

STARS AND STRIPES®

Wednesday, February 1, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Botched raid an early lesson for Trump

The Washington Post

The mission facing the Navy SEALs as they approached a remote desert compound was a formidable one: detain Yemeni tribal leaders collaborating with al-Qaida and gather intelligence that could plug a critical gap in U.S. understanding of one of the world's most dangerous militant groups.

Instead, a massive firefight ensued, claiming the life of an American sailor and at least one Yemeni child, and serving as an early lesson for President Donald Trump's national security team about the perils of overseas ground operations.

The raid Saturday in Yemen's Bayda governorate, which also included elite forces from the United Arab Emirates, was the first counterterrorism operation approved by Trump, who took office a week earlier. The death of Chief Special Warfare Operator William "Ryan" Owens was the first combat fatality of Trump's young presidency.

Special operations such as this have always been risky for

presidents to approve. Trump and some of his advisers have promised to give the military greater rein in authorizing such missions as part of their desire to wipe out extremist threats. But the president has also said he is leery of getting entangled too deeply in costly operations overseas.

In Saturday's operation, the SEALs faced difficulties from the start. After the U.S. forces descended on the village of Yaklaa, a heavily guarded al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula stronghold surrounded by land mines, militants launched an intense counterattack. As the pitched gunbattle continued, officials called in Marine Cobra helicopter gunships, backed by Harrier jets, to strike the AQAP fighters, according to U.S. officials familiar with the incident.

An elite special operations air regiment was then sent in to pull the team and its casualties out of the fray, banking into the night under heavy fire to link up with a Marine quick-reaction force that had taken off in MV-22 Ospreys from the USS Makin

Island floating offshore.

The two units planned to meet in the desert to transfer the wounded SEALs so they could be taken back to the amphibious assault ship for treatment, but one of the Ospreys lost power, hitting the ground hard enough to wound three Marines and disable the aircraft.

With the twin-engine transport out of action, a Marine jet dropped a GPS-guided bomb on the disabled \$70 million Osprey to ensure that it did not fall into militant hands.

Yemeni officials said the operation killed 15 women and children, including the 8-year-old daughter of the late radical Yemeni-American cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, who was killed in 2011 in a U.S. drone strike. American officials said they were unable to immediately confirm the civilian deaths but suggested that most or all of those killed were militants.

Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said women participated in the gunfight.

According to current and former officials with knowledge of

the operation, military officials had proposed it weeks before, under former President Barack Obama's administration, as part of an attempt to compensate for intelligence losses caused by Yemen's extended civil conflict.

After considering the operation for several weeks, Obama officials concluded that the raid would not be possible before the president's Jan. 20 departure, and they began to tee up a final decision for Trump's top advisers.

The operation, the first U.S.-led ground raid in Yemen since 2014, comes as the United States tries to rebuild a counterterrorism mission that has been severely curtailed since 2015.

The operation might also be a sign of things to come. The Pentagon, according to two defense officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters, is drawing up plans to be considered by the White House that, if approved, could delegate decision-making for operations in Yemen to a lower level and accelerate activities against AQAP.

Ships search for oil damage after Antietam incident

BY ERIK SLAVIN

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Navy and Japan Coast Guard ships continued searching Yokosuka's shoreline and waters Wednesday for signs of environmental damage one day after the guided-missile cruiser USS Antietam ran aground on a shoal and leaked hydraulic oil.

The Antietam grounded just before 11 a.m. Tuesday while anchoring near the northeast side of the base at the Ammunition Handling Anchorage Area, Naval Forces Japan officials said Wednesday.

No ammunition was being handled at the time of the incident, Naval Forces Japan spokesman Darian Wilson said.

The area is regularly used by U.S. and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force ships for anchoring and isn't far from the base's piers.

The Navy and the Japan Coast Guard conducted surface searches for an estimated 1,100 gallons of leaked hydraulic oil Tuesday and Wednesday.

On each day, Navy searches "turned up negative, with no oil visible in the water or on the shoreline," Wilson said.

The Japan Coast Guard

hasn't found any floating oil since being notified Tuesday afternoon, a spokesman said Wednesday.

Whether hydraulic oil floats on water depends on the depth of discharge, currents and other conditions, officials said.

A Navy vessel will continue searching for signs of oil, Wilson said.

The Antietam sustained damage to its propeller, creating what Navy officials deemed a "minor operational setback" Wednesday.

Divers from Yokosuka's ship-repair facility were still inspecting the propeller Wednesday.

Tug boats pulled the Antietam back to the pier Tuesday, though the boats weren't needed to pull the cruiser off the shoal where it grounded, Wilson said.

The propeller will need repair before the Antietam can resume normal operations in the Asia-Pacific region.

Antietam is among 13 ships homeported at Yokosuka and one of at least seven equipped for intercepting ballistic missiles. Such ships typically operate at a high tempo and would be a critical part of defense if North Korea ever launched ballistic missiles at the U.S. or an ally.

Hiring freeze hits military readiness

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's federal hiring freeze is "striking at the heart" of the military's ability to maintain its equipment, the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee said Tuesday.

Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., said hundreds of Defense Department civilian maintainers who have been hired for renewable terms at facilities around the country to work on aircraft, ships and ground combat vehicles now face layoffs under the freeze, which was ordered by Trump last week.

