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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Poland to spend \$284M to upgrade US bases

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Poland plans to spend nearly \$300 million to upgrade several military sites used by U.S. forces in the country, a move expected to eventually improve the quality of life for soldiers deployed there.

A bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers on Wednesday released a finalized version of the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act, which is expected to be voted on as early as next week.

The \$866 billion defense bill detailed upgrades in store for the U.S. military operating in Poland that are to be paid for by Warsaw, rather than U.S. taxpayers.

The NDAA authorizes the Pentagon to accept seven construction projects with in-kind contributions totaling \$284.5

million from Poland.

The projects are part of a bilateral defense security cooperation agreement that requires Poland to pick up a large amount of the infrastructure costs needed to support U.S. troops in the country.

The largest initiative calls for \$93 million to be spent on a new Army barracks and a dining facility in Powidz, which has emerged as a major aviation and logistical hub for the U.S. military in Poland.

The living conditions at the base are among the most austere for troops carrying out missions in the central European country.

Other projects include a \$35 million rotary wing apron in Powidz, fuel storage and rail improvements in Swietosow, and aerial port and taxiway upgrades in Wroclaw.

The Poles will also spend \$16.2 million to establish a “company operations facility” for U.S. special operations troops doing missions in Lubliniec, a town in the south-central part of the country.

The United States in recent years has been steadily building up its force in Poland, which has become the centerpiece of the military’s push to counter Russia and fortify NATO’s eastern flank.

In March, the Pentagon established its first permanent garrison in the Polish city of Poznan, where an Army headquarters manages operations stretching from the Baltics to Bulgaria.

The garrison alone oversees about a dozen different sites, which feature a mix of units rotating in and out of Poland.

Poland has also been increasing its own defense spending,

with major investments in weapons systems, including U.S. Abrams tanks.

The 2024 NDAA seeks to reward countries like Poland that meet NATO defense spending benchmarks calling for at least 2% of gross domestic product to be dedicated to military matters. Currently, only seven of NATO’s 31 members hit the mark.

The failure of many allies in Europe to sufficiently increase defense spending has been a major point of contention over the years, with several U.S. administrations calling for allies to shoulder a larger share of the security burden.

When it comes to basing, training and exercises, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin should prioritize allies that have reached the 2% GDP benchmark, the NDAA states.

USS Mount Whitney returns from Mediterranean Sea

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The amphibious command ship USS Mount Whitney is back in Italy after seven weeks in the Mediterranean Sea amid U.S. efforts to keep the Israel-Hamas conflict from broadening in the Middle East.

The U.S. 6th Fleet flagship returned to its Gaeta homeport Friday, the fleet announced in a statement the same day.

While deployed, Mount Whitney worked with allied and partner navies. They visited Larnaca in Cyprus and Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete, 6th Fleet said.

The 6th Fleet statement didn’t have specifics on Mount Whitney’s actions, but the ship is equipped with extensive communications capabilities and other assets that enable it to direct operations.

The ship’s return follows the departure of at least two other U.S. Navy vessels sent to

the eastern Mediterranean in the aftermath of Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack on Israel. Mount Whitney deployed Oct. 18.

The destroyer USS Ramage, part of the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group, returned to Norfolk, Va., on Dec. 3 following a seven-month deployment to the U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/6th Fleet area of operations, the Navy announced the following day.

Ramage served as an air defense unit for the strike group off the coast of Israel and closely monitored Russian navy units for signs of aggression, the service said.

While on deployment for 214 days, the Ramage crew logged over 400 helicopter landings and sailed more than 50,000 miles, the Navy said.

And on Nov. 28, the destroyer USS Paul Ignatius returned to its homeport at Naval Station Rota in Spain after an extended six-month deployment that included integration with the Ford group.

The aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford and the destroyer USS Thomas Hudner remain in the Eastern Mediterranean, each having made recent visits to NSA Souda Bay.

The cruiser USS Normandy, also part of the Ford group, visited Piraeus, Greece, on Dec. 3.

Ford was nearing the end of a six-month deployment in the NAVEUR-AF/6th Fleet area of responsibility when Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered it to the Eastern Mediterranean in October. Austin then indefinitely extended the carrier’s deployment.

The amphibious transport dock ship USS Mesa Verde and embarked elements of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit also remain in the region.

Mesa Verde, part of the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group, recently finished a bilateral exercise with a Greek marine brigade in the Mediterranean, 6th Fleet said.

US imposes embargo amid Houthi attacks

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. has sanctioned 13 businessmen and firms that it accuses of helping fund the Houthis, a militant group in Yemen that has engaged in lengthy firefights with U.S. Navy ships in the Red Sea in recent weeks.

The sanctions, announced Thursday, target a financial network that the U.S. says channels money from Iran to the Houthis. The economic measures represent one of the few ways the U.S. has publicly retaliated against the militant

group.

The sanctions are linked to the recent missile and drone attacks by the Houthis, Brian Nelson, undersecretary of the treasury for terrorism and financial intelligence, said in a statement Thursday.

The move follows criticism from former defense officials and Republican politicians of the U.S. response to attacks by Iranian-backed militants in the Middle East since the Oct. 7 outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas.

