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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Mattis: No plan to add troops in Mideast

Associated Press

TOKYO — U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Saturday the U.S. cannot afford to ignore destabilizing moves by Iran, but has no plans to respond by increasing American military forces in the Middle East.

Mattis spoke at a joint news conference in Tokyo with his Japanese counterpart, Tomomi Inada. Mattis held a series of high-level meetings in Seoul and Tokyo this week on his first overseas trip as Pentagon chief. He was returning to Washington on Saturday.

Asked about U.S. concern about China's militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea, Mattis was critical of China's moves but said U.S. military action was not appropriate.

On the Iran issue, Trump administration officials have said they were actively considering a "range of options," including economic measures and increased support

for Iran's regional adversaries.

On Friday, the administration ordered sanctions against more than two dozen people and companies from the Persian Gulf to China in retaliation for Iran's recent ballistic missile test. Those targeted by the Treasury Department include Iranian, Lebanese, Emirati and Chinese individuals and firms involved in procuring ballistic missile technology for Iran.

The Trump White House has left unsaid whether military action would be part of intensifying pressure on Iran.

Iran "is the single biggest state sponsor of terrorism in the Middle East," Mattis said Saturday.

"I think it is wise to make certain that Iran recognizes that what it is doing is getting the attention of a lot of people," Mattis continued. "It does no good to ignore it. It does no good to dismiss it. At the same time, I don't see any need to increase the number of forces we have in the Middle East at this time."

During his tenure as commander of U.S. Central Command, which ended in 2013, Mattis was known to have pushed for more aggressive actions against Iran than the Obama White House would tolerate. He has called Iran the biggest threat in the Middle East.

One of the specifics Mattis offered at his Senate confirmation hearing on combating the Islamic State group in Syria was that he believed the campaign to take Raqqa should be accelerated.

The Obama administration had set a limit of about 500 U.S. troops in Syria, a policy derived from then-President Barack Obama's resistance to getting drawn into another war in the Middle East.

U.S. special operations troops have been working in small groups with local Syrian opposition fighters, both Kurdish and Arab, as part of a strategy to gradually retake Raqqa, the Islamic State group's declared capital. The U.S. also has been conducting airstrikes.

Defense chief warns China US will defend Japan

BY ERIK SLAVIN
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis chastised China on Saturday for "shredding the trust" of its neighbors, while reaffirming that the U.S. would defend Japan-administered islands claimed by China if they ever were attacked.

Mattis also praised the current cost-sharing agreement for hosting U.S. bases in Japan as a "model agreement," despite comments by President Donald Trump during his campaign that Japan and South Korea were not paying enough for hosting U.S. troops.

In 2013, China declared an Air Defense Identification Zone over the uninhabited Senkaku islands.

Japanese and Chinese fighter jets regularly overfly the uninhabited territory. Coast guard and other vessels have shadowed one another in nearby waters.

"I made clear our long-standing policy on the Senkaku Islands," Mattis said. "The U.S. will continue to recognize Japanese administration of the islands."

Lu Kang, a spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, on Saturday reasserted Beijing's claim on the islands and called on the U.S. to cease "making wrong remarks" over the issue, according to The Associated Press.

Mattis' comments came after Saturday morning talks with Defense Minister Tomomi Inada regarding the bilateral alliance and security in the Asia-Pacific region.

Mattis arrived in Tokyo on Friday and met with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, reassuring the Japanese leader that the U.S. remained committed to defending Japan.

"We have watched in the South China Sea, as China has shredded the trust of nations in the region, apparently trying to have veto authority over the security and economic conditions of neighboring states," Mattis said. "If we have a dispute, we take then to arbitration — we don't settle them by military means."

Mattis' reference to arbitration recalled an international Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling last year against China on 14 of 15 major claims, and stated that a Chinese map line claiming up to 90 percent

of the South China Sea did not conform to Chinese-ratified international law.

China has maintained its ambiguous claim to most of the waters and territory of the South China Sea.

Mattis ruled out any large-scale military maneuvers in response to China's military fortification and artificial construction atop several South China Sea reefs, all of which are also claimed by its neighbors.

However, Mattis maintained the U.S. Navy's right, and that of all commercial vessels, to transit the sea's waters wherever international law allows.

Mattis and Inada also discussed North Korea's continued development of its ballistic missile and nuclear weapons program.

Mattis' Tokyo visit followed a trip to South Korea, where he warned North Korea that any attack on the U.S. or its allies would be met with an "effective and overwhelming" response.

The defense chiefs also talked about realignment plans for U.S. troops in the region and reducing the burden on the island of Okinawa.

Trump travel ban temporarily blocked

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The government on Saturday suspended enforcement of President Donald Trump's refugee and immigration ban and scurried to appeal a judge's order, plunging the new administration into a crisis that has challenged Trump's authority — and ability to fulfill campaign promises.

The stand-down, a day after a federal judge in Washington state temporarily blocked the ban, marked an extraordinary setback for the White House just one week after Trump acted on his own to suspend America's refugee program and halt immigration to the U.S. from seven Muslim-majority countries that the U.S. says raise terrorism concerns.

As the White House worked

to reinstate the ban, Trump mocked U.S. District Judge James Robart, appointed by President George W. Bush, as a "so-called judge" whose "ridiculous" ruling "will be overturned."