The loss of manpower from Trump's order will hit the military's maintenance and readiness just as the president embarks on an effort to rebuild the armed forces, Smith said. Overall, the order could affect thousands of DOD civilians hired to do maintenance work for limited terms.

"This boneheaded, ideological attack on the functioning of our government is having real consequences," he said.

The Republican chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, was working Tuesday with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to

determine whether the department would allow exemptions for hiring for those positions, a spokesman told Stars and Stripes.

Among his first acts, Trump signed a memorandum temporarily halting federal hiring for 90 days — with an exemption for military personnel — until his administration can create a plan to reduce the size of the workforce. He traveled to the Pentagon days later to sign another memorandum setting a policy to rebuild the military and calling for a top-to-bottom review.

"In the same week that President Trump says he is rebuilding the military, he signs an order striking at the heart of U.S. military readiness," Smith said in a statement. "That is unconscionable and it directly affects the support we provide to U.S. servicemembers in the field, not to mention the national security of the United States."

Smith's office released a list of some facilities where the term and temporary DOD civilians face layoffs or empty positions cannot be filled:

■ Red River Army Depot near Texarkana, Texas, which maintains Humvees and Bradley Fighting Vehicles, is set to lay off 678 direct labor and 55 indirect labor employees.

■ Warner Robins Air Logistics Complex at Robins Air Force Base, Ga., works on F-15 jets and other aircraft, and it is short 343 aircraft maintainers out of its 7,000 employees but will not be able to hire.

■ Anniston Army Depot in Alabama, which builds and repairs ground combat vehicles, needs to hire 248 workers and 40 are set to be laid off.

The positions comprised term and temporary DOD civilians. Term workers can be hired for one to four years to handle projects or help with a large workload, and temporary workers are hired for jobs that are not expected to last more than a year, according to the Code of Federal Regulations.

Under Trump's executive action, the Defense Department and all federal agencies cannot hire new employees or create new positions. They are specifically barred from tapping contractors to complete work.

The move was meant to protect the American taxpayer and halt runaway growth of the government, according to White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer.

The freeze will remain in place for three months while the Office of Management and Budget creates a "long-term plan to reduce the size of the

federal government's workforce through attrition."

However, the president has allowed Mattis and other agency heads to make exemptions for positions they deem necessary for national security and public safety.

The Defense Department has not issued any exemptions to the civilian hiring freeze, Pentagon spokesman Johnny Michael said.

It is considering positions that may need to be exempted for several reasons, but it has not made any final determinations. He did not specify which positions the department is considering.

Thornberry is working with Mattis on ways to ensure that the military's readiness to defend the country and fight wars is not affected, according to spokesman Claude Chafin.

"No one takes the issue of restoring military readiness more seriously than Chairman Thornberry," Chafin wrote in an email.

Last week, the acting director at the Department of Veterans Affairs announced he will exempt doctors and other front-line health care providers after a groundswell of concern over the freeze's effects on its nationwide system of hospitals and clinics.

Reports: Teen planned to plant bomb near Ramstein

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
AND MARCUS KLOECKNER
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — A 17-year-old Islamic State sympathizer planned to set off a pipe bomb near Ramstein Air Base but changed his mind because he didn't want to "kill so many people," according to media reports.

The Austrian weekly newspaper Falter reported this week that the 17-year-old, identified only as Lorenz K., told police of the plan after he was arrested

in Vienna on Jan. 20 when an acquaintance reported him to authorities.

Falter said it had obtained a transcript of the youth's questioning. German police and Austria's Interior Ministry refused to comment on the report. "Report Mainz," a German television show, had also received copies of the same transcript, media said.

According to Falter, Lorenz K. told police he planned to place the bomb under a garbage can near Ramstein, the largest U.S.

air base overseas, in December.

"That is what I planned to do. But I did not have the heart to do it," he was quoted by Falter as saying. "I could not ... really kill so many people."

Base officials at Ramstein said Wednesday that they were aware of reports about the planned bombing and that base leadership regularly reminds airmen and their families to remain vigilant.

Lorenz K. had found instructions online on how to make a bomb, the weekly said.

Falter, which said the man was a Muslim born in Austria, said it's believed he was radicalized while spending time in prison in 2015 for a variety of offenses. While on probation, he told investigators, he contacted a member of the Islamic State group via Facebook.

Rather than fighting for the Islamic State in Syria, the suspect said, "I wanted to do something in Europe. I hate the German military because they participate in fights against Muslims."

Gulf exercises kick off

BY CHRIS CHURCH
Stars and Stripes

ABOARD ROYAL NAVY SHIP HMS OCEAN — The multilateral exercise Unified Trident began Tuesday in the Persian Gulf amid rising tensions between the U.S. and Iran.

The exercise kicked off one day after reports that Iran launched a ballistic missile test and Iranian-backed Houthi rebels struck a Saudi coalition ship off the western coast of Yemen.

Adding to the tension: President Donald Trump could scrap the Iran nuclear deal, saying throughout his campaign that it was bad for the U.S.

Despite the setting, Unified Trident has nothing to do with Iran, said the exercise planner, Royal Navy Lt. Cmdr. Ant Wallace.

"It's not a show of force to the Iranians at all," Wallace said. "The reason we are doing this exercise, and I'll stress this over and over again, is because it's easier to do here than it would be anywhere else. It's a key opportunity to bring ships together, to exercise together and to operate together. The fact that it's in the (Persian) Gulf is coincidental, really."

