

STARS AND STRIPES®

Monday, January 2, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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DOD reviews status of some discharged vets

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The Defense Department said it is reviewing and potentially upgrading the status of veterans who might have been improperly discharged for reasons related to post-traumatic stress syndrome, sexual orientation, sexual assault and other circumstances.

“With today’s announcement, the department is reaffirming its intention to review and potentially upgrade the discharge status of all individuals that are eligible and that apply,” a Pentagon statement said Friday.

The announcement comes a week after President Barack Obama signed the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, which included a bipartisan provision to help veterans who may have been erroneously given a less-than-honorable discharge due to bad behavior arising from mental trauma, such as PTSD or traumatic brain injury.

Such discharges, also called “bad paper” discharges, often arise from minor misconduct, such as being late and other behaviors that are linked to trauma-related conditions. Veterans with less-than-honorable discharges are ineligible for certain benefits.

“So many of our servicemembers have

developed PTSD and brain injuries while on active duty, many of whom were undiagnosed until long after their service was completed,” Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., said in a statement last month.

“Too many service members have lost access to their [Department of Veterans Affairs] benefits because of mental health injuries that were not recognized when they left the military,” Democratic Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee Personnel Subcommittee, said in the same statement.

The provision will let veterans with mental health injuries and those who experienced military sexual trauma have their discharges upgraded more easily “so that they can get the care they need and the benefits they earned,” she said.

The Pentagon said it will reach out to affected veterans through engagement with veterans and military service organizations and other outside groups as well as direct outreach to individual veterans.

The Defense Department is encouraging all veterans who believe they experienced “error or injustice” in their discharges to contact their service’s Board for Correction of Military/Naval Records or Discharge Review Board, the statement said.

The Defense Department said it was inviting feedback from veterans and other military organizations on their experiences with those two boards, including suggestions on how policies and processes could be improved.

If the discharge was less than 15 years ago, the veteran should complete Defense Department Form 293. For older discharges, DD Form 149 should be completed.

Veterans seeking to correct records other than discharges should complete and submit DD Form 149, as well.

The announcement outlined three keys to succeeding in having discharges upgraded or corrected.

“First, it is very important to explain why the veteran’s discharge or other record was unjust or erroneous — for example, how it is connected to, or resulted from, unjust policies, a physical or mental health condition related to military service, or some other explainable or justifiable circumstance,” the Defense Department said.

Second, evidence supporting key facts, such as medical records, should be provided.

Third, it is helpful to submit copies of the veteran’s service records.

White House ordered to turn over report on torture

Miami Herald

MIAMI — With just weeks until Republicans take control of Congress and the White House, a federal judge has ordered the Obama administration to deliver to his court’s top-secret storage site a copy of the so-called Senate Torture Report on the CIA’s Black Site prison program.

U.S. District Court Judge Royce Lamberth issued the two-page order Wednesday in Washington, in the mostly dormant federal court challenge of the Guantanamo Bay detention in Cuba of former CIA prisoner Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, 51. The Saudi, who was waterboarded and rectally abused while a captive of the spy agency, is awaiting trial by military commission as the alleged architect of al-Qaida’s Oct. 12, 2000, USS Cole bombing off Yemen that killed 17 U.S. sailors.

Lamberth also ordered the government

to “preserve and maintain all evidence, documents and information, without limitation, now or ever in the [U.S. government’s] possession, control or custody, relating to the torture, mistreatment, and/or abuse of detainees held in the custody of the Executive Branch” since Sept. 11, 2001.

The Republican leader of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Sen. Richard Burr, of North Carolina, has sought the return of what are believed to be eight Obama administration copies of the largely classified 6,700-page report, prompting fears that the damning examination of interrogation practices during the administration of George W. Bush won’t be available for death penalty appeals in the Guantanamo military commissions cases. President Barack Obama recently decided to keep his copy in the top secret portion of his presidential archives, sparing its destruction. But he declined to declassify it, meaning the earliest

it could become public is in 2028.

The report has an entire chapter on al-Nashiri’s treatment during his 2002-06 CIA custody, and his Pentagon-paid lawyers asked the military judge in the capital case to furnish them with a copy for trial preparation. Alternatively, they asked the tribunal judge, Air Force Col. Vance Spath, to put a copy into the war court safe for an eventual appeal.

Spath refused, saying prosecutors were mining the classified report for the information the defense attorneys would be entitled to see. The chief prosecutor, Army Brig. Gen. Mark Martins, has dismissed the report, which offers lurid details of detainees kept naked, deprived of food and sleep, rectally abused, waterboarded and shackled in so-called stress positions, as a legislative work product, “opinions and analysis” — not evidence.