The Houthis have launched a flurry of attacks targeting Is-

rael and ships in the Red Sea in the past two months.

U.S. destroyers have responded by shooting down the Houthi missiles and drones.

One attack Sunday lasted more than seven hours, with USS Carney shooting down three aerial drones, including one that was headed toward the ship, U.S. Central Command said.

The attack left three commercial vessels damaged by missiles, CENTCOM said.

On Nov. 26, USS Mason chased pirates boarding a commercial ship, and the Pen-

tagon later said at least one Houthi missile was fired in the general area.

The USS Thomas Hudner on Nov. 15 also shot down a drone from Yemen heading in its direction, CENTCOM said.

White House officials say there are efforts to safeguard shipping routes through the establishment of a naval task force, although specifics on its operational scope remain unclear, as a similar organization already exists.

The Pentagon also says it hasn't ruled out strikes on the Houthis.

Airmen lost in Osprey crash awarded medals

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Air Force has bestowed posthumous awards upon each of the eight airmen who died Nov. 29 when their CV-22B Osprey crashed off Japan's southwestern coast.

The tiltrotor — assigned to the 353rd Special Operations Wing at Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo — went down near Yakushima, an island in Kagoshima prefecture.

In recognition of their service, the Air Force announced Wednesday that all eight have been awarded the Air Medal. Five also received the Meritorious Service Medal and three were awarded the Air and Space Commendation Medal.

The body of Staff Sgt. Jake Galliher, 24, a linguist from Pittsfield, Mass., was recovered the day of the crash. He was awarded the Air Medal and an Air and Space Commendation Medal with one oak leaf cluster.

Maj. Luke Unrath, 34, a CV-22 pilot and flight com-

mander from Riverside, Calif., and Tech. Sgt. Zachary Lavoy, 33, a medical operations flight chief from Oviedo, Fla., were recovered Dec. 4. Both received the Air Medal and the Meritorious Service Medal.

Capt. Terrell Brayman, 32; Staff Sgt. Jake Turnage, 25; and Senior Airman Brian Johnson, 32, were recovered Dec. 5.

Brayman, a CV-22 pilot and flight commander from Pittsford, N.Y., received the Meritorious Service Medal and an Air Medal with a combat device and five oak leaf clusters.

Turnage, a flight engineer from Kennesaw, Ga., and Johnson, a flight engineer from Reynoldsburg, Ohio, both received an Air Medal and the Air and Space Commendation Medal.

U.S. and Japanese dive teams were still searching for the remains of Maj. Jeffrey Hoernemann, 32, and Maj. Eric Spendlove, 36. Navy divers on Sunday recovered the remains of the seventh crew member, The Associated Press reported.

House lawmakers urge probe on safety issues

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Members of the House Armed Services Committee on Thursday asked a federal watchdog agency to investigate safety issues concerning Osprey tiltrotor aircraft in the wake of last month's deadly crash off the coast of Japan.

Eight airmen died in the Nov. 29 crash of an Air Force CV-22B Osprey.

Reps. John Garamendi, D-Calif., and Mike Waltz, R-Fla., sent a letter to the Government Accountability Office urging a review into the cause of this most recent accident as well as earlier incidents, according to a release from Garamendi's office.

Garamendi is the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee's subpanel on readiness. Waltz is the subpanel's chairman.

The Japan crash "comes after numerous mishaps involving the Osprey aircraft, resulting in the tragic loss of over 50 service members," the news release states.

Other recent Osprey fatalities were in August when three Marines died in an accident in Australia, and in June 2022, when five Marines perished in a crash about 115 miles east of San Diego.

On Wednesday, the Defense Department grounded all Ospreys used by the Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy.

"Preliminary investigation information indicates a potential materiel failure caused the mishap, but the underlying cause of the failure is unknown at this time," the Navy said in a Wednesday news release regarding the groundings. "While the mishap remains under investigation, we are implementing additional risk mitigation controls to ensure the safety of our service members."

In the lawmakers' letter, they ask the GAO to search for trends in causes of Osprey accidents and mishaps, as well as investigate issues of maintenance and supply that "negatively impact availability rates" of the aircraft.

Isolated in Kaliningrad

Neighbors limit movement through Russian exclave

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

Stars and Stripes

VILNIUS, Lithuania — Train passengers traveling between Moscow and Kaliningrad, Russia's militarized exclave, are confronted with the carnage Russia is inflicting on Ukraine every time they pass through this nation's capital.

There, on both sides of the track on platform No. 5 of Vilnius' central railway station, they are prompted to look at 24 large graphic photos from Russia's war against its smaller neighbor.

"Today Putin is killing peaceful civilians in Ukraine," the writing on the photos reads. "Do you agree with this?"

On a recent morning, a few passengers headed to Kaliningrad from Moscow looked out toward the display as the train paused for a 30-minute "technical stop." One woman closed the curtains on her window.

From Vilnius, the train will pass through the so-called "Suwałki Gap" between Kaliningrad and Belarus, a 60-mile-long strip of land along the Lithuania-Poland border that has long inspired fear in the Baltics and among NATO's planners.