Trump's direct attack recalled his diatribes during the campaign against a federal judge of Mexican heritage who was overseeing a Trump University case. Justice Department lawyers could be called upon to answer for his words as the travel ban case reaches the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The order had caused unending confusion for many foreigners trying to reach the United States, prompted protests across the country and led to a series of court challenges.

The State Department on

Friday said as many as 60,000 foreigners from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia or Yemen had their visas canceled. The department reversed course Saturday, saying they could travel to the U.S. if they had a valid visa.

The Homeland Security Department no longer was directing airlines to prevent visa-holders affected by Trump's order from boarding U.S.-bound planes. The agency said it had "suspended any and all actions" related to putting in place Trump's order, which the White House argued was "intended to protect the homeland."

The Justice Department was expected to ask the 9th Circuit to set aside Robert's ruling so the ban could go back into effect.

Trump already made clear

what he thought of Robert's action.

"The opinion of this so-called judge, which essentially takes law-enforcement away from our country, is ridiculous and will be overturned," Trump tweeted. "When a country is no longer able to say who can and who cannot come in & out, especially for reasons of safety & security — big trouble!"

That rhetoric could put government lawyers defending Trump's order in a tough spot if a federal appeals court were to ask them about it.

"Either they have to defend the statements that Judge Robart is a 'so-called judge,' which you can't do, or they have to distance themselves from the president, who is their boss," said University of Pittsburgh law professor Arthur Hellman.

President attacks curbs on big banks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has launched his long-promised attack on banking rules that were rushed into law after the nation's economic crisis, signing new orders after meeting with business and investment chiefs and pledging further action to free big banks from restrictions. Wall Street cheered him on, but Trump risks disillusioning his working-class voters.

On Friday he directed his Treasury secretary to review the devilishly complex 2010 Dodd-Frank financial oversight law, which was signed by President Barack Obama to overhaul regulations after the financial and housing crisis of the past decade. It aimed to restrain banks from misdeeds that many blamed for the crisis.

The new president also signed a memorandum instructing the Labor Department to delay an Obama-era rule that requires financial professionals who charge commissions to put their clients' best interests first when giving advice on retirement investments.

While the order on Dodd-Frank, named after its Democratic sponsors, won't have an immediate impact, Trump's intent is clear. The law has been a disaster in restricting banks' activities, he said earlier

in the week. "We're going to be doing a big number on Dodd-Frank."

During a meeting with business leaders, including JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon, on Friday, he said, "Frankly I have so many people, friends of mine that have nice businesses that can't borrow money. They just can't get any money because the banks just won't let 'em borrow because of the rules and regulations of Dodd-Frank."

Those regulations unnecessarily cramp the U.S. economy and job creation, he declared. But many Democrats see it differently, including Sen. Elizabeth Warren, who was behind the formation of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, formed as part of the Dodd-Frank law.

"Donald Trump talked a big game about Wall Street during his campaign — but as president, we're finding out whose side he's really on," Warren said in a statement. "The Wall Street bankers and lobbyists whose greed and recklessness nearly destroyed this country may be toasting each other with champagne, but the American people have not forgotten the 2008 financial crisis — and they will not forget what happened today."

The crisis touched off the worst recession since the 1930s Great Depression, wiping out \$11 trillion in U.S. household wealth and leaving about 8 million Americans jobless.

GOP softens tone on Obama's health law

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans are increasingly talking about repairing President Barack Obama's health care overhaul, a softening of tone that comes as their drive to fulfill a keystone campaign promise encounters disunity, drooping momentum and uneasy voters.

GOP lawmakers insist they haven't abandoned their goal of repeal, though they face lingering disputes about whether that vote should come before, after or simultaneously with a replacement effort.

Republicans triumphantly shoved a budget through Congress three weeks ago that gave committees until Jan. 27 to write bills dismantling the law and substituting a Republican plan. Everyone knew that deadline meant little, but now leaders are talking about moving initial legislation by early spring.

And as the party struggles to translate its longtime political mantra into legislation that can pass Congress, some Republicans have started using gentler language.

"It's repairing the damage Obamacare has caused. It's more accurate" than repeal and replace, said Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., who chairs the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

Trump's Army secretary pick withdraws over business ties

Bloomberg

Vincent Viola, the billionaire founder of trading firm Virtu Financial Inc., has withdrawn his nomination to be Secretary of the Army after distancing himself from his business ties proved too difficult, according to two officials in the Trump administration and a third person familiar with Viola's decision.

Viola informed President Donald Trump on Friday that he will be unable to accept the nomination because separating from the organizations that he has built during the past 35

years has proven insurmountable, said two of the people familiar with Viola's decision, who asked not to be named.

The full extent of Viola's financial holdings and ownership stakes in other companies would've been detailed in ethics and financial disclosure forms to be filed as the nomination process unfolded. Without them, it's difficult to know what business arrangements tripped him up. This is the first Trump nominee to withdraw from consideration.

Viola, the son of a truck driver and a homemaker, is a

West Point graduate and former Army infantry officer who served in the 101st Airborne Division. Viola's net worth is estimated at \$2.5 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. He founded Virtu Financial in 2008 and took the electronic market-making firm public in 2015.

Viola served as chairman of the New York Mercantile Exchange from 2001 to 2004, after starting his career on the Nymex trading floor and working his way up through the organization. He's also the owner of the NHL's Florida Panthers.