WWP faces difficult choices after scandal

BY DIANNA CAHN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The nonprofit Wounded Warrior Project entered 2016 with a more than \$400 million budget and reason to believe its meteoric growth would continue. It ended the year with detrimental losses following a scandal that led to the ouster of its two top executives in March.

While the veterans charity has remained mum on projected 2017 revenue, there is little doubt that donations continue to fall.

New CEO retired Lt. Gen. Mike Linnington took the helm in July promising transparency as he worked to right the ship. After the organization announced its first restructuring — laying off 15 percent of its 600-member staff — Linnington told news organizations that WWP lost \$90 million to \$100 million in revenue. He told *Stars and Stripes* at the time that he would release exact figures at the end of September, when the fiscal year came to a close.

Last week, Linnington declined to release the 2016 tallies or projections for the 2017 budget, which began Oct. 1. He said he was “still a rookie on nonprofit accounting” when he spoke with the newspaper in August and said he would release the financials only after they were audited and filed with the IRS — likely next summer.

An examination of WWP’s financials appears to indicate that the nonprofit could face big troubles in the coming year — losses so steep that it would be forced to choose between depleting its reserves or cutting critical programs for wounded veterans and their families.

“They are contracting,” said Doug White, a nonprofits expert and professor who was director of Columbia University’s Master of Science in Fundraising Management. He left his position in June to conduct an in-depth study of what happened at WWP. “There’s no way they can’t contract at this point.”

White was fascinated by the controversy surrounding WWP

spending, which raised questions about how nonprofits raise and allocate money and how their success is judged. In a strongly worded report, he concluded that the vision of ousted CEO Steve Nardizzi and Chief Operating Officer Al Giordano — which involved aggressive and costly fundraising to exponentially grow the nonprofit — was sound, even good business for the organization. But he acknowledged Nardizzi’s flamboyant style led to damaging perceptions.

Nardizzi and Giordano were fired after reports in *The New York Times* and on CBS in January 2016 portrayed lavish spending and a toxic organizational culture. The charity had been placed on the Charity Navigator watch list for having too small of a percentage of donations going directly to programming.

Charity Navigator calculated that as much as 40 percent of revenue was spent on fundraising and administration. A forensic accounting of WWP’s financials found no wrongdoing, but distrust remained. As donors began pulling their support, the board removed the two leaders. By mid-spring WWP donations were plummeting. The charity pulled its TV ads and went into a holding pattern until Linnington’s arrival in July. The ads have only recently resurfaced, but other than Linnington’s initial statements in August and September, WWP has divulged little about its financial situation.

There has been a lot of speculation about WWP’s numbers for 2017, and without transparency from the organization, there’s no way to be certain. But there are ways to assess nonprofit financial performance.

White said that pulling advertising has unseen repercussions for a nonprofit, stalling new donations and limiting the ability to recoup donors as monthly donations expire and aren’t renewed. He said the losses quickly build on themselves, leaving the nonprofit further behind.

With WWP out of the public eye, donor drop-off likely increased, he said. Without an

aggressive campaign to restore fundraising, it’s reasonable to assume things have gotten worse.

According to the latest financial documents available for Wounded Warrior Project — the nonprofit tax form 990 for 2015 — the organization made \$398.7 million. Nardizzi said the charity had projected a budget increase to \$414 million in 2016 (plus \$13 million from reserves to be used for the long-term care trust) and to \$475 million in 2017.

By the time Linnington took the helm in July, Nardizzi said he believed the organization was on a trajectory to lose \$200 million in 2017.

In August, the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* reported that Nardizzi had slammed the trustees of WWP for downplaying the financial crisis. Nardizzi told the *Chronicle* that during a conversation with Linnington in early July, the newly appointed CEO told him that the 2017 projections were even more dismal: revenue of just \$185 million.

Linnington confirmed to the *Chronicle* that he’d spoken with Nardizzi, but said the figure was inaccurate. He told the magazine that it was too soon to predict the organization’s fundraising amount, and that 2017 revenue could be anywhere from \$185 million to \$355 million.

Nardizzi confirmed to *Stars and Stripes* that when he left in March, WWP had \$250 million in reserves — an amount they believed was “enough to weather any storms,” he said.

Their plan was to transfer some of that into the trust created for WWP’s Independence Program, which provides lifetime home care for the most severely wounded. The organization was looking to grow programming and planned to add less to reserves.

That vision likely changed with the decline in WWP revenue. WWP ended 2016 with less revenue than budgeted and almost certainly an expectation for losses in 2017.

To help balance the books in 2016, the organization reduced staff in August and closed nine

offices. But, looking at the charity’s financials, White said that would not have been enough to cover the losses. The halt in advertising helped refill the till — though that’s a double-edged sword for future revenue — and savings could have come from reducing the funds earmarked for the trust.

