before Big 12 play resumes. Marcus Santos-Silva also had 11 points for Texas Tech (8-2).

No. 14 Rutgers 81, Purdue 76: Montez Mathis had a career-high 25 points, including 16 in the second half, and the host Scarlet Knights won without leading scorer Ron Harper Jr.

Clemson 77, No. 18 Florida State 67: Clyde Trapp scored 15 points and Nick Honor had all his 13 points in the second half, including the go-ahead three-pointer, as the host Tigers rallied past the Seminoles.

No. 24 Virginia Tech 80, Miami 78: Keve Aluma scored a career-high 26 points and the host Hokies made crucial free throws in the final minute on the way to a victory.