Deal shaves \$728M from F-35 program

The Washington Post

The Pentagon and Lockheed Martin announced on Friday a contract deal for the next batch of 90 F-35 Joint Strike Fighter jets that shaves \$728 million off the total cost of the program and brings the per-plane cost of the stealth plane below \$95 million for the first time.

The contract is "a good and fair deal for the taxpayers, the U.S. Government, allies, and Industry," F-35 Program Executive Officer Lt. Gen. Chris Bogdan said in a statement.

The announcement brings an end to months of unusually public negotiations between the Trump administration and Lockheed Martin, which manufactures the plane.

In late December, the president took to Twitter to criticize the program for being too expensive. He even went so far as to ask one of Lockheed's competitors, Boeing, to "price out a comparable F-18 Super Hornet," as an alternative to the F-35.

The unit cost of the plane has been on a long, downward trend as Lockheed ramps up its volume of production. The company has been saying for years that it expects the cost of the plane to fall to \$85 million per plane during the next few years, and the Air Force's budget for 2017 already reflects cost reductions of about \$10 million per plane.

Bogdan told reporters on Dec. 19 — before the president tweeted about the program and met publicly with defense companies — that the F-35's cost per plane should fall "somewhere on the order of 6 to 7 percent per airplane" for the next batch of planes.

The deal announced Friday translates to a 7.3 percent reduction in the per-plane cost of the most common F-35 variant. When the overall costs of the program are factored in the reduction is closer to 8 percent.

Navy bids goodbye to Enterprise

The (Norfolk, Va.) Virginian-Pilot

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. — The final watch already was secured when the young sailor approached the older one in the frigid hangar bay of the now-ex-USS Enterprise on Friday morning.

The Navy decommissioned the Enterprise on Friday during a ceremony at Newport News Shipbuilding, where the world's first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier was built.

"Thanks for keeping her operating," the older man said. "You've done a great job."

"Thanks for getting her going and, you know, keeping her running for all that time you were here," the younger sailor responded.

Nearly 50 years may have separated the men's service aboard the "Big E," but those decades that the Enterprise served set the standard for carriers, sailors and shipbuilders who followed.

"Her sea stories become our sea stories and her history is our history," Rear Adm. Bruce Lindsey, commander of Naval Air Force Atlantic, said.

The Enterprise — CVN 65 — was the eighth Navy ship to carry that name. It was the world's first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. Its keel was laid Feb. 4, 1958 at Newport News Shipbuilding. Commissioned in November 1961, it responded to the Cuban missile crisis a year later.

It has served in nearly every conflict since and was the first to launch strikes against targets in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom after the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

"It has always made records," James Voorhies said Friday. He was assigned aboard the Enterprise from 1983 to 1987 and now serves as president of its association. "Even today, it made a record. It was the very first nuclear aircraft car-

rier to be decommissioned."

As many as 250,000 sailors had served aboard the Enterprise.

Ray Godfrey, that older sailor who was approached by the younger one Friday, was among the Enterprise's first crew, known as a plank owner. Now 77, Godfrey was a 21-year-old machinist's mate when he stepped aboard in 1961 to work in the nuclear spaces. He served until 1966.

Godfrey returned in 2012 for the ship's last homecoming and this week helped pass out commemorative coins to its remaining crew from the Navy Historical Foundation.

"I was so proud of the Enterprise," Godfrey said, adding he "realized the importance of what it did."

The Enterprise's age showed Friday as it sat in dry dock. Chunks of its gray paint had peeled away from its hull. But its legacy will live on not only through sea stories and American military milestones, but in a physical presence.

A piece of the Enterprise's steel will be used in the keel of America's next USS Enterprise, CVN 80, the third in the USS Gerald R. Ford class of aircraft carriers also under construction at Newport News Shipbuilding, said Matthew Mulherin, the shipbuilder's president.

So while Friday's ceremony took on the somber tones of a funeral, there was also a bittersweet undercurrent that hinted at things to come.

Capt. Todd Beltz, commander of the Enterprise, said current plans call for the ship to end up at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Washington. Beltz said while he'd felt a range of emotions Friday, the biggest one was pride.

"Sailors who have all served on this ship, they walk away with pride, and that's really something special that this ship has generated," Beltz said.

UN drops sanctions on Afghan ex-warlord

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The U.N. Security Council has removed Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former Afghan warlord who fought U.S. troops after the 2001 invasion, from its sanctions list in a move aimed at bringing the Taliban and other insurgent groups to the negotiating table.

A statement posted Friday by the Security Council said Hekmatyar, leader of Islamist organization Hezb-e-Islami, would no longer have his assets frozen or be subject to a travel ban or arms embargo.

The lifting of the sanctions followed a request by the Afghan government, which signed a peace deal in September with Hekmatyar that gives him and his followers immunity for past actions and allows them to return to Kabul and receive full political rights.

Supporters of the deal hope it will pave the way for the Taliban and other militant groups to join a peace process, which they say is the only realistic solution to the country's 15-year war.

"This is very good for peace in Afghanistan," Amin Karim, Hekmatyar's chief negotiator, told Stars and Stripes when asked on Saturday about the lifting of sanctions. "It shows other groups, who insist on fighting, that the Afghan government is committed to the agreement."