It is likely that part of the 2016 losses would have had to be covered from the reserves. If funding continues to drop in 2017 at the same pace or greater, which White believes is likely, cuts will have to be far deeper.

According to the WWP financial statements, its spending for management was \$14.5 million in 2015, with nearly \$75 million spent on fundraising and \$262.5 million on programming. The remaining \$47 million went into reserves.

The fundraising budget remained almost the same for 2016, but the organization can’t afford to make cuts there if it has any chance of regaining its donor base, White said. There could be some savings from not giving grants to groups that help veterans, although that involves a relatively small amount of money. Cuts to administration also don’t have much value.

The only two areas left to reduce: programming and reserves, White said.

As revenue and programs decrease, the ratio of fundraising or administration to programming skews, exacerbating the problem that Wounded Warrior Project had in the first place: not spending enough of its pie on programming.

In September, after the layoffs and restructuring at WWP, Charity Navigator took the nonprofit off the watch list, giving it high marks for accountability and transparency, but lower marks for financials based on its high spending on fundraising.

WWP has remained silent on how it plans to reverse its fortunes, but White and others said families who benefit from the nonprofit are concerned.

Something will have to be cut; it’s just a question of who will get left without a chair at the table, he said.

Islamic State kills 36 in attack at Baghdad market

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — A suicide bomber driving a pickup loaded with explosives struck a bustling market in Baghdad on Monday, killing at least 36 people in an attack claimed by the Islamic State group hours after French President Francois Hollande arrived in the Iraqi capital.

The bomb went off in a fruit-and-vegetable market that was packed with day laborers, a police officer said, adding that another 52 people were wounded.

During a news conference with Hollande, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said the bomber pretended to be a man seeking to hire day laborers. Once the workers gathered around, he detonated the bomb.

Islamic State claimed the attack in a statement circulated on a militant website often used by the extremists. It was the third Islamic State-claimed attack in as many days in and around Baghdad, underscoring the lingering threat posed by the group despite a string of setbacks elsewhere in the country during the past year, including in and around the northern city of Mosul.

The attack took place in Sadr City, a vast Shiite district in eastern Baghdad that has been

targeted repeatedly by Sunni extremists since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

Shiite militiamen loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr, a firebrand cleric from the family for whom the neighborhood is named, were seen evacuating bodies in their trucks before ambulances arrived. Dead bodies were scattered across the bloody pavement alongside fruit, vegetables and laborers' shovels and axes. A minibus filled with dead passengers was on fire.

Asaad Hashim, an owner of a cellphone store nearby, described how the laborers pushed and shoved around the bomber's vehicle, trying to get hired.

"Then a big boom came, sending them up into the air," said Hashim, 28, who suffered shrapnel wounds to his right hand. He blamed "the most ineffective security forces in the world" for failing to prevent the attack.

An angry crowd cursed the government even after a representative of al-Sadr tried to calm them. Late last month, Iraqi authorities started removing some of the security checkpoints in Baghdad in a bid to ease traffic for the capital's 6 million residents.

Islamic State claims Istanbul club attack

Associated Press

ISTANBUL — The Islamic State group on Monday claimed responsibility for the New Year's attack at a popular Istanbul nightclub that killed 39 people and wounded scores of others.

Turkish police, meanwhile, detained eight people in connection with the attack but were still hunting for the gunman who disappeared amid the chaos.

The Islamic State-linked Aamaq News Agency said the attack was carried out by a "heroic soldier of the caliphate" who attacked the nightclub "where Christians were celebrating their pagan feast."

It said the man fired an automatic rifle and also detonated hand grenades in "revenge for God's religion and in response to the orders" of Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

The group described Turkey as "the servant of the cross" and also suggested it was in retaliation for Turkish military offensives against the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq.

"We let infidel Turkey know that the blood of Muslims that is being shed by its airstrikes and

artillery shelling will turn into fire on its territories," the statement said.

Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency said eight people were taken into custody by Istanbul anti-terrorism squads and they were being questioned at Istanbul's main police headquarters. It did not provide further information on the suspects.

Earlier, Turkish media reports had said that Turkish authorities believed the Islamic State group was behind the attack and that the gunman, who is still at large, is likely to be either from Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan.

According to the Hurriyet and Karar newspapers, police had also established similarities with the high-casualty suicide bomb and gun attack at Istanbul's Ataturk Airport in June and was investigating whether the same Islamic State cell could have carried out both attacks.

The gunman killed a policeman and another man outside the Reina club in the early hours of 2017 before entering and firing with an automatic rifle at an estimated 600 people partying inside.