Belarus hosted war games near the area in August, offering an alarming reminder to some military strategists of how a revanchist Russia could partner with Belarus to cut off the three Baltic nations once under Moscow's rule — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — from the rest of NATO.

But for now, the only connection between Russia's pliant ally and Russia's outpost on the Baltic Sea are train tracks carrying both Russian people and goods through European Union and NATO territory.

Kaliningrad, a former part of Germany that was taken by the Soviet Union as a spoil of World War II, finds itself increasingly isolated amid Russia's war in Ukraine as neighboring countries restrict its residents' movement, NATO adds members, and the Kremlin focuses its attention on waging war.

"Those who live in Kaliningrad have always felt like they're on an island and now it's an even bigger feeling," said Alexei Chabounine, a 53-year-old journalist with the Kaliningrad-based news site "Russian West." "There is a general feeling of being locked in."

Britain's defense ministry reported last month that Russia likely moved strategic air defenses from Kaliningrad to backfill recent losses on the Ukraine front, demonstrating

the "overstretch" the war has caused for Russian capabilities.

Still, Kaliningrad remains a source of power projection for the Kremlin into NATO's northern flank and one of the most militarized places in Russia, home to the Baltic Fleet as well as nuclear-capable Iskander missiles and other powerful armaments.

The Ukraine war has left a mark on Kaliningrad, Chabounine said. About 5,000 of the region's population of 1 million have been mobilized to fight in Ukraine, and estimates by locals put the death toll at around 450 people. Their graves occupy not just military cemeteries, but civilian ones, too.

The exclave's authorities seldom speak about the dead, but they do talk about how Kaliningrad is helping the war effort, Chabounine said. The region is providing quadcopters, camouflage nets and clothes, and allocating a significant portion of its 2024 budget to help finance the war. Soldiers who signed contracts with the army will be paid an additional 100,000 rubles, or about \$1,111, he said.

Russia is pouring money into Kaliningrad to help blunt the impact of Western sanctions, and investment in the exclave's vast military infrastructure continues, Chabounine said. But there is no construction of fortifications or preparations for an expanded war that would bring Russia into conflict with NATO.

"Even if Russia attacks the Baltics, there will be nothing left of Kaliningrad. There's no way to defend it — we'll be blockaded," he said. "The authorities say they will defend us, but truth be told, I don't see that happening."

The threat from Kaliningrad has receded with Russia mired in Ukraine and NATO welcoming Finland, and likely Sweden, into its ranks, experts say. Russia's goal of turning Kaliningrad into a launching pad to dominate the Baltics has "effectively been canceled," according to a November report published by the French Institute of International Relations.

"With the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, the Baltic theater is reconfigured so profoundly to Russia's disadvantage that no amount of effort could make 'Fortress Kaliningrad' defensible," the report states.

Eerik Purgel, head of the border and migration control service in Estonia's north-eastern region bordering Russia, said Estonia is thrilled to see "brother" nation Finland

in the military alliance and is eagerly awaiting the accession of Sweden.

"The Baltic Sea will become the NATO Sea," he said.

Russia has long been preparing for the eventuality of Kaliningrad getting cut off from the Russian mainland, said Tomas Jermalavicius, head of studies at the Estonia-based International Centre for Defence and Security think tank.

Moscow in recent years has tested Kaliningrad's capacity to operate its own power grid and installed a floating gas terminal to lessen Kaliningrad's dependence on pipelines that run through Lithuania, he said. The terminal has enough storage space to supply Kaliningrad for a month, according to Chabounine.

"Obviously they have a sense that this might become a very isolated part of Russia in a major crisis," Jermalavicius said.

The Kaliningrad exclave, located more than 200 miles from mainland Russia, has always stood a bit apart from the rest of the country, said Sergey Sukhankin, a Kaliningrad native and senior fellow at the James-town Foundation, a defense think tank.

It was populated by a mix of people from across the Soviet Union after World War II, and its residents prided themselves on being "not entirely Russian" and a part of "Russia's Europe," he said. Cross-border travel, especially to neighboring Poland, became frequent after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

But ties to Europe began to fray with Russia's first incursion into Ukraine in 2014. Authorities in Kaliningrad cracked down on German and Lithuanian cultural institutions, seeking to erase traces of the exclave's pre-Soviet past. Last summer, after a transit dispute with Lithuania, a Kaliningrad court shut down the Lithuanian Language Teachers' Association, a prominent Lithuanian group in the region.

For years, there has been agitation among some fringe elements in Kaliningrad to form an autonomous Baltic Republic and possibly secede from Russia. The Baltic Republican Party was founded explicitly for that purpose in 1993 before being dissolved by Russia in 2003.

One of its members, Rustam Vasiliev, continues to champion the group's cause, even after immigrating from Kaliningrad to the United States nearly a decade ago. He envisions Kaliningrad as a Europe-leaning republic with Königsberg, the city's former German name, as its capital.

Perhaps fallout from the Ukraine war could set the stage for such a split, he said.

"The region is like a heavy suitcase without a handle for the Kremlin," Vasiliev said. "It is inconvenient to carry, but the Kremlin is too greedy to drop it and walk away. What will be in the future only God knows."