Unified Trident involves the British Royal Navy, Royal Australian Navy, French Marine Nationale and U.S. Naval Forces Central Command. The combined task force is led by British Royal Navy Commodore Andrew Burns.

Task Force 50 is in charge of planning and conducting strike and contingency operations, and it is typically led by a U.S. aircraft carrier strike group commander. Burns took over Task Force 50 in mid-November as the first Royal Navy officer to lead a U.S. task force in the Middle East.

The three-day exercise is designed as practice on how to aggregate a number of forces in the Persian Gulf, Wallace said. The exercise also tests the task force's ability to address conventional and unconventional maritime and air threats.

B-2s wrap up training

Stars and Stripes

A trio of B-2 Spirit stealth bombers wrapped up three weeks of training in the Pacific that included drills with B-1B Lancers out of Guam.

The B-2s, which recently returned home to Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo., also trained with other U.S. aircraft and the Royal Australian Air Force, a Pacific Air Forces statement said.

"The B-2's nearly 7,000 mile unrefueled range allows us to seamlessly integrate with our Australian counterparts on the tactical and operational levels, demonstrating the ability to deter adversaries and defend our allies and partners," Brig. Gen. Dirk Smith, PACAF's director of Air and Cyberspace Operations, said in the statement.

The crews also took part in a Navy drill near Oahu that included Hawaii Air National Guard F-22A Raptors, and trained alongside supersonic Lancers deployed to Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, under U.S. Pacific Command. Such missions allow crews to keep their skills fresh while familiarizing themselves with air bases and airspace in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, the statement said.

IG report: CENTCOM didn't exaggerate war on terrorism progress

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Defense Department review delivered to Congress on Tuesday concludes that senior leaders at U.S. Central Command did not exaggerate the progress the U.S. was making in fighting Islamic State militants, two U.S. officials said.

The long-awaited report from the Pentagon's inspector general is not expected to satisfy intelligence analysts who complained that officials were improperly reworking intelligence assessments being prepared for President Barack Obama and other top policymakers to offer a rosier view of U.S. operations against the Islamic State group.

The probe began after at least one civilian analyst for the Defense Intelligence Agency told authorities he had evidence that officials at the Florida-based CENTCOM, which oversees operations in the Middle East, were improperly reworking the conclusions of these assessments.

A House GOP task force concluded in a report last year that there were "persistent problems" in 2014 and 2015 with the command's analysis of U.S. efforts to train Iraqi forces and fight Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The several-hundred-page classified report, however, did not provide evidence that there were intentional efforts to distort intelligence analyses, said one U.S. official who had been briefed on the report.

While the report provided no evidence that Islamic State group intelligence assessments were altered, it did find that analysts' concerns were real and that if they didn't believe their work was being respected that sentiment could have affected the overall intelligence report, a second U.S. official said.

That official, who is familiar with the contents of the classified report, said the inspector general found no wrongdoing and no conspiracy or intent to color the intelligence, but concluded more broadly that there should be improvements in personnel management and leadership to

address concerns by analysts about the treatment of their work.

As an example, the report notes that analysts who see their words being changed or left out of briefings could be less motivated to provide their best assessments. And if that sentiment made them less likely to bring up key points or conclusions, it affected the intelligence product, the official said.

The official said the report looked more broadly at the intelligence community as a whole and how it develops its assessments. And it said that by making people feel as though their work was not appreciated, there were unintended consequences, including that analysts may have left things out of their reports.

The official said there are no recommendations for anyone to be punished. But the report did include some recommendations that certain personnel develop better leadership skills. And the report talked at length about the need to improve processes and the way the intelligence community works in order to make sure analysts are encouraged to bring their work forward.

The officials were not authorized to speak publicly about the report and demanded anonymity.

An unclassified version of the report was to be released on Wednesday.

In February 2016, the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee said the panel had been told that CENTCOM personnel had deleted files and emails amid the allegations that intelligence assessments were being altered. CENTCOM said that as a matter of policy, all senior leaders' emails were stored for record-keeping purposes and could not be deleted.

At the time, the chairman, Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Calif., also said the Office of the Director of National Intelligence had briefed the committee on a survey indicating that more than 40 percent of CENTCOM analysts believed there were problems with the integrity of the intelligence analyses and process.

Trump taps Gorsuch for Supreme Court

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has nominated Neil Gorsuch, a fast-rising conservative judge with a writer's flair, to the Supreme Court, setting up a fierce fight with Democrats over a jurist who could shape America's legal landscape for decades to come.

At 49, Gorsuch is the youngest Supreme Court nominee in a quarter-century. He's known on the Denver-based 10th Circuit Court of Appeals for clear, colloquial writing, advocacy for court review of government regulations, defense of religious freedom and skepticism toward law enforcement.

"Judge Gorsuch has outstanding legal skills, a brilliant mind, tremendous discipline and has earned bipartisan support," Trump declared, announcing

the nomination in his first televised prime-time address from the White House.

Gorsuch's nomination Tuesday was cheered by conservatives wary of Trump's own fluid ideology. If confirmed by the Senate, he would fill the seat left vacant by the death last year of Antonin Scalia, long the right's most powerful voice on the high court.