Taliban strike in Afghanistan; NATO casualties hit low

By E.B. BOYD
AND ZUBAIR BABAKARKHAIL
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban have continued their assault on Afghanistan's southwestern Helmand province with attacks in two key districts, Afghan security forces said, as NATO announced that its forces last year suffered the fewest casualties since the U.S. invasion in 2001.

The latest round of fighting began Dec. 31 in Sangin and Marjah districts, a provincial spokesman said. The Marine Corps suffered significant casualties while fighting to liber-

ate both areas in 2009-11. That the Taliban are conducting operations in winter is at variance with their usual practice of retreating to western areas of Pakistan to regroup before returning in the spring, when the weather is more suitable for carrying out operations.

Though Taliban activity has increased in recent months, U.S. and NATO troops, who mainly have been performing a train-and-advise mission since combat operations formally ended in 2014, are generally now at less risk of death or injury.

NATO confirmed on Monday

a local news report that its forces in 2016 suffered the fewest casualties since the 2001 invasion. Fifteen NATO personnel were killed last year: two Romanians, nine Americans and four civilian staff members.

Since 2015, the Taliban have made successive inroads in Helmand, including capturing several districts. Afghan security forces have suffered some of their most significant casualties trying to defend the province.

The Afghanistan Analysts Network said in report last year that Afghan forces are struggling to fend off the in-

surgers because of a lack of coordination among army and police units and an understaffed military. Meanwhile, the Taliban have strengthened their position through the use of commando teams and the capture of Afghan ammunition and vehicles from checkpoints and bases they overran.

The U.S., which pulled out of Helmand in 2014, has had to send special operations teams back to the area to help Afghan forces battle the insurgents. A NATO spokesman declined on Monday to comment on whether U.S. forces were involved with this latest set of clashes.

Obama in closing stretch of presidency

Associated Press

HONOLULU — His last presidential vacation behind him, Barack Obama is entering the closing stretch of his presidency, an 11th-hour push to tie up loose ends and to put finishing touches on his legacy before handing the reins to President-elect Donald Trump.

Obama returns to Washington midday Monday from Hawaii with about two dozen workdays left. His final days largely will be consumed by a bid to protect his endangered health care law, a major farewell speech and the ongoing handover of power to Trump.

In an email to supporters on Monday, Obama said he'll deliver a valedictory speech on Jan. 10, following a tradition set in 1796 when the first president, George Washington, spoke to the American people for the last time in office. The speech will take place at McCormick Place, a giant convention center in Obama's hometown of Chicago.

"I'm thinking about them as a chance to say thank you for this amazing journey, to celebrate the ways you've changed this country for the better these past eight years, and to offer

some thoughts on where we all go from here," Obama said.

Obama's chief speechwriter, Cody Keenan, traveled with Obama to Hawaii and spent much of the trip working on the speech. The Chicago trip likely will be Obama's last outside Washington as president and will include a "family reunion" for Obama's former campaign staffers.

Obama is also planning last-minute commutations and pardons, White House officials said, in line with his second-term effort to cut sentences for inmates given unduly harsh sentences for drug crimes. Though prominent offenders like Edward Snowden and Rod Blagojevich are asking for leniency, Obama's final acts of clemency are expected to remain focused on drug offenders whose plight Obama tried but failed to address through criminal justice reform.

After taking office eight years ago, Obama and his aides were effusive in their praise for how Obama's predecessor, George W. Bush, helped his team take over the massive federal bureaucracy. Obama has vowed to pass on the favor to Trump. But the transition hasn't been with-

out incident.

The two teams have clashed over the Trump team's requests for information Obama aides fear could be used to eliminate government employees who worked on Obama priorities like climate change and minority rights overseas. Trump's team, meanwhile, has been frustrated by Obama's attempts to box Trump in with parting moves to block ocean drilling, to declare new monuments and to further empty out the Guantanamo Bay prison.

While on his annual vacation on Oahu, Obama asserted himself forcefully on two foreign policy issues that put him in direct conflict with Trump. Obama directed the U.S. to defy tradition by allowing a U.N. Security Council resolution criticizing Israel on settlements to pass, then slapped Russia with sweeping penalties over U.S. allegations of hacking.

The final days are Obama's last chance to define his presidency before he loses the bully pulpit and cedes his legacy to historians. For Obama, helping Americans understand how his two terms have reshaped American life is even more critical amid concerns that

Trump may undo much of what he accomplished, including the health law.

As Trump and Republicans vow to gut the Affordable Care Act, Democrats are working to devise a strategy to protect the law by exploiting GOP divisions about how to replace it. To that end, Obama will travel Wednesday to the Capitol to meet with House and Senate Democrats, likely his last meeting with his party's lawmakers as president.

His administration is also working feverishly to finish up regulations in the pipeline that Obama hopes can be completed in the final days, perhaps increasing the likelihood his policies carry over. The closer it gets to Trump's inauguration, the harder those tasks become.