Heavy fighting in Gaza as US sends support for Israel

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Heavy fighting raged Sunday across Gaza, including in the devastated north, as Israel pressed ahead with its offensive after the U.S. blocked the latest international push for a cease-fire and rushed more munitions to its close ally.

Israel has faced rising international outrage and calls for a permanent cease-fire after the killing of thousands of Palestinian civilians. About 90% of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced within the besieged territory, where U.N. agencies say there is no safe place to flee. The United States has lent vital support to the offensive once again in recent days, by vetoing United Nations Security Council efforts to end the fighting that enjoyed wide international support, and by pushing through an emergency sale of over \$100 million worth of tank ammunition to Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thanked President Joe Biden for the "important ammunition for the continuation of the war."

The U.S. has pledged unwavering support for Israel's goal of crushing Hamas' military and governing abilities, and returning all the hostages captured in the Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war. Hamas and other Palestinian militants stormed into southern Israel that day, killing some 1,200 people and capturing around 240, over 100 of whom were released during a weeklong cease-fire late last month.

Israel's air and ground war in response has killed thousands of Palestinians, mostly civilians, and forced some 1.9 million people to flee their homes. With a trickle of aid allowed in, and delivery impossible in much of the territory, Palestinians face severe shortages of food, water and other basic goods.

"Expect public order to completely break down soon, and an even worse situation could unfold including epidemic diseases and increased pressure for mass displacement into Egypt," U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told a forum in Qatar, a key intermediary.

Qatar's prime minister, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, told the forum that mediation efforts will continue to stop the war and have all hostages released, but "unfortunately, we are not seeing the same willingness that we had seen in the weeks before."

Israel's national security adviser, Tzachi Hanegbi, told Israel's Channel 12 TV that the U.S. has set no deadline for Israel to achieve its goals of dismantling Hamas and returning all hostages.

"The evaluation that this can't be measured in weeks is correct, and I'm not sure it can be measured in months," he said.

Penn leader resigns after antisemitism testimony

Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. — The University of Pennsylvania's president has resigned amid pressure from donors and criticism over testimony at a congressional hearing where she was unable to say under repeated questioning that calls on campus for the genocide of Jews would violate the school's conduct policy.

The chairman of the Ivy League school's board of trustees, Scott Bok, also resigned immediately during a trustees meeting Saturday evening, just hours after Bok announced Liz Magill's departure as president in just her second year.

Bok, a supporter of Magill's, defended her through several months of criticism over the university's handling of various perceived acts of antisemitism.

He called her a good person and talented leader who is not "the slightest bit antisemitic."

"Following that, it became clear that her position was no longer tenable, and she and I concurrently decided that it was time for her to exit," Bok said in a statement also announcing his resignation.

Calls for Magill's firing exploded after Tuesday's testimony in a U.S. House committee on antisemitism on college campuses, where she appeared with the presidents of Harvard University and MIT.

The three presidents were called before the committee to answer those accusations. But their lawyerly answers drew renewed blowback from opponents, focused particularly on a line of questioning from Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y., who repeatedly asked whether "calling for the genocide of Jews" would violate Penn's code of conduct.

Tennessee residents clean up after storms killed damage neighborhoods

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Central Tennessee residents and emergency workers cleaned up Sunday from severe weekend storms and tornadoes that killed six people and sent more to the hospital while damaging buildings, turning over vehicles and knocking out power to tens of thousands.

Officials confirmed that three people, including a toddler, died after a tornado struck Montgomery County 50 miles northwest of Nashville near the Kentucky state line on Saturday afternoon. Some 23 people were treated for injuries at hospitals in the county, officials said in a news release.

In a neighborhood just north of downtown Nashville, three people were killed Saturday as a result of tornadoes, the city's Emergency Operation Center said in a social media post.

National Weather Service meteorologists said in a posting on X, the platform formerly known as

Twitter, said the destructive tornadoes were spawned in the Clarksville and Nashville areas.

In Nashville, the roof of a church north of downtown collapsed during the storm, resulting in 13 people being treated at hospitals, Nashville emergency officials said in a news release. They were later listed in stable condition.

Photos posted by the Clarksville fire department on social media showed damaged houses with debris strewn in the lawns, a tractor-trailer flipped on its side on a highway and insulation ripped out of building walls. Video footage from the Tennessee storms showed a ball of fire rising from behind a row of homes into the sky.

A curfew was in effect both Saturday night and Sunday night in Clarksville, where officials on Sunday urged motorists to keep away from the damaged areas so as not to impede the work of first responders and utility crews.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Woman tried to burn MLK birthplace

GA ATLANTA — Atlanta police arrested a woman accused of trying to burn down the birth home of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in Atlanta.

Officers arrested the 26-year-old woman Thursday after responding to a report of vandalism in process at the two-story home in the Auburn Avenue Historic District, according to a police statement.

Police say a preliminary investigation shows the woman poured gasoline on the property before people stopped her. Her name was not immediately released. She's charged with second-degree attempted arson and interference with government property.

The historic site is now a museum operated by the National Park Service.