Karim said he and his colleagues were in constant contact with the Taliban, who are watching the situation "very, very closely."

"They are waiting to see what happens when Hekmatyar returns to Kabul in two or three weeks — maximum one month," he said. "It's difficult to say if they'll be persuaded to come to the negotiating table soon, but we are working on that very hard."

Hekmatyar, who is believed to be living in the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan, is so far the only insurgent leader to sign a peace agreement with the Afghan government.

Hezb-e-Islami has been blamed for serious human rights abuses and the indiscriminate shelling of Kabul during the civil war in the 1990s, which killed thousands. The group's last major attack was a car bombing three years ago that killed six American

soldiers and nine Afghan civilians.

Hekmatyar is seen as a potential rival to President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. Experts say his return to the Afghan capital will likely provide an additional challenge to the country's weak national unity government, which has struggled to combat a resurgent Taliban.

As militants stepped up attacks last year, the government lost 15 percent of the territory it controls, maintaining rule in just 60 percent of the country, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction said in its latest report on Tuesday.

Some worry that allowing Hekmatyar's return could further embolden the Taliban, making the militants' participation in peace talks less likely.

"All political parties in Afghanistan have rivalries, and when Hekmatyar comes to Kabul it will definitely boost those rivalries," said Faraidon Momand, a member of parliament from Nangarhar province. "But Afghans hope that the political leaders will join hands and work for peace. Afghanistan needs it."

DOD releases, quickly pulls video seized in Yemen raid

BY COREY DICKSTEIN AND TARA COPP

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — U.S. Central Command on Friday released a short video clip it said was representative of the intelligence gathered by Navy SEALs during a deadly raid of an al-Qaida compound in Yemen. Within two hours of releasing the video, the Pentagon pulled it from its website.

The problem was the video is nearly a decade old and likely has long been circulated in jihadi forums on the internet. After Central Command uploaded the video to DVIDs, the Pentagon's media distribution website, it received feedback from the public that the video was old, said Air Force Col. John Thomas, a Central Command spokesman.

Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East, immediately took it down "because we didn't want to pass off something that was old as new," he said.

However, the footage was obtained during the Yemen raid, which yielded useful intelligence, said Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman.

"It does not matter when the video was made," he said. "That they had it is still illustrative of who they are and what their intentions are."

The rest of the material seized in the raid will remain classified, officials said.

In its initial statement Friday, Central Command said the video clips were pulled from a computer seized by commandos during the Jan. 29 raid on al-Qaida's Yemen affiliate in the country's rural southwestern Bayda province. The raid left Senior Chief Petty Officer William "Ryan" Owens, 36, a member of the Navy's elite SEAL Team 6, and likely several civilians dead.

The video clips, which included English subtitles and were entitled "Courses for Destroying the Cross," showed "a small sample of the sort of intelligence information that was obtained in the site exploitation mission against an al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula staging area, propaganda center, and logistics hub for AQAP's terrorist network this past weekend," the Central Command statement read.

In the clips, a man speaking Arabic is clad in a white, knee-length lab coat with his face hidden by a black mask. The man provides instructions on how to build homemade explosives. The man mixes what appear to be chemicals in beakers before eventually placing a match to the concoction, causing a small explosion.

"Now we start with a practical training on how to destroy the cross with explosives," the man says in Arabic, according to the subtitles on the video. "We would like as many people to graduate with this knowledge and expertise as possible."

Al-Qaida says Trump ignited 'flame of jihad' with raid

IRBIL, Iraq — President Trump is "foolish" and has ignited the "flame of jihad" with a raid in Yemen in which civilians were killed, al-Qaida said Friday in its first official comments on the new U.S. administration.

That the raid came only days after Trump's vow to eradicate Islamist terrorism in his inauguration speech makes it "clear for us that the threat was not directed to the Islamic militants only, but to all the Muslims, men, women and even children," al-Qaida's al-Nafeer bulletin said, accusing the Trump administration of intentionally killing women and children.

U.S. Central Command, or Centcom, has not specified how many civilians were killed in the raid Saturday, in which a Navy SEAL also died.

Civilian casualties also provide easy fodder for extremist propaganda, and Trump's comments indicating that he will heavily bomb Islamic State militants have caused nervousness for some in the region.

From The Washington Post

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Casino offering slots, table games, cemetery

NY TYRE — New York state's newest casino has 2,000 slot machines, 77 table games, 12 poker tables, a food court, a concert venue — and a cemetery.

The Las Vegas-style del Lago Resort and Casino opened Wednesday in the Cayuga County town of Tyre. The developer, Rochester-based Wilmore, had to build the casino's parking lot around an old family cemetery containing the graves of people who farmed the surrounding land generations ago.

People who live nearby told WSTM-TV in Syracuse that the descendants of those buried in the small cemetery didn't want them disturbed during construction.

Town officials said the casino plans to build a fence around the cemetery and make it accessible to the families whose loved ones are buried there.

Police say man killed snake after argument

NJ LODI — Police say a snake was killed soon after it was purchased at a pet store in New Jersey.

Police told NorthJersey.com a man killed the albino corn snake after arguing with his son outside of NJ Exotic Pets in Lodi on Saturday.

The men left the dead snake outside of the store. Employees brought the snake into the store and placed its remains in a refrigerator.

Police have not released the names of the men pending the investigation.