Though Obama remains president until Jan. 20, the White House can't process the departure of all its staffers on a single day. So this week, Obama aides will start "offloading," turning in their Blackberries and shutting down their computers for the last time, leaving a smaller staff on hand for the final days.

Trump comments defended

WASHINGTON — Incoming White House press secretary Sean Spicer is defending cryptic comments by President-elect Donald Trump that he knows "things that other people don't know" when it comes to allegations of Russian hacking.

Spicer told Fox News Channel's "Fox & Friends" that Trump is getting national security briefings "on a daily basis" and "there doesn't seem to be conclusive evidence" Russians were behind the hacking of Democratic emails during the election.

Spicer also dismissed on Monday a report released by the FBI and Homeland Security Department supporting the accusations against Russia, calling it a "how-to" manual on basic cybersecurity for Democrats.

In an interview on NBC's "Today Show," Spicer said President Barack Obama only punished Russia after Democrat Hillary Clinton lost the election and that the recent sanctions were politically motivated.

Lake Erie search resumes

CLEVELAND — Authorities say recovery efforts are resuming in the search for a small plane carrying six people that disappeared over Lake Erie, near Cleveland.

The city of Cleveland said Monday morning that weather conditions were favorable for searching, with light winds and relatively calm waters. Seven vessels and four dive teams are taking part in waters 35 to 45 feet deep.

The city said there have been multiple reports of debris washing ashore east of Burke Lakefront Airport, where a plane carrying a family of four and two neighbors departed late Thursday. Police said they have confirmed that a bag recovered Sunday was from the aircraft.

No details have been released. The bag was found near a private harbor in a small lakeside community.

The other debris hadn't been verified as being from the plane.

3 arrested in pipeline protest

MINNEAPOLIS — Police have arrested a third suspect after opponents to the Dakota Access pipeline hung a banner from the roof of the U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis during the Minnesota Vikings' season finale against the Chicago Bears.

The 27-year-old woman is accused of obstructing legal process. Police haven't released details of her role in the incident Sunday afternoon.

Two other people accused of sneaking onto a truss in the roof and rappelling down to unfurl the banner have been arrested for trespassing. Formal charges are pending. The game wasn't interrupted, but eight rows of fans seated below the banner were cleared as a precaution.

The Dakota Access pipeline would carry oil from North Dakota to Illinois. Opponents fear it could harm the environment and American Indian artifacts. The pipeline developer disputes that.

From The Associated Press

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man charged with giving Valium pill as tip

PA BETHLEHEM — Here's a tip: Don't give a prescription painkiller as a gratuity.

The suspected gesture led to trouble for a patron of a Pennsylvania casino on Thursday.

State police said the man at the Sands Casino in Bethlehem tipped a server with a Valium pill. The Morning Call reported David Carnevale, of Caldwell, N.J., faces a charge of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance. He was released on his own recognizance. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Friday.

Man pulled from car before train hits vehicle

FL ORLANDO — A man whose car stalled on a railroad track in Orlando was pulled to safety before a commuter train crashed into it.

Orlando television station WFTV reported that Jean Merseille, 73, was pulled to safety on Thursday by Nelson Perez, 30, just moments before impact. Merseille was unharmed.

Merseille's car got stalled on the tracks after he tried to turn around. He was given a \$114 citation for stopping on the train tracks.

Potential home buyer finds body in garage

MI DETROIT — Detroit police said a man interested in buying a home made the gruesome discovery of a mummified body inside its garage.

The Detroit Free Press reported the man entered the garage Thursday and found a decomposed and mummified body inside a car parked inside.

Police spokesman Officer Dan Donakowski said tenants who lived at a home told officers they never entered the garage because the property owner told them they couldn't use it.

He said it's unclear how and when the person died but the body had been there "for quite some time."

Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office spokesman Lloyd Jackson said that because of its condition, it's unclear if the body is that of a male or female. He said an autopsy will be performed this week.

Naked man sought after chasing 2 girls on road

NJ EVESHAM — Authorities are searching for a naked man who chased after two teenage girls as they walked along a southern New Jersey roadway.

Evesham Township police said the girls noticed the man wasn't wearing a shirt when he initially drove by them about 1 p.m. Friday. He returned a few minutes later and was completely naked when he suddenly bolted from the Jeep and ran toward the girls, ages 14 and 15.

The girls ran to the older teen's house and told her father what had happened. They said the man didn't say anything to them during the incident and did not touch them.

Menorah outside home twisted into swastika

AZ CHANDLER — Police are investigating who was responsible for twisting a menorah outside a Chandler home into the shape of a swastika.