Robotaxi service faces fine in alleged cover-up

CA SAN FRANCISCO — California regulators are alleging a San Francisco robotaxi service owned by General Motors covered up the severity of an accident involving one of its driverless cars, raising the specter they may add a fine to the recent suspension of its California license.

The potential penalty facing GM's Cruise service could be around \$1.5 million, based on documents filed late last week by the California Public Utilities Commission.

The notice orders Cruise to appear at a Feb. 6 evidentiary hearing to determine whether

the robotaxi service misled regulators about what happened after one of its driverless cars ran into a pedestrian who had already been struck by another vehicle driven by a human on the evening of Oct. 2 in San Francisco.

The February hearing comes just six months after the commission authorized Cruise's robotaxi service to begin charging passengers for around-the-clock rides throughout San Francisco despite strident objections from city officials who warned the driverless cars malfunctioned.

Three weeks after Cruise's Oct. 2 accident, the California Department of Motor Vehicles effectively shut down the robotaxi service by suspending its license to operate in the state.

Charges dropped against police in 2020 protests

TX AUSTIN — A Texas prosecutor whose office oversaw indictments against more than 20 Austin police officers for tactics used during the 2020 protests that followed George Floyd's killing said last week that he was dropping most of the cases and would ask the Justice Department to investigate instead.

The announcement is a sharp reversal for Travis County District Attorney Jose Garza, a progressive who was elected months after the protests and ran on promises to hold police accountable in the Texas capital. Garza, a Democrat, said his office would dismiss indictments against 17 officers but still move forward with prosecuting four others.

The slate of felony charges

were by far the most indictments of officers from a single U.S. police department following nationwide protests in 2020 over racial injustice and police brutality. Some Austin police officers fired beanbag rounds in the crowd, critically injuring one teenager.

County may stop forcing unwed dads to pay costs

WI MADISON — Dane County officials are looking to stop making unwed fathers repay Medicaid for the cost of their children's births in cases before 2020.

The county already ended the policy for births after 2020, the Wisconsin State Journal reported. The county budget that passed in November calls for asking the state to drop cases from prior to 2020. That could lead to expunging 3,000 cases.

Dane County collected \$2.2 million in repayments in 2020, up from \$1.2 million in 2019 as the county intercepted COVID-19 pandemic stimulus checks and unemployment bonuses, according to ABC for Health, a Madison-based nonprofit law firm that helps people find health care.

Pilot charged with trying to cut engines is out of jail

OR PORTLAND — An ex-Alaska Airlines pilot accused of trying to cut the engines of a passenger flight while off-duty and riding in an extra seat in the cockpit was released from jail pending trial Thursday, after an Oregon judge approved it with conditions that include keeping away from aircraft.

Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Thomas Ryan

made the decision as Joseph Emerson pleaded not guilty to reduced charges of reckless endangerment; he previously faced attempted murder charges.

Emerson, of Pleasant Hill, Calif., has also pleaded not guilty to a federal charge of interfering with a flight crew. The judge in that case also agreed that he could be released pending trial.

The release conditions include that Emerson undergo mental health services, stay away from drugs and alcohol, and not come within 30 feet of an operable aircraft.

Boy's mother charged in football practice shooting

FL APOPKA — A Florida woman whose 11-year-old is accused of shooting two teenagers at a football practice in October was charged with a felony Thursday after authorities say she left a loaded gun in a worn and tattered cardboard box in her car.

Sharelle Johnson, 33, did not have the box secured and it was easily opened, according to the state attorney's office. Investigators say Johnson's son took the gun from the car and shot two teens following an argument at football practice.

She was charged with negligence by leaving a loaded firearm within easy access of a child.

A report from the Apopka Police Department said the child had been chased and attacked by the shooting victims, with a witness telling detectives one of the shooting victims had slapped him in the face.

— From wire reports



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Army holds off Navy with goal-line stand

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Army held its ground on a goal-line stand in the final seconds to send Navy mascot Bill the Goat — and Navy superfan Bill, the G.O.A.T. — home disappointed.

Army linebacker Kalib Fortner scored on a fourth-quarter strip sack and then helped stuff quarterback Tai Lavatai inches from the end zone with 3 seconds left to lead the Black Knights to a 17-11 victory over Navy on Saturday and win the 124th meeting of the nation's oldest service academies.

"Why's it always got to be like that?" said Army coach Jeff Monken, whose team won last year in double overtime. "It is. It's always like that. We had a 14-point lead, and with 1 second to go they're standing there knocking on the door with a chance to tie the game. Unreal."

Bryson Daily ran for 84 yards and threw Army's first touchdown pass against Navy since 2015 to help the Black Knights claim the much-coveted bragging rights for the sixth time in eight tries. Kanye Udoh ran for 88 yards for Army, which also claimed the Commander in Chief's Trophy that goes to the team with the best record in head-to-head matchups against other service academies. (Army upset then-No. 17 Air Force last month.)

Lavatai came off the bench in the second quarter and rushed for 74 yards, completing 16 of 26 passes for 176 yards — the most passing yards for a Navy quarterback against Army since 2010. Jayden Umbarger caught six passes for 75 yards and a touchdown that made it 17-9 with 2:47 left.