Gorsuch thanked Trump for entrusting him with "a most solemn assignment." Outlining his legal philosophy, he said: "It is the rule of judges to apply, not alter, the work of the people's representatives. A judge who likes every outcome he reaches is very likely a bad judge."

Some Democrats, still smarting over Trump's unexpected victory in the presidential election, have vowed to mount a vigorous challenge to nearly any

nominee to what they view as the court's "stolen seat." President Barack Obama nominated U.S. Circuit Court Judge Merrick Garland for the vacancy after Scalia's death, but Senate Republicans refused to consider the pick, saying the seat should be filled only after the November election.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, of New York, said he has "serious doubts" that Gorsuch is within what Democrats consider the legal mainstream, saying he "hewed to an ideological approach to jurisprudence that makes me skeptical that he can be a strong, independent justice on the court."

Trump's choice of Gorsuch marks perhaps the most significant decision of his young presidency, one with ramifications that could last long after

he leaves office. After a reality television buildup to Tuesday's announcement — including a senior Trump adviser saying more than one court candidate was heading to Washington ahead of the event — the actual reveal was traditional and drama-free.

Gorsuch would restore the court to the conservative tilt it held with Scalia on the bench. But he is not expected to call into question high-profile rulings on abortion, gay marriage and other issues in which the court has been divided 5-4 in recent years.

If confirmed, Gorsuch would join the court that is often the final arbiter for presidential policy. Justices upheld Obama's signature health care law in 2012 and could eventually hear arguments over Trump's controversial refugee and immi-

GOP suspends vote rule as nominees fight heats up

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In the latest intensification of partisan hostilities, Republicans rammed President Donald Trump's picks to be treasury and health secretaries through a Senate committee on Wednesday with no Democrats present after unilaterally suspending panel rules that would have otherwise prevented the vote.

By a pair of 14-0 roll calls, the Senate Finance Committee approved Rep. Tom Price, R-Ga., to be health and human services secretary and banker Steve Mnuchin to be treasury secretary. Both nominations must be confirmed by the full Senate.

The GOP's show of brute political muscle came shortly before a testy session of the Senate Judiciary Committee at which lawmakers approved Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., to be attorney general. Later Wednesday, the full Senate planned to vote on confirming Rex Tillerson, the former Exxon Mobil CEO, as

secretary of state.

With Republicans controlling both the White House and Congress for the first time in a decade, the GOP display of strength seemed to signal that the party will do all it can to block Democratic attempts to frustrate them.

Democrats had boycotted Wednesday's abruptly called Finance Committee meeting, as they'd done for a session a day earlier, demanding more time to question the two men about their past financial practices.

Before approving the two nominees, the committee's Republicans voted 14-0 to temporarily suspend a rule requiring at least one Democrat to be present for any votes. Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said the Senate parliamentarian had approved the extraordinary tactic and blamed it on Democrats, saying their boycott was "one of the most pathetic things I've ever seen" and "a nefarious breach of protocol."

Secretary of state choice headed for Senate approval

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's nomination of Rex Tillerson for secretary of state is headed toward Senate confirmation after several Democrats crossed party lines to back the former Exxon Mobil CEO.

The vote on Tillerson, scheduled for Wednesday, comes as tension builds among congressional Republicans and Democrats over Trump's executive order on immigrants and refugees. The Senate's top Democrat, Chuck Schumer, of New York, said the order would be a litmus test for Trump's remaining Cabinet choices, and that any who refuse to reject the "horrible" new policy should be opposed.

But Democrats lack the numbers in the Senate to block Tillerson from becoming the nation's chief diplomat. Republicans hold a four-seat advantage and, during a procedural vote Monday on the nomination,

Democrats Joe Manchin, of West Virginia; Heidi Heitkamp, of North Dakota; and Mark Warner, of Virginia, cast their ballots for Tillerson. They're unlikely to change their minds.

Sen. Angus King, a Maine independent who caucuses with the Democrats, also supported Tillerson. The nomination needs only a simple majority to be confirmed.

Sen. Ben Cardin, of Maryland, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he wasn't sure whether Tillerson would steer Trump toward a coherent foreign policy or whether he might be a "yes man, enabling the risky, chaotic whims of a demagogue president who is leading us on a march of folly."

With liberal groups pressing them to fight Trump, Democrats used delaying tactics on Trump nominees Tuesday. It's one of their limited weapons as the congressional minority to hamper the GOP.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

'Jughead' deer freed from pretzel container

MD BEL AIR — A deer that had a plastic pretzel container stuck on its head for days has finally been freed.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources told local media that the deer, which had been nicknamed "Jughead" by residents of Bel Air who were tracking him, had the container stuck on his head since Jan. 19.

After spotting the deer on and off for more than a week, DNR staff tranquilized the deer Sunday evening.

DNR spokesman Gregg Bortz said the Wildlife Response Team released the deer from the container, monitored him until he recovered from the tranquilizer and then released him into the wild with new ear tags.

The DNR tweeted video of the deer being freed.

Bounty hunter sentenced after raid on police chief

AZ PHOENIX — A man was sentenced to probation for his guilty plea in a 2015 incident in which nearly a dozen armed bounty hunters looking for a fugitive swarmed the home of Phoenix's then-chief of police.

Brent Leroy Farley, 44, had pleaded guilty to an attempted bail bond agent violation.