Chandler police spokesman Seth Tyler said the religious symbol made from PVC pipe was displayed in the front yard

as part of Hanukkah.

No arrests have been made.

Investigators are turning to neighbors to see if they saw anything or captured surveillance video of the incident.

Officers were called to the home Friday on a trespassing call. Tyler said the incident is being investigated as a felony trespassing case.

Ex-President Carter helps release sea turtle

FL MARATHON — Former President Jimmy Carter; his wife, Rosalynn; and about 40 other family members have helped release a rehabilitated loggerhead sea turtle off the Florida Keys.

"Salty" was released Friday after the Carters, their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren toured The Turtle Hospital, a facility that opened in 1986 and has since treated and released more than 2,000 injured sea turtles.

Salty had convalesced at the hospital since October after being discovered floating near Sombrero Lighthouse about 6 miles off the Keys. It had suffered an intestinal impaction and a lung infection.

High-speed chase goes on for 50 miles

WY CASPER — The Wyoming Highway Patrol said a Montana man in a stolen car led troopers on a 50-mile chase in southeast Wyoming.

The patrol got a report Dec. 27 about the silver sedan going north on Interstate 25 in Laramie County at 100 mph. A trooper in Platte County tried to pull the Subaru over but it didn't stop.

The Casper Star-Tribune reported the driver led officers on a chase topping 120 mph and even collided with a snowplow before troopers used their ve-

hicles to block the car.

The patrol said Jonathan Wayne Hankinson, 32, of Laurel, Mont., is charged with possession of stolen property, aggravated assault on a peace officer, fleeing and eluding, and reckless endangering.

The chase slightly injured a trooper and damaged three law enforcement vehicles.

Police: Whale spotted swimming in river

NY NEW YORK — Officers patrolling New York City's harbor in a police boat spotted a whale in the East River.

The New York Police Department's special operations division posted a photo of the unusual tourist on its Twitter account Saturday morning.

The whale was seen swimming along the shores of Manhattan's upper East Side, close to Gracie Mansion, where the mayor lives.

U.S. Coast Guard Petty Officer Frank Iannazzo-Simmons said officials from his office haven't seen the whale. But he said that based on the photos, it appears to be a humpback whale.

Police seek bank robber wearing Spider-Man hat

RI JOHNSTON — Police are asking for the public's help in finding a man who they say robbed a bank in Johnston last week while donning a black Spider-Man hat.

Police said the man walked into a Citizens Bank branch on Friday morning and gave a teller a note that demanded money and said he had a gun.

Police said the man never showed a weapon and made off with an undetermined amount of cash. They said he ran off in an unknown direction.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Tide, Tigers ready for rematch

Associated Press

Get ready for a blockbuster sequel.

It's Alabama vs. Clemson, The Rematch.

The top-ranked Crimson Tide will take on the No. 3 Tigers in a do-over of last season's national championship game, a 45-40 thriller won by Alabama.

If the Jan. 9 matchup in Tampa, Fla., comes anywhere close to that classic in the desert, it will more than make up for two semifinal duds on Saturday.

Alabama (14-0) wore down No. 4 Washington for a 24-7 victory in the Peach Bowl, while Clemson dominated No. 2 Ohio State 31-0 in the Fiesta Bowl, handing Urban Meyer the first shutout of his coaching career.

The Tide opened as a touchdown favorite.

"They are who they are because they're the best, they're the standard," Clemson coach Dabo Swinney. "We're excited. If you're ever going to be the best, you've to beat them. It's going to be an unbelievable game. I'm glad we've got a shot. That's all we can ask for."

Alabama will be going for its fifth nation-

al championship in eight seasons, a run that already has stamped it as one of the greatest dynasties in college football history.

If coach Nick Saban claims another title, he will join Bear Bryant as the only coaches to win six titles in the poll era.

Clemson (13-1) will be going for the second national title in school history, having come up just short a year ago.

The Tigers wanted another shot at Alabama all along.

"Of course," said Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson, who turned in a virtuoso performance in the Fiesta Bowl, much like he did in last year's title game. "They're the best of the best. You've got to earn it."

Alabama has been dominant all year long, surviving a close call at Ole Miss early in the season but winning every other game by double-figure margins.

The Tide went old school on Washington, wearing down the Huskies with its stifling defense and a powerful running game, overcoming an off day for freshman quarterback Jalen Hurts.

Bo Scarbrough, a second-string running back who has come on strong late in the season, rushed for 180 yards and two touch-

downs in the Peach Bowl. He figures to play a big role in the championship game.

"We've been playing him more and more, and he has certainly delivered in a really positive way," Saban said. "Whoever's hot, that's who's going to get the ball. He's been hot lately and he's going to get the ball."