State law requires clerk to return flag

SC YORK — A clerk of court who said he was

removing a Confederate flag from a renovated courthouse because everyone should feel they are being treated fairly now says he will have to return the flag because of a state law.

York County Clerk of Court David Hamilton said he was told Friday by state officials he would be violating the state's Heritage Act, which protects Confederate and other historical monuments, symbols and names.

The Heritage Act was passed in 2000 and requires legislative approval to move or take down historical monuments. One of the few times lawmakers have given permission to remove a Confederate symbol was to permanently take the rebel flag that flew in front of the Statehouse after a self-avowed racist killed nine black worshippers at a Charleston church in 2015.

Power surge fries appliances, siding

PA BROOKVILLE — The 911 calls started pouring in just after noon. The electrical meter is on fire. The house siding is burning. My power strip is smoking. The computer is fried. The carpeting is singed. Our light bulb exploded.

A power company says a failed power line component was to blame for an electrical surge Jan. 20 in Brookville, population 4,000. When it was over, 500 to 1,000 residents were affected, said Tracy Zents, the director of Jefferson County's Department of Emergency Services.

"I've been doing this a little over 30 years, and this is definitely a first for me," Zents said. "We were fortunate that nobody was hurt."

The volume of calls quickly overwhelmed the local volunteer fire department 70 miles

northeast of Pittsburgh, which had to call three other departments for help, Zents said.

Employees lose gender transition coverage

AR FAYETTEVILLE — Gender transition treatments will no longer be covered by University of Arkansas System employee insurance plans.

The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette reported the school system's self-funded insurance plans for employees will cover the services until March 6.

A judge in December ordered a halt to federal Health and Human Services enforcement of regulations addressing gender identity and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Transgender advocates are questioning the reasoning for suspending coverage after that date. The school system cited an injunction in an ongoing federal district court case in Texas.

Descendants of black Muslim leader charged

MD LA PLATA — Police in southern Maryland say a daughter and granddaughter of black Muslim leader Malcolm X are charged with stealing a rental truck that was found carrying seven pit bulls in what police describe as inhumane conditions.

Charles County Sheriff's Office spokeswoman Janelle Love said Friday that Malikah Shabazz, 51, and her daughter Bettih Shabazz, 19, were arrested Wednesday night in a Wal-Mart parking lot in La Plata.

Malikah also faces seven charges of animal cruelty. Love said the dogs were in stacked crates, and some were injured.

She said the truck was reported stolen earlier Wednesday to Vermont State Police.

Lawsuit over quality of prison food dismissed

MI GRAND RAPIDS — A judge says Michigan prison food that might not be tasty isn't enough to carry a lawsuit.

Federal Judge Gordon Quist last month dismissed a lawsuit by a prisoner who said his rights were violated by spoiled ground beef, a bruised orange, cold noodles and warm milk back in 2013.

Christopher Velthuysen said he was sick in 2014 after eating watered-down oatmeal, leftovers and cake without frosting. He sued the company that provides food to prisons.

The judge says "isolated incidents" are insufficient to state a legal claim over prison food. The 46-year-old Velthuysen is locked up for a second-degree murder conviction in Wayne County.

Casino serves gambler 27 drinks in 9 hours

PA MOUNT POCONO — The Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board fined a casino \$25,000 for serving a gambler 27 drinks in a nine-hour period.

Mount Airy Casino Resort said it won't comment on the fine. The gambling board said the fine was levied as part of a consent agreement, meaning the casino isn't contesting the penalty.

The board said the customer was playing table-top slot machines at a casino bar when he was served. The board found the customer was showing signs of intoxication after nine drinks, meaning the bartender

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STARS AND STRIPES®

New England's 'D' has tough task ahead

Associated Press

Joe Theismann knows how it feels to bring the NFL's most prolific offense into the Super Bowl and leave with a loss.

The former Washington Redskins quarterback also knows how difficult it can be to deal with a defense designed by Bill Belichick.

So Theismann has a couple of thoughts about what could happen in the Super Bowl on Sunday, when Belichick's New England Patriots, who allowed the fewest points during the regular season (15.6 per game), face QB Matt Ryan, wideout Julio Jones and the rest of the Atlanta Falcons, who scored the most points (an average of 33.8).

This is the 51st Super Bowl, and the seventh featuring the No. 1 offense against the No. 1 defense; the "D" is 5-1 in the previous such matchups.

Also, the past seven times a season's top "O" was in the Super Bowl, it went 2-5, while the past seven times a top "D" vied for the Lombardi Trophy, it went 5-2.

Why is that?

"On offense, just generally speaking, there are more things that can go wrong than can on the defensive side of the ball," Theismann said in a telephone interview.

He won the Super Bowl in 1983 and lost it the following year after having directed Washington to a then-record 541 points in the regular season.

One of his Redskins' NFC East rivals back then was the New York Giants, where Belichick was the defensive coordinator during the 1985-90 seasons.

"A lot of offenses go through one or two players, and so a defense — and Bill is great at this — will focus on a particular

player or a particular concept and that's where they will make sure to stop the opponent," Theismann said.

"You can't really do the same thing on offense and say, 'Who do we want to go after?' It's tough to pick out one person. You're not going to isolate on a particular linebacker or a corner. There is just less susceptibility to that on defense."