An attorney for Farley has said his client made the plea because he didn't have the proper licensing to be a bounty hunter when he orchestrated the raid. Five others charged in the case have pleaded guilty to a reduced charge.

Bounty hunters mistakenly went to the home of now-retired police Chief Joe Yahner after

they were sent there by a text message to look for a suspect.

The bounty hunters mistakenly believed a fugitive wanted in Oklahoma was in the house.

Large doll resembling Trump hung by noose

IN FORT WAYNE — A large doll resembling President Donald Trump that was hung from a tree by a noose in Indiana has left some area residents uncomfortable.

WANE-TV reported that the doll is adorned with a flag of the former Soviet Union and was hung in Fort Wayne after Trump's inauguration. The TV station went to the home where it's hanging but said no one answered the door.

A banner on the home says: "Trump is a disgrace to America."

Jared Paden, who lives nearby, said it's "shocking." He said he's "not really excited about it being in my neighborhood."

Police say the homeowner is protected by the right to free speech.

Oakdale Neighborhood President Tom Tiernon says residents respect the right to free speech, but they're concerned "a line has been crossed."

Bull on the run in city caught by cowboys

SD RAPID CITY — It took a couple of cowboys from a rodeo competition, each armed with a lasso, to catch an escaped bull that was running wild in a South Dakota city.

Authorities said the bull got loose Sunday when the owner was loading him into a trailer at the Central States Fairgrounds in Rapid City. The bull bolted along a bike path, through Me-

morial Park and Rapid Creek, and stopped at the Executive Golf Course.

KOTA-TV reported that police said even though the bull was tired, he was still considered dangerous, especially in a residential area.

Police summoned some cowboys from the Sutton Ranch Rodeo competition at the civic center, and they were able to rope the bull and get him back to the trailer.

Vandalism damages 600-plus gravesites

OH COLUMBUS — The large Ohio cemetery that includes the gravesites of humorist James Thurber, five governors and a grandfather of President George H.W. Bush saw more vandalism last month, adding to a tally of more than 600 damaged gravesites there over the past two years.

The Columbus Dispatch reported that the vandalism at the nearly 170-year-old Green Lawn Cemetery, southwest of downtown Columbus, has caused damage estimated at more than \$1 million.

The latest round marred eight gravesites and a century-old mausoleum on Jan. 9. A security camera also showed the vandal grabbing some American flags from veterans' graves, setting the flags on fire and tossing them in some brush.

A \$1,000 reward is being offered for information to convict whoever is responsible for the vandalism.

State residents advised about 'yes' phone scam

WV CHARLESTON — A phone scam that's circulating in the U.S. is also targeting parts of West

Virginia.

State Attorney General Patrick Morrisey's office said the scam involves the recipient of an unsolicited phone call being asked, "Can you hear me now?" Morrisey's office said in a news release that answering "yes" allows the caller to record the word and misuse it as the consumer agreeing to pay for a product or service.

Morrisey said people who receive such calls should just hang up the phone and avoid giving any affirmative answer.

Morrisey encourages consumers to make frequent bank account and financial record checks to see if any fraudulent charges have occurred.

The news release said the scam is circulating in areas including northern West Virginia.

Man on bike accused of trying to kidnap toddler

FL RIVIERA BEACH — Authorities said a man jumped off his bike and tried to kidnap a toddler out of a stroller in South Florida.

Citing a police report, The Palm Beach Post said Rene Ivan Raudales, 39, followed a woman, a 13-year-old child and a 2-year-old child strapped into a stroller after they left a Riviera Beach convenience store Wednesday.

The woman managed to get inside her home, along with the two children, but when they re-emerged several minutes later, the woman said Raudales was still there, saying, "Give me the baby." One of the intended victims then struck the suspect in the face with the stroller.

Police said Raudales was arrested after first attempting to flee. He said he had no recollection of the incident.

From wire reports

Your objective source for military news
updated 24/7 from bases
around the world.
Now online at www.stripes.com.

STARS AND STRIPES®

Pats rely on source of untapped talent

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — When it comes to filling out his roster each season, Bill Belichick has always placed a premium on potential.

From late-round draft picks to guys that never heard their name called on draft night, during his 17 years in New England the Patriots coach has developed a knack not just for identifying unheralded players, but cultivating them into key contributors.

The group he has in Houston for Sunday's Super Bowl is no exception.

There are 14 players on the Patriots' 53-man roster that came into the NFL as undrafted free agents, and another 10 who were selected in the fifth round or later.

Among those that were undrafted, eight appeared in 12 games or more during the regular season, including cornerback Malcolm Butler (16 starts), running back LeGarrette Blount (eight starts), receivers Chris Hogan (14 starts) and Danny Amendola, center David Andrews (16 starts), fullback James Develin, special teamer Brandon King and punter Ryan Allen.

Belichick said it's key to find players who have the most room for growth, no matter their background.

"Not everybody is from Alabama and Michigan and USC and those places, so for some of those guys, and even the ones that come from there, it's still a huge jump for them," Belichick said. "It's a big part of a big time in a professional player's career — making it the first year, but then that first to second or first to second to third. That's true for everybody."

While most teams have one or two players on their roster that fit into this category, the Patriots separate themselves by getting a high level of production out of several of them.