But everything at Alabama starts with the defense. The Tide leads the nation in most major categories and has even helped out the offense by scoring 11 touchdowns, including Ryan Anderson's interception return for a score just before halftime in the Peach Bowl, putting his team firmly in control against the Huskies.

Clemson endured an up-and-down year that included close victories over Troy and North Carolina State, and a shocking loss at home to Pittsburgh.

But the Tigers, led by Heisman Trophy runner-up Watson, are playing their best when it matters most.

The victory over Ohio State was dominant in every way.

"That's our best four quarters of the year," Swinney said. "We were at our best on the biggest stage."

Cousins' play sets up Redskins offseason intrigue

Associated Press

LANDOVER, Md. — If it's true that, as many saw it, this entire Washington Redskins season was a referendum on Kirk Cousins and whether he should get a long-term contract, the way things ended — a late interception sealing a playoffs-preventing loss — should make for quite an intriguing offseason.

For while Cousins broke his own franchise record for passing yards, nearly eclipsing 5,000, and set another team mark with more than 400 completions, he also closed things on a down note as Washington (8-7-1) lost four of its final six games, including 19-10 against the New York Giants on Sunday.

"This isn't my first time dealing with this," Cousins said through a bit of a forced smile. "Tough times don't last; tough people do, right? I sound like a broken record, but I'm

going to keep saying that until I retire."

A year after leading the Redskins to the NFC East title, Cousins now will be home during the postseason.

He threw a pair of second-half picks Sunday, both by Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie, the second coming while Washington trailed 13-10 with about 1½ minutes remaining. Cousins stepped out of the pocket, scanned the field for a receiver, then threw a floater that did not really come all that close to reaching intended receiver Pierre Garcon.

Garcon and other teammates rose to Cousins' defense afterward, saying as defensive lineman Ricky Jean Francois did of the defeat: "It was not his fault at all."

After the game, Cousins acknowledged he probably should have tucked the ball and run it on that late interception.

Coach Jay Gruden agreed

that throw constituted "a poor decision."

In the next breath, Gruden added: "I think he belongs in the NFL as a starting quarterback, that's for sure, and hopefully it's here."

And that will be the key question over the coming weeks for Washington and general manager Scot McCloughan: Will the team keep Cousins and, if so, for how much?

The QB made nearly \$20 million this season under the franchise tag. The Redskins could tag him again, for about \$24 million, or sign him to a multiyear deal, or let him walk as a free agent.

Asked what he expects, Cousins shrugged his shoulders and answered: "It's really not my decision to make. The ball was in the court of the team last year and they chose to tag me. And the same is true this year."

Here is what else we know after the Giants (11-5), who already were locked into the NFC's No. 5 seed, beat the Redskins:

Gruden knows results

From 6-3-1 to out of the playoffs thanks to a 2-4 finish — including two flat losses at home to teams with nothing at stake — Gruden and the Redskins have a lot to ponder in a longer-than-they-wanted offseason. Gruden was asked whether he had his team ready to play Sunday. "On a gut level, I like to think so, but obviously, the results say otherwise." Said Jean Francois: "I don't blame this on no coach. ... It was on us."

Redskins not running

If the Redskins are going to get back to the playoffs next season, they'll want to improve a drab running game that closed with 15 carries for 38 yards against New York.

Broncos' Kubiak resigns after victory

Associated Press

DENVER — The Broncos are in search of a coach. The Raiders are looking for a quarterback.

Neither of these AFC West rivals came out of Sunday in as good of shape as they went in.

After a 24-6 victory, Denver coach Gary Kubiak told his players he was stepping away.

During that loss, the Raiders (12-4) saw their hopes for a division title and first-round bye slip away, and also lost their quarterback-of-the-moment, Matt McGloin, to a shoulder injury.

They are faced with the prospect of rookie Connor Cook making his first NFL start in a playoff game at Houston next

weekend.

"Nothing is easy about this league," coach Jack Del Rio said. "We wanted to win the division but we didn't earn that. We earned the playoffs."

He had little to offer about McGloin's status. The fourth-year veteran, starting in place of the previously injured Derek Carr, left in the second quarter with an injury to his left shoulder and watched the rest of the game from the sideline.

In the other locker room, players voiced support for Kubiak, who has battled health problems and will leave the team only one short season after he led it to a Super Bowl title.

"I owe him a lot, obviously," said Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian, who earned the starting job this year.

The Broncos went 9-7 and missed the playoffs, and now, team vice president John Elway embarks on a coaching search he didn't expect. Dolphins defensive coordinator Vance Joseph and Falcons offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan could be candidates.

"I trust him 100 percent," linebacker Von Miller said of Elway, with whom he had contentious contract negotiations last offseason. "We have a championship organization here."

But there will be a new champion this year. The Raiders once looked like as much of a front-runner in the AFC as anyone outside of New England. But now, it's Kansas City as division champion and Oakland as a road team with no sure bet on who its quarterback will be.

Patriots wrap up home-field edge with win

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Tom Brady threw for 276 yards and three scores Sunday as the Patriots clinched home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs by beating the Dolphins 35-14.

New England took a 20-0 lead in the first half and turned away Miami's comeback bid with the help of a 77-yard touchdown catch-and-run by Julian Edelman and a 69-yard fumble return by linebacker Shea McClellin.

The Patriots (14-2), already assured of a first-round bye, became the ninth team since 1972 to go undefeated on the road during the regular season.

The Dolphins (10-6), beaten for only the second time in the past 11 games, had already earned an AFC wild-card berth. They play their first postseason game since 2008 next weekend at Pittsburgh.

Packers 31, Lions 24: Aaron Rodgers threw three of his four touchdown passes in the second half, lifting the Packers to an NFC North clincher.

Detroit's Matthew Stafford connected with Anquan Boldin for a 35-yard touchdown pass with 13 seconds left, but the visiting Packers recovered the onside kick.

Rodgers will lead fourth-seeded Green Bay at home

Sunday against the fifth-seeded New York Giants in an NFC wild-card game.

Chiefs 37, Chargers 27: Alex Smith threw for two touchdowns and ran for another as the Chiefs clinched the AFC West title and a first-round playoff bye in perhaps the final NFL game in San Diego.

The Chiefs (12-4) took the division with the win and Oakland's loss at Denver.

San Diego fired coach Mike McCoy after the game.

Falcons 38, Saints 32: Matt Ryan bolstered his MVP credentials with four first-half TD passes to secure Atlanta's first-round bye.

Steelers 27, Browns 24 (OT): Steelers backups assured the Browns of the top pick in the 2017 draft.

Pittsburgh's Landry Jones hit Cobi Hamilton with a 26-yard touchdown with 2:57 left in overtime. The visiting Browns took a lead on Cody Parkey's 34-yard field goal with 7:17 remaining in the extra session.

Jets 30, Bills 10: Ryan Fitzpatrick threw two touchdown passes in what was likely his final game for the host Jets.

Despite a 5-11 record, the Jets are making no changes in leadership, meaning both coach Todd Bowles and general manager Mike Maccagnan will remain with the team next

season.

Titans 24, Texans 17: A concussion that sidelined quarterback Tom Savage could have the biggest impact coming out of the Texans' loss.

Savage started for the AFC South champions, left in the second quarter to be evaluated for a concussion and was cleared. He took a snap to kneel down on the final play of the first half and was diagnosed with a concussion after being re-evaluated at halftime.

That left Brock Osweiler, benched for Savage last month, running Houston's offense. He threw for 253 yards and a touchdown and also ran for a 1-yard TD on fourth-and-goal in the fourth quarter in the loss to Tennessee.

Eagles 27, Cowboys 13: Tony Romo threw his first touchdown pass in nearly 14 months as the playoff-bound Cowboys played it safe.

The visiting Cowboys (13-3) had already locked up the No. 1 seed and home-field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs so Dak Prescott played only two series and Ezekiel Elliott watched from the sideline.

Buccaneers 17, Panthers 16: Jameis Winston threw for 202 yards and one touchdown as the host Buccaneers broke up Cam Newton's 2-point conversion throw in the closing

seconds for their first winning season in six years.

Vikings 38, Bears 10: Sam Bradford concluded his first season with host Minnesota with three first-half touchdown passes. Bradford went 25 for 33 for 250 yards and one interception, finishing with a 71.6 percent completion rate to set an NFL single-season record.

Colts 24, Jaguars 20: Andrew Luck threw a 1-yard touchdown pass to Jack Doyle with 9 seconds left. Host Indianapolis (8-8) went 75 yards in 84 seconds with no timeouts to avoid its first losing season since 2011, sending linebacker Robert Mathis out with a win in his final NFL game.

Bengals 27, Ravens 10: Andy Dalton completed his first 10 passes, one for a touchdown, and Rex Burkhead ran for a pair of scores in Cincinnati's fifth straight win at home over Baltimore.

Seahawks 25, 49ers 23: Russell Wilson threw for 258 yards and a touchdown as the Seahawks rallied from an early 11-point deficit in what could be coach Chip Kelly's final game with the 49ers.

Cardinals 44, Rams 6: Carson Palmer threw touchdown passes to Jeremy Ross, Darren Fells and Larry Fitzgerald, and the Cardinals wrapped up a frustrating season.

Hawks get past Spurs in OT

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Tim Hardaway Jr. made a tying three-pointer with 3.3 seconds remaining in regulation and scored