"This game, in the grand scheme of things, is about more than football," Navy coach Brian Newberry said. "It's about celebrating some of the finest young men in the country on the field, and then celebrating and recognizing all those that have dedicated their life to service, that have served and are serving your country. Shining a light on them, celebrating them and showing gratitude for their sacrifice and their commitment. That's what it's all about."

"I think, at the end of the day, whoever was in the stands was proud of what they saw these young men do."

The matchup of patriots at the Patriots' home brought an injection of pomp and excitement to Gillette Stadium, where the six-time Super Bowl champions have stumbled to a 3-10 record — getting shut out twice at home in a season for the first time in franchise history. New England is on pace for the worst season in Bill Belichick's three decades as an NFL head coach, stripping some of the shine off the devoted Navy man

who is in the discussion for the Greatest Of All Time.

Belichick, who grew up in Annapolis while his father spent 34 years as a Navy assistant coach, spoke to the Midshipmen on Friday night and pulled on a Roger Staubach-era Navy helmet for a TV pregame show to predict the winner.

It wasn't enough.

"I know Belichick has a rich history with Navy. I know his dad coached there," Army linebacker Leo Lowin said. "I know Boston's near the ocean. But it's good to get an Army win here."

The Black Knights opened a 17-3 lead with less than five minutes to play before Lavatai drove Navy for one score and then took the Midshipmen to the Army 6 in the final minute. He threw two incompletions before hitting Alex Tecza, who was tackled in bounds at the 2.

With no timeouts and no opportunity to spike the ball — it was fourth down — Navy scrambled to line up and get the play off. Lavatai surged forward as his whole team pushed, ahead of him and behind, but Army held on; replay confirmed that the ball never crossed the goal line.

To kill the remaining 3 seconds, Daily took a shotgun snap, hesitated, and stepped out of the end zone for an intentional safety.

Heisman Trophy awarded to LSU quarterback Daniels

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jayden Daniels was too good to be overlooked.

LSU's dazzling dual-threat quarterback won the Heisman Trophy on Saturday night, becoming the first player since 2016 to win college football's most prestigious player of the year award as part of a team that did not play for a conference championship.

The fifth-year player, who transferred from Arizona State to LSU in 2022, received 503 first-place votes and 2,029 points after accounting for 50 touchdowns and nearly 5,000 total yards in just 12 regular-season games.

"This is a dream come true," Daniels started his acceptance speech.

Washington's Michael Penix Jr. was the runner-up with 292 first-place votes and 1,701 points and Oregon's Bo Nix was third (51, 885), putting transfer quarterbacks in each of the top three spots. Ohio State receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. finished fourth (20, 352).

Wearing a sharp light gray suit, Daniels dropped his head for a moment when his name was called. He was the favorite to win the award, but said he felt relieved when it was official.

Still, he stayed composed throughout his speech, when he thanked everyone from his offensive line to the groundskeepers at Tigers Stadium and cafeteria workers who help feed the team.

"I wasn't really like, emotional, like crying," Daniels said lat-

er at a news conference. "I guess it's kind of how I play on the field. I'm just enjoying the moment, just embracing everything, giving thanks to God."

Daniels, who turns 23 on Dec. 18, won AP Player of the Year earlier this week.

Daniels is the fifth quarterback in the last seven seasons to win the Heisman after transferring, joining former LSU star Joe Burrow in 2019 and USC's Caleb Williams last year.

"I want to thank all my teammates, from Arizona State to LSU," Daniels said. "You're my brothers. You work so hard every day, inspiring me to be my best."

He is also LSU's third Heisman winner overall, along with running back Billy Cannon in 1959.

Burrow led LSU to a national championship and Cannon's team came close, finishing No. 3 in the country.

Daniels' Tigers (9-3) slipped out of that race with two losses in the first six weeks, but he certainly wasn't to blame.

"I really wish I could have brought you back another championship," Daniels said as he thanked the LSU fans.

Week after week he fueled the best offense in the country with his passing (3,812 yards) and running (1,134). He leads the nation in total offense at 412 yards per game and is averaging an astounding 10.71 yards per play.

No. 13 LSU is set to face Wisconsin in the ReliaQuest Bowl on Jan. 1, though Daniels has not yet decided if he will play the final game of his college career.

Ohtani signs record deal with Dodgers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Shohei Ohtani has set a financial record to go along with his singular on-field performance, getting \$700 million to make a 30-mile move up Interstate 5 to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

His agent, Nez Balelo, issued a release Saturday announcing the 10-year contract, ending months of speculation that began even before Ohtani became a free agent on Nov. 2. In recent days, media and fans had tracked private plane movements and alleged sightings like detectives in attempts to discern the intentions of the two-time AL MVP with the Angels.

“This is a unique, historic contract for a unique, historic player,” Balelo said. “He is excited to begin this partnership, and he structured his contract to reflect a true commitment from both sides to long-term success.”

Ohtani’s total was 64% higher than baseball’s previous record, a \$426.5 million, 12-year deal for Angels outfielder Mike Trout

that began in 2019.