In New England's 36-17 victory over Pittsburgh in the AFC title game last weekend, for example, the Patriots made sure to limit what Steelers star receiver Antonio Brown did.

His catches amounted to only 77 yards, with no TDs.

"Bill basically uses common sense: 'If you have one player who's really good, let's see how you play without him.' They weren't going to allow Antonio Brown to make plays. They said, 'Look, we're going to bump him at the line, put somebody over the top, and you're going to have to make plays with the other nine players.' If a defense can limit 20-25 percent of an offense by taking one individual away from it, the pendulum swings to the defensive side," Theismann said.

"In this Super Bowl," he added, "Julio Jones is going to get the bulk of the attention."

Make no mistake: This is a versatile Falcons offense overseen by coordinator Kyle Shanahan, who is expected to be hired to run the San Francisco 49ers after this season ends and whose father Mike was the head coach of two Super Bowl champions with the Denver Broncos.

Ryan spread out his 38 TD passes to a league-record 13 receivers. Jones is the best of the bunch, but Mohamed Sanu,

Taylor Gabriel and running backs Devonta Freeman (who ran for more than 1,000 yards and caught 54 passes) and Tevin Coleman (more than 500 yards rushing, more than 400 receiving) need to be accounted for, too.

"There's not one thing that you can point out and say, 'Stop Julio Jones. Stop Sanu. Stop the running game,'" Patriots linebacker Dont'a Hightower said.

Or as Belichick put it: "Every guy that gets the ball can score a touchdown from 80 yards away or more."

The Falcons (13-5) scored at least 30 points in 13 of their 18 games this season, including the playoffs, reaching 40 a half-dozen times. During their current six-game winning streak, they never scored fewer than 33.

"We know that they're the cream of the crop, offensively," Patriots cornerback Logan Ryan said. "And for us, we feel like we're that, defensively."

The Patriots (16-2) allowed more than 25 points only once in their 18 games, a 31-24 loss to Seattle in November. Since then, they've won nine games in a row, never trailing at any moment in their past seven.

"It's the best defense that we've seen in the NFL this year. The numbers show it, and watch the film and you see exactly why their numbers are the way they are," Shanahan said.

"They have very good players all around, players that are interchangeable, that can be pass rushers, that can be linebackers, that can be corners, that can be safeties. And they have an extremely good scheme."

Hall of Fame candidates humbly await word

Associated Press

HOUSTON — It seems that one word is commonly used by candidates for the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

LaDainian Tomlinson says it. So do Jason Taylor and Tony Boselli.

Throw in the rest of the 18 finalists, too.

Humble.

"I've never really put myself in their league," says defensive end Jason Taylor, who starred with the Dolphins and made the NFL's All-Decade Team of the 2000s. "It's really, really cool to be mentioned with those

guys. It humbles you."

Taylor, who now hosts a program on SiriusXM's NFL Radio, spent portions of his 15 pro seasons being humbled by Tomlinson. So were most defenders in the league as the Chargers and Jets standout won an MVP award, two rushing titles, and set a record with 31 touchdowns and 186 points in 2006 on his way to the same all-decade squad.

"I'm lost for words when I think about the Hall of Fame," Tomlinson said. "I'm a small-town kid and no one that I ever knew went to the Hall of

Fame. ... And so just thinking about that, thinking about a little kid from a small country town possibly, you know, going to the Hall of Fame, it chokes me up."

Taylor, Tomlinson and former Eagles safety Brian Dawkins — yes, also a member of that all-decade team — are first-year eligibles.

Also on the ballot that a panel of 46 media members and two former players already in the hall, James Lofton and Dan Fouts, will consider are: quarterback Kurt Warner; running back Terrell Davis;

receivers Isaac Bruce and Terrell Owens; tackles Joe Jacoby and Tony Boselli; center Kevin Mawae; guard Alan Faneca; kicker Morten Andersen; cornerback Ty Law; and safety John Lynch.

Also on the ballot are former Cardinals and Chargers coach Don Coryell, an offensive mastermind; senior candidate Kenny Easley, one of the hardest-hitting and versatile safeties the NFL has seen; and contributors Paul Tagliabue, the former league commissioner, and Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones.

Wave after wave of lawsuits rock Baylor

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — The allegations against Baylor, its football program and former coach Art Briles, get uglier with each new lawsuit and legal filing.

Among the most recent: More than 50 acts of rape by dozens of football players in four years. Briles asking why an alleged rape victim would hang out with “bad dudes” (his own players). And coaches encouraging female students in a hostess group to have sex with recruits.

And they keep rolling in, deepening the public disgust and mistrust with the nation’s largest Baptist university as it tries to fight lawsuits, settle others and fend off withering criticism from all sides as to how things spun so out of control with a sexual assault scandal that included multiple accusations against the football program.

“It seems relentless,” said Fred Norton Jr., president of the Baylor Line Foundation, the school’s alumni organization. “It’s all unsettling. Nobody knows what’s going to be the next shoe to drop. It wears us all out to have to keep defending what Baylor really is, the true Baylor we know.”

Baylor faces at least six federal and state lawsuits as well as a federal civil rights investigation into claims the school and football program, which Briles built into a Big 12 champion from 2008-2016, ignored, mishandled or tried to cover up reports of sexual or physical abuse and other criminal misdeeds across campus for years.