Julian Edelman was a college quarterback at Kent State and seventh-round pick in the 2009 draft before he became Tom Brady's go-to guy on third down. Special teamer Nate Ebner, a sixth-round pick in 2012, went from a rugby background to the Patriots' top tackler on special teams. And before Butler became a Super Bowl hero with his late interception against Seattle in 2015, he was undrafted in 2014. He leads the team with four interceptions.

The newest member of the

club is Hogan, who is coming off a franchise-record, nine-reception, 180-yard performance in the AFC championship game.

Hogan played four years of lacrosse at Penn State, and once played opposite Patriots assistant Steve Belichick.

Following a year of football at Monmouth and stints on the practice squads of the New York Giants and Miami Dolphins, he was with Buffalo in 2014 when he caught his first career NFL touchdown pass late during a Bills loss to New England.

When he became a free agent following the 2015 season, the Patriots were the first to contact him.

Hogan said there's a common link among his teammates that have taken unconventional routes to the NFL.

"Those guys are hardworking guys, every single one of them," Hogan said. "We're all alike in that sense. Where we have a real competitive attitude, but we are more than willing to do whatever it takes and whatever is asked of us to win football games."

That willingness to buy in may be even more important than knowing exactly what a player's role will be for Belichick.

Edelman said Belichick initially didn't have any idea how he would utilize him when he was drafted.

But Belichick told him he recognized something innate in the way the 5-foot-10, 200-pounder played the game.

Linebacker and defensive captain Dont'a Hightower said those intangibles are found in players throughout the locker room.

"A lot of people talk about the 'Patriot Way.' There's not a straight definition of it but here you know that we're going to work every day," Hightower said. "Around here you're either getting better or you're getting worse."

While he gives Belichick credit for putting the foundation in place, Hightower said the link is a locker room full of players that "already have that in them" when they arrive.

"They already have that dog in them, maybe it's just not the right way that they're doing it," Hightower said. "I feel like Bill does a great job of that, of getting the right stuff out of guys and saying the right things to get them to work hard."

Former Air Force sergeant gets show on 'Radio Row'

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Bernard Edwards spent the past 16 years as an Air Force surgical operations manager, leading and training more than 300 medics and caregivers and aiding surgeons serving in the military.

The retired technical sergeant is on Radio Row during Super Bowl week getting a chance to host a one-hour talk show on SiriusXM's special channel dedicated to the NFL championship game.

"I am launching a career in public speaking, which encompasses all different forms of media," Edwards said as he prepared for his Wednesday

program on Super Bowl LI Radio, SiriusXM 134.

"In broadcasting there are so many lanes and various forms of social media, TV and radio and podcasts. I am primarily interested in sports when it comes to broadcasting. For public speaking, I like to do keynotes on leadership, diversity, personal development, business.

"I've never been on radio on this level, though I have been on (local) public radio. I also did a channel for veterans and those on active duty and did some various interviews on AFN (Armed Forces Network)."

Edwards, 36, grew up in Europe in a military family and

lettered in football, basketball, and track at Bitburg American High School.

"I was blessed to make the All-Europe teams and even played basketball for a local German team for one season instead of my high school, so that I could experience wrestling for my high school. You couldn't play two sports for the school in one season," he explains.

"While serving in the Air Force, I played defensive back for the Armed Services Football Team out of Walter Reed (Military Medical Center) in Maryland for two years."

He also took up mixed martial arts and trained in Bra-

zilian jiu-jitsu and muay thai, competing in the Army Combatives tournaments. Edwards has traveled to Thailand and Bali to train in MMA.

Edwards has strong interest in broadcasting now that he is out of the armed services. So for an hour Wednesday, FedEx, the USO and SiriusXM are giving him the opportunity to talk sports — to America.

He'll get off to a good start with such guests as Drew Brees, Le'Veon Bell and David Johnson for his debut.

"That's even more awesome," he said. "Just to get to speak to one of those is a great opportunity. To speak to all three, awesome."

Blues fire Hitchcock after 5-8 January

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — The Blues abruptly fired coach Ken Hitchcock on Wednesday, cutting short the veteran's final season in St. Louis and putting coach-in-waiting Mike Yeo in charge of the underperforming team months earlier than planned.

General manager Doug Armstrong announced the change one day after the Blues' fifth loss in six games.

"We don't lose with pride," an emotional Armstrong said at a news conference. "I don't think that we've given our best effort, and, Ken, ultimately he's paying the price with all our failures, starting with mine."

The 65-year-old Hitchcock was in his sixth season as Blues coach. They went 248-124-41 and made the playoffs in each of his five seasons, reaching the Western Conference final last spring. But St. Louis went just 5-8 in January and at 24-21-5 was mired in eighth place in the Western Conference entering the day.

"We've let our group become independent contractors," said Armstrong, who informed Hitchcock of his decision Tuesday night after the loss to the Winnipeg Jets. "It's a losing brand of hockey and Ken's

paying the price for it."

Hitchcock took the fall for the Blues' underachieving season, which had a lot to do with goaltending struggles. Goalies Jake Allen, Carter Hutton and Pheonix Copley have combined for an .887 save percentage, which is the worst team mark in the NHL.

Yeo said Allen is the team's goaltender for now and for the future. He said he doesn't expect to make wholesale personnel changes right away, beginning with the Blues' game Thursday against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

"We all have to dig much, much deeper than what we have," Yeo said. "Effort is going to be something that is talked about day in and day out."