His \$70 million average annual salary is 62% above the previous high of \$43,333,333, shared by pitchers Max Scherzer and Justin Verlander with deals they struck with the New York Mets. Ohtani’s average salary nearly doubles the roughly \$42.3 million he earned with the Angels. It also exceeds the entire payrolls of Baltimore and Oakland this year.

His agreement includes unprecedented deferred money that will lower the amount it counts toward the Dodgers’ luxury tax payroll, a person familiar with the agreement told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the details were not announced.

“He structured his contract to reflect a true commitment from both sides to long-term success,” Balelo said. “Shohei and I want to thank all the organizations that reached out to us for their interest and respect, especially the wonderful people we got to know

even better as this process unfolded.”

This is perhaps the largest contract in sports history, topping highs believed to be set by soccer stars Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappé.

There was no immediate comment by the Dodgers. Ohtani has not spoken with reporters since Aug. 9.

“I apologize for taking so long to come to a decision,” Ohtani said in an English-language statement on Instagram. “I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone involved with the Angels organization and the fans who have supported me over the past six years, as well as to everyone involved with each team that was part of this negotiation process.

“And to all Dodgers fans, I pledge to always do what’s best for the team and always continue to give it my all to be the best version of myself,” he continued. “Until the last day of my playing career, I want to continue to strive forward not only for the

Dodgers but for the baseball world.”

Ohtani joins a lineup that also includes 2018 AL MVP Mookie Betts and 2020 NL MVP Freddie Freeman. The Dodgers won the NL West this year for the 10th time in 11 seasons before they were swept by Arizona in the Division Series in October.

Los Angeles begins the 2024 season in Seoul, South Korea, against San Diego on March 20-21.

Ohtani’s decision came six years and one day after he first agreed to his deal with Angels.

Ohtani has redefined modern baseball since he chose the Angels as his first major league team. Nobody has come close to matching his achievements at the plate and on the mound, becoming one of the majors’ elite players in both roles when healthy. Along the way, he has become one of the most marketable athletes in the world, a force when it comes to ticket sales, TV ratings and sponsorship revenue.

Davis lifts Lakers to In-Season Tournament crown

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — As Commissioner Adam Silver prepared to hand LeBron James the MVP trophy of the inaugural NBA In-Season Tournament, he cautioned that “it doesn’t come with a franchise.”

James bent over in laughter, but he has been serious about wanting to own an NBA expansion team in Las Vegas.

For now, he’ll more than settle for the individual honor and tournament championship after scoring 24 points and adding 11 rebounds Saturday night to help the Los Angeles Lakers beat the Indiana Pacers 123-109 in the final.

“My enthusiasm about being here post-career, bringing a team here has not changed,”

James said. “The fans are amazing here. They have everything already: WNBA team, they have a baseball team (Athletics) coming in soon, NFL team, hockey team, F1 (Formula One) was just here. This is a place that loves great attractions, and I think the NBA will be another great addition to this city.”

As well as James played Saturday, the star was teammate Anthony Davis, who had 41 points and 20 rebounds — numbers that would have been season highs if they counted. This is the only game in the tournament that doesn’t figure in the standings or statistics.

Davis also shot 16-for-24, had five assists and blocked four shots.

“They’re a hell of a one-two

punch,” Lakers coach Darvin Ham said about James and Davis. “That one or two could be either one of them on any given night. At the end of the day, they know how to take it to the next level when everything is on the line.”

Los Angeles is the champion because the two headliners received plenty of help.

Austin Reaves scored 28 points, D’Angelo Russell added 13 points and Cam Reddish set the tone defensively by limiting the damage by Indiana’s Tyrese Haliburton, who emerged as one of the faces of this tournament.

He had 20 points and 11 assists against the Lakers, often passing to a teammate rather than trying to force the action.

“(Reddish) didn’t score a lot

(nine points), but I felt like he was one of the best players on the court with the way he defended and really changed the game on that end of the floor,” Reaves said.

Also for the Pacers, Bennedict Mathurin scored 20 points and Aaron Nesmith had 15.

In addition to taking home a trophy, Lakers players on standard contracts each made \$500,000 and the Pacers received \$200,000 apiece. Players on two-way deals take home half those amounts.

The tournament and the title game had a combination of an NBA playoff and one-and-done NCAA Tournament kind of atmosphere, and the Pacers and Lakers played as if their seasons were on the line.

Senators pull away to top Red Wings

Associated Press

DETROIT — Claude Giroux and Vladimir Tarasenko each had a goal and an assist and the Ottawa Senators beat Detroit 5-1 on Saturday night in a game overshadowed by a hit from behind that left Red Wings captain Dylan Larkin unconscious on the ice.

Larkin was down for about a minute after being cross-checked in the back of the head and neck by Ottawa's Mathieu Joseph. Eventually, Larkin was able to stand up after regaining consciousness. He was hunched over as he was assisted to the locker room.

The team released a statement during the game that Larkin was being evaluated by the medical staff. Coach Derek Lalonde didn't have a further update afterward.

"Obviously, very concerned," Lalonde said. "That's a really tough look, seeing him passed out on the ice, unconscious."

Standing near the Ottawa goal during a first-period power play, Larkin took the hit from Joseph and fell into the Senators' Parker Kelly, who also hit him.