One court filing last week alleges more than 50 acts of rape by more than 30 football players over a four-year period, and that Baylor football promoted a culture of “sex, drugs and violence.”

And after months of refusing

to release details from its own investigation, Baylor on Thursday revealed text messages between Briles, assistant coaches and staff members that appear to show them trying to shield players from police and university discipline.

In one instance, when shown a list of names of players a woman said attacked her, Briles allegedly responded, “Those are some bad dudes. Why was she around those guys?”

To date, only two of Briles’ former players have been tried and convicted of sexual assault, and another is currently charged in a 2016 assault. But the university’s own investigation that led to Briles’ firing last May determined his program acted “above the rules” and the school mishandled assault complaints across campus for years.

The civil lawsuits started piling up as alleged victims came forward with claims of assault

and investigative misconduct or incompetence by the school.

And it wasn’t just victims suing the school. Two of Baylor’s former in-house investigators have sued or filed complaints with federal officials alleging Baylor mishandled assault investigations and retaliated against them for doing their jobs. Even Briles sued, alleging Baylor regents and officials had libeled and defamed him in comments to investigators and the media.

Briles this week dropped that case, but it was a similar lawsuit by Collin Shillinglaw, one of Briles’ top assistants, that finally prompted Baylor regents to reveal some of the details uncovered by the school’s 2016 investigation led by the Philadelphia law firm Pepper Hamilton.

The regents’ court filing Thursday said they had no choice but to reveal some of the details of what they found.

US men’s soccer team gets first victory under Arena

Associated Press

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — Jordan Morris ended the U.S. scoring drought, gave Bruce Arena his first national team win in more than a decade and put himself in a position to make the roster for games that count.

Morris scored in the 59th minute, and the United States beat Jamaica 1-0 in an exhibition Friday night to give Arena the first win of his second stint as national team coach.

“Jordan Morris has made a statement,” said Arena, who earned his first victory as the U.S. coach since an exhibition triumph over Latvia in May 2006.

Benny Feilhaber took a 20-yard pass from Dax McCarty and played the ball to Morris with a back-heel pass. Morris returned the ball to Feilhaber, who was making his first start in five years.

Feilhaber dribbled into the

penalty area and pushed the ball back to Morris. The 22-year-old forward, last season’s Major League Soccer Rookie of the Year, took a touch and beat goalkeeper Ryan Thompson inside the near post with a right-footed shot from 8 yards. It was the second international goal for Morris, who also scored against Mexico in an April 2015 exhibition, and ended a 280-minute U.S. scoreless streak.

“We created a lot of chances, and it was good to finally get one,” Morris said. “It kind of rewarded us for all the hard work we did this camp.”

After starting 0-2 in the final round of World Cup qualifying in North and Central America and the Caribbean, the U.S. resumes the hexagonal March 24 against Honduras in San Jose, California, then plays four days later at Panama.

The next match will be near Stanford, where Morris impressed national team staff when the U.S. trained against

Cardinal players ahead of the 2014 World Cup.

“He’s clearly a likely candidate for our camp in March,” Arena said.

Before a crowd of 17,903 at Finley Stadium and playing a rare match on artificial turf, the Americans got their second straight shutout under Arena, who said a priority would be tightening the U.S. defense. A 2-1 home loss to Mexico and a 4-0 rout at Costa Rica caused the U.S. Soccer Federation to fire Jurgen Klinsmann, who had been in charge since 2011, and bring back Arena, the national team’s coach from 1998-2006.

Arena changed nine starters from his return match, a 0-0 tie against Serbia last weekend.

Goalkeepers Luis Robles and David Bingham split halves and combined on the shutout. Central defender Walker Zimmerman made his international debut, and three players who made their debuts last weekend

got their first starts: left back Jorge Villafana and midfielders Chris Pontius and Sebastian Lletget.

“All you can ask for as a player is the opportunity,” Zimmerman said. “I think the mentality of everyone in this group is it’s a new coaching staff. Everyone’s got a fresh slate.”

Arena praised the 23-year-old Zimmerman, who is entering his fifth season with Dallas.

“As the last couple of weeks went on, Walker got better and better every day,” he said. “I thought tonight he had a terrific game.”

Forward Jozy Altidore didn’t play at all Friday. Arena said the 27-year-old is dealing with a “little bit of a nagging injury” without specifying the nature of the ailment.

“He could have played but best not to have that linger on and have him ready for his season with Toronto,” Arena said.

Westbrook leads Thunder past Grizzlies

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Russell Westbrook scored 19 of his 38 points in the fourth quarter to lead the Oklahoma City Thunder past the Memphis Grizzlies 114-102 on Friday night.

Westbrook also had 13 rebounds and 12 assists. It was his 25th triple-double this season and the 62nd of his career. His season total is the most in the NBA since Wilt Chamberlain had 31 during the 1967-68 season.

Steven Adams had 16 points and 13 rebounds, Joffrey Lauvergne scored a season-high 16 and Anthony Morrow added 15 points for the Thunder, who snapped a three-game losing streak.

Celtics 113, Lakers 107: Isaiah Thomas scored 17 of his 38 points in the fourth quarter as host Boston beat Los Angeles for its sixth consecutive victory.

Boston and Los Angeles began the night with 3,252 wins, tied for the most in NBA history. Before their loss, the Lakers held at least a share of the league's victories mark since 2001.