Calling the change a "rebirth," Armstrong fought back tears while calling Hitchcock a future Hall of Famer and his "best friend." Yeo said he felt terrible replacing Hitchcock midseason but that he accepted the responsibility of turning the season around.

Goaltending coach Jim Corsi was also fired, and his duties will be handled by Hall of Fame goaltender Martin Brodeur and Ty Conklin.

Hitchcock has coached 20 NHL seasons with the Dallas Stars, Philadelphia Flyers, Columbus Blue Jackets and Blues. He won the Stanley Cup with Dallas in 1999, and his 781 career regular-season victories are fourth all-time, one shy of Hockey Hall of Fame coach Al Arbour for third. Hitchcock has said he's interested in continuing to coach elsewhere after this season.

Fired by the Minnesota Wild last February, Yeo was added to Hitchcock's staff in the offseason to be his successor beginning in 2017-18.

Hitchcock is the third coach to be fired this season following Gerard Gallant of the Florida Panthers in November and Jack Capuano of the New York Islanders in January. Three of the past eight Stanley Cup champions have made a coaching change midseason.

Hitchcock and Gallant immediately become candidates for the expansion Vegas Golden Knights, who begin play next season but could hire a coach at any time.

"If he wants to coach, teams would be crazy not to call him," Armstrong said of Hitchcock. "Now does he want to coach? I don't know."

Wild top Oilers, extend road point streak

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Many things have improved for the Edmonton Oilers this season. Their record against the Minnesota Wild is not one of them.

Tyler Graovac scored twice and Minnesota defeated Edmonton 5-2 on Tuesday night in a matchup of teams on a tear when the NHL All-Star break arrived.

Jason Zucker, Zach Parise and Chris Stewart also scored for the Wild (33-11-5), who picked up right where they left off coming out of the break. Minnesota won its third game in a row and improved to 22-3-2 since the beginning of December.

"We wanted to start this road trip off on the right foot," Stewart said. "We have four big road games and this was a hot team here. It was a good test and we answered the bell."

The Wild extended their franchise-record road point

streak to 14 games, including five straight wins. They swept the three-game season series and improved to 13-3-1 in their last 17 meetings with the Oilers. Minnesota is 13-1-0 in Edmonton since Oct. 21, 2010.

Darcy Kuemper received a rare start in net for the Wild and earned his sixth win. He stopped 41 shots and even added an assist.

"It's been kind of funny, because I've felt good, especially lately, and sometimes the result just hasn't been there," he said. "It was nice to feel good in there and keep the score down. I just have to keep working, and the guys made it pretty easy on me tonight."

Blue Jackets 6, Rangers 4: Seth Jones scored twice while Alexander Wennberg had a goal and two assists as Columbus beat host New York.

Sharks 3, Blackhawks 1: Tomas Hertl scored the game-winner with 2:03 remaining in regulation after Patrick Mar-

leau got his 499th career goal, helping host San Jose beat Chicago for its seventh win in eight games.

Ducks 5, Avalanche 1: Jakob Silfverberg scored two goals and John Gibson made 28 saves as host Anaheim wrapped up a three-game season sweep of struggling Colorado.

Kings 3, Coyotes 2: Jake Muzzin scored a power-play goal with 1:49 to play as Los Angeles snapped host Arizona's season-best three-game winning streak.

Penguins 4, Predators 2: Patric Hornqvist scored twice and Matt Murray stopped 37 shots, leading host Pittsburgh.

Islanders 3, Capitals 2: Ryan Strome and Johnny Boychuk scored in the third period while Thomas Greiss made 28 saves as host New York beat league-leading Washington.

Hurricanes 5, Flyers 1: Sebastian Aho had three goals and an assist, leading host Carolina to the victory.

Bruins 4, Lightning 3: Zdeno Chara scored the go-ahead goal in the third period and Tuukka Rask made 18 saves as Boston beat host Tampa Bay for its first three-game winning streak since early December.

Stars 6, Maple Leafs 3: Kari Lehtonen made 40 saves as host Dallas scored five times in the first period.

Jets 5, Blues 3: Mark Scheifele and Blake Wheeler each had a goal and two assists, powering host Winnipeg to the win.

Canadiens 5, Sabres 2: Max Pacioretty scored three times and Carey Price made 37 saves, leading host Montreal.

Panthers 6, Senators 5: Jonathan Marchessault scored the go-ahead goal late in the third period to lift host Florida to the victory.

Devils 4, Red Wings 3: Kyle Palmieri scored twice and Cory Schneider made 27 saves, helping New Jersey hold on for the road win.

Leonard's 36 lead Spurs over Thunder

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — The San Antonio Spurs have admired the outstanding season Russell Westbrook is having and the Oklahoma City Thunder point guard didn't disappoint in person.

Neither did the Spurs, who took playing Westbrook as a great challenge.

Kawhi Leonard scored 36 points as San Antonio held Westbrook scoreless in the fourth quarter for a 108-94 victory on Tuesday night.

"You're just fired up just playing against Russ out there," Leonard said. "[Westbrook is] out there competing on every possession. The way he's been playing, he has been ridiculous. So, you definitely want to rise up to the challenge."

It was the Spurs' first game against the Thunder since Oklahoma City bounced them out of the Western Conference playoffs last season following a franchise-record 67 wins in the regular season.

The Thunder look vastly different after losing Kevin Durant to free agency and trading

Serge Ibaka, but Westbrook continued to terrorize San Antonio.

Westbrook had 27 points, 14 assists and six rebounds, but was shut out after scoring 14 points in the third. He shot 0-for-4 in the fourth and finished 7-for-17 from the field.

"I think everybody in this locker room loves those challenges," said Spurs guard Danny Green, who was Westbrook's primary defender.

"Top teams, the best players, that's what we're here for. We grew up watching this game and want to play in these games. To play against the best, beat the best and compete against the best and see where we stand individually and as a group."

LaMarcus Aldridge added 25 points for San Antonio, which improved to 17-6 at home.

Wizards 117, Knicks 101: Bradley Beal went shot for shot with Carmelo Anthony and then some as host Washington blew out New York to move into a tie for first place in the Southeast Division.

Beal scored 28 points, Mar-

kieff Morris had 24 and John Wall added 15 points and 13 assists as the Wizards rolled to their fifth victory in a row. Beal was 12-for-18 from the floor, while Anthony was 10-for-17 for 26 points.

Washington improved to 28-20 and tied the Atlanta Hawks for first place.

Raptors 108, Pelicans 106 (OT): Kyle Lowry had 33 points and 10 assists, and made the tiebreaking jumper with 4.3 seconds left in overtime as host Toronto outlasted New Orleans.

Jonas Valanciunas added 20 points and 12 rebounds, while Lowry matched his season high from three-point range, going 6-for-14.

Jrue Holiday scored 30 points and Anthony Davis had 18 points and 17 rebounds for his 30th double-double as the Pelicans lost their second straight.

Down 106-102 with just over a minute to play in OT, New Orleans tied the game on Davis' floating jump shot with 29 seconds to go.

But Lowry worked the shot clock at the other end, finally

putting the Raptors in front for good on his step-back jumper.

Rockets 105, Kings 83: Ryan Anderson had 25 points and 11 rebounds while Eric Gordon added 17 points as host Houston used a big second-quarter run to beat Sacramento.

Anderson shot 6-for-12 from three-point range and Houston went 14-for-45 from behind the arc as a team.

Trail Blazers 115, Hornets 98: Damian Lillard scored 27 points as host Portland handed Charlotte its fifth straight loss.

Allan Crabbe added 21 points off the bench for the Blazers, who have won four of their last five games.

Lakers 120, Nuggets 116: Nick Young scored 23 points while Lou Williams added 21 as host Los Angeles survived a frantic fourth quarter to snap its seven-game home losing streak against Denver.

Rookie Ivica Zubac scored a career-high 17 points for the Lakers, who snapped their three-game skid despite getting outscored 40-39 in the wild final period.

Creighton trio steps up in win over Butler

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Creighton spent the last two weeks looking for ways replace their star point guard.

Coach Doug McDermott found the perfect solution Tuesday night.

Justin Patton, Marcus Foster and Khyri Thomas all scored 15 points Tuesday night and No. 22 Creighton regained its three-point shooting touch as it ran away from No. 16 Butler, 76-67.

"This is a huge win for us given the events of the past couple of weeks," McDermott said. "We're still trying to find ourselves in some regards, so to come in here and get this victory is a real shot in the arm."

Initially, the Bluejays (20-3, 7-3 Big East) struggled without Maurice Watson Jr., who tore the ACL in his left knee Jan. 16.

But after losing three of their previous four and sliding from the top 10 almost out of the Top 25, Creighton has reverted to its early season form.

It has won two straight and moved into second place in the conference standings after going 13-for-21 from three-point range, a season-high 61.9 percent.

That's not all.

They were 55.8 percent from the field, limited the usually high-scoring Bulldogs to just 40.0 percent and allowed only 2 3s in the second half.

"We were never going to fold, we never doubted ourselves," Patton said after scoring 12 points in the second half. "We just had to learn everything all over again and it looks pretty good right now, if I do say so myself."

Kamar Baldwin scored 14 points and Kelan Martin added 11 for the Bulldogs (18-5, 7-4), not nearly enough to avoid their first back-to-back losses of the season.

No. 7 West Virginia 85, Iowa State 72: Nathan Adrian scored a career-high 23 points and grabbed 11 rebounds as visiting West Virginia (18-4, 6-3 Big 12) overwhelmed Iowa State for its third straight

win.

No. 8 Kentucky 90, Georgia 81 (OT): Malik Monk made two three-pointers and scored eight of 37 points in overtime, and Bam Adebayo and Dominique Hawkins added baskets to help host Kentucky end a two-game losing streak.

The Wildcats appeared headed to their third straight loss until Monk's jumper with 8 seconds remaining in regulation tied the game at 76. Hawkins' desperation heave from midcourt bounced off the rim as the horn sounded.

No. 10 Wisconsin 57, Illinois 43: Ethan Happ scored 14 points to lead visiting Wisconsin (19-3, 8-1 Big Ten).

No. 12 North Carolina 80, Pittsburgh 78: Justin Jackson scored 20 points and host North Carolina (20-4, 8-2 Atlantic Coast Conference) held on.

No. 17 Maryland 77, Ohio St. 71: Justin Jackson had 22 points and 12 rebounds for visiting Maryland.