Joseph and Kelly were assessed roughing penalties on the play with 6:10 left in the period.

Detroit's David Perron was given a match penalty for intent to injure for cross-checking Artem Zub as the Ottawa defenseman stood next to the prone Larkin.

Nine-time All-Star Patrick Kane scored his first goal of the season in his second game with Detroit.

Islanders 3, Kings 2 (OT): Jean-Gabriel Pageau scored 13 seconds into overtime, Ilya Sorokin stopped 34 shots and New York ended Los Angeles' record season-opening road winning streak at 11.

Anders Lee scored twice in the third period to tie the score for the Islanders. They improved to 4-0-1 in their last five games and 7-1-4 in their last 12.

Golden Knights 6, Stars 1: Captain Mark Stone, Zach Whitecloud, Nicholas Roy and Paul Cotter each had a goal and an assist and Stanley Cup champion Vegas wrapped up its season series against host Dallas with a victory.

The Golden Knights, at 18-5-5 just past one-third of the way through their regular-season schedule, have an NHL-high 41 points. Dallas is 15-8-3 for 33 points.

Bruins 5, Coyotes 3: David Pastrnak had two goals and an assist, Linus Ullmark made 31

saves and host Boston held off Arizona.

Kevin Shattenkirk had his 99th career goal for Boston.

Maple Leafs 4, Predators 0: Auston Matthews scored twice, Ilya Samsonov made 18 saves for his first shutout of the season for host Toronto.

Capitals 4, Rangers 0: Charlie Lindgren stopped 31 shots for his second shutout of the season and host Washington beat New York to snap a three-game losing streak.

Sonny Milano, Anthony Mantha, Tom Wilson and Nicolas Aube-Kubel scored to help the Capitals spoil former coach Peter Laviolette's return to Washington with his new team.

Canucks 4, Hurricanes 3: Elias Pettersson broke a tie at 3:29 of the third period, Thatcher Demko stopped 21 shots and host Vancouver held on to beat Carolina.

Pettersson also had two assists, Sam Lafferty and Ilya Mikheyev each had a goal and an assist and J.T. Miller also scored.

Flyers 5, Avalanche 2: Travis Konecny scored twice, Owen Tippett had a goal and an assist and Carter Hart stopped 36 shots in visiting Philadelphia's victory over Colorado.

Travis Sanheim and Joel Fa-

rabee also scored, and Bobby Brink had two assists for the Flyers. They won their fourth straight and improved to 10-3-1 in their last 14.

Lightning 4, Kraken 3 (OT): Nikita Kucherov scored his second goal of the game 3:12 into overtime to lift visiting Tampa Bay, sending reeling Seattle to its seventh straight loss.

Anthony Cirelli had a goal and an assist, Nicholas Paul also scored and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 26 saves. The Lightning have won three of four since a four-game skid.

Devils 4, Flames 2: Nico Hischier scored twice and visiting New Jersey beat Calgary for its third straight victory and sixth in seven games.

Vitek Vanecek made 23 saves to help the Devils improve to 14-10-1.

Blackhawks 3, Blues 1: Petr Mrazek made 38 saves, Anthony Beauvillier, Alex Vlasic and Jason Dickinson scored and host Chicago beat St. Louis for its first back-to-back wins of the season.

Canadiens 3, Sabres 2 (SO): Cayden Primeau made a career-high 46 saves and Juraj Slafkovsky scored in the fourth round of the shootout to lift visiting Montreal past Buffalo.

Top-ranked Arizona races past No. 23 Wisconsin

Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. — Pelle Larsson nailed his third 3-pointer of the first half, Caleb Love followed with a steal and a thunderous fastbreak slam, then Oumar Ballo capped the spectacular stretch with an alley-oop dunk.

The outburst took a scant 55 seconds. Top-ranked Arizona can flip a game in a hurry.

Larsson scored a career-high 21 points, Love added 20, and the No. 1 Wildcats rolled to a 98-73 win over No. 23 Wisconsin on Saturday.

"We kept our energy," Larsson said. "I feel like when you play us, you've got to have your energy the whole game. As soon as you relax, we're going to keep going."

The Wildcats — playing as the top team in the country for the first time in nine years — looked comfortable in their new role, using a 25-8 run to end the first half and take a 17-point halftime lead.

"It felt like 50-2," Wisconsin coach Greg Gard said.

Larsson finished 6-for-6

shooting from the field, including 4-for-4 on 3-pointers. The Wildcats (8-0) shot 58% from the field.

It was tight game for the first 10 minutes, and the score was tied at 23-all with 8:50 left in the first half before a stretch of overwhelming offense from the Wildcats gave them a 48-31 advantage at the break.

"The snowball happened, it kept getting bigger and bigger, and it was hard for us to get it under control," Gard said. "We'll learn a lot from this as we go

through the tape. I didn't think we were as good defensively as we have been, but that's in large part due to Arizona."

The Badgers (7-3) came into the game on a six-game winning streak, including a win over then-No. 3 Marquette.

John Blackwell led Wisconsin with 17 points. Steven Crowl added 11 points.

It was Arizona's biggest margin of victory against a nationally ranked opponent since beating Western Kentucky by 39 in 2002.