Mavericks 108, Trail Blazers 104: Yogi Ferrell scored 32 points to help visiting Dallas beat Portland.

After a 4-17 start to the season, the Mavericks have won four straight and eight of 11 to move within 2½ games of Denver for the final playoff spot in the Western Conference.

Suns 105, Kings 103: Devin

Booker scored 33 points and hit the game-winning jumper at the buzzer to give Phoenix a victory over host Sacramento.

DeMarcus Cousins had a triple-double with 22 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists for the Kings. Sacramento has lost three straight games.

Magic 102, Raptors 94: Serge Ibaka had 20 points and 12 rebounds, leading host Orlando to the victory.

Toronto (30-21) played without star guard DeMar DeRozan, who was sidelined by a right ankle injury. Jonas Valanciunas, Norman Power and Kyle Lowry each had 18 points for the Raptors, who have lost eight of 10.

Rockets 121, Bulls 117 (OT): James Harden had 42 points, 12 rebounds and nine

assists to rally Houston to the overtime win.

Harden hit a step-back jumper over Paul Zipser with 36.1 seconds remaining in the extra period and was fouled. He made the free throw to give the Rockets a two-point lead they never relinquished.

Nuggets 121, Bucks 117: Nikola Jokic returned to the lineup with his first career triple-double, powering host Denver to the win.

Pacers 106, Nets 97: Paul George and Jeff Teague each scored 24 points, helping visiting Indiana to its fifth consecutive win.

Pistons 116, Timberwolves 108: Marcus Morris scored a career-high 36 points as Detroit held on for the victory at home.

Kessel celebrates 800th game with overtime winner

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Phil Kessel celebrated the 800th game of his career in style, scoring twice, including the winner 3:15 into overtime to lead the Pittsburgh Penguins to a 4-3 victory over the suddenly struggling Columbus Blue Jackets on Friday night.

Nick Bonino added his eighth for Pittsburgh and Patric Hornqvist scored his fifth goal in his last five games for the Penguins. Matt Murray stopped 28 shots as Pittsburgh drew within two points of second-place Columbus in the tight Metropolitan Division race.

Cam Atkinson capped a third-period rally with his 25th of the season for Columbus. Brandon Dubinsky and Alexander Wennberg also scored for the Blue Jackets. Sergei Bobrovsky finished with 29 saves for Columbus, which is just 7-7-1 since going unbeaten (14-0-0) in December.

Flames 4, Devils 3 (OT): Defenseman TJ Brodie had four assists, the last on Mikael Backlund's winning goal at 1:13 of overtime, and visiting

Calgary sent New Jersey to its seventh straight loss at home.

Sean Monahan, Kris Versteeg and Matt Stajan also scored as the Flames won their third straight game. Brian Elliott made 26 saves.

Adam Henrique, Pavel Zacha and Kyle Palmieri tallied for New Jersey, which battled back from an early 2-0 deficit to take the lead. Cory Schneider had 34 saves.

The Flames cycled the puck in the Devils' end on the winning goal before Brodie found Backlund low in the left circle for a shot under the cross bar. It was not immediately clear whether the puck went into the net, but the officials soon signaled a goal.

Red Wings 5, Islanders 4: Danny DeKeyser scored with 27.9 remaining in regulation, lifting host Detroit over the New York.

DeKeyser's shot from the left side of the left circle caromed off two Islanders defensemen, Nick Leddy and Thomas Hickey, and into the net.

Detroit had a one-goal lead for 20 minutes before Jason Chimera made it 4-all with

2:26 left in the third period. Red Wings coach Jeff Blashill challenged that Chimera was offside, but the goal that he chipped in between the post and Petr Mrazek stood off Darren Helm's turnover.

The Red Wings avoided losing a season-high sixth straight game.

Henrik Zetterberg had a go-ahead goal late in the second period, scored 23 seconds after John Tavares pulled the Islanders into a 3-all tie. Helm and Anthony Mantha had goals 2:20 apart earlier in the period to put Detroit ahead after it trailed 2-1 following the first.

Hurricanes 2, Oilers 1: Sebastian Aho scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period, lifting host Carolina past Edmonton.

Jordan Staal had a goal in the first period for Carolina, which split the season series. Edmonton won the other meeting, 3-2 at home on Oct. 18.

Connor McDavid scored the Oilers' only goal, tying the game in the second period.

Carolina, 17-6-1 at home, improved to 8-0-0 this season

when allowing just one goal.

Edmonton defenseman Matt Benning left at 14:36 of the second after being bloodied by a hard check from Viktor Stalberg behind the Oilers' goal and did not return.

Panthers 2, Ducks 1: Jonathan Huberdeau scored his first goal of the season to lift host Florida over Anaheim.

Reilly Smith also scored for the Panthers, and Aleksander Barkov had an assist in his return to the lineup after missing 15 games due to injury. James Reimer stopped 22 shots.

Huberdeau's goal during 4-on-4 play with 4:58 left in the second period broke a 1-all tie. Barkov passed from the left circle across to Huberdeau in the slot and he shot the puck high into the net.

Hampus Lindholm scored for Anaheim, and John Gibson made 35 saves.

Huberdeau had been out all season following surgery to repair an Achilles tendon injury sustained Oct. 8 in the final preseason game against New Jersey. It was his first goal since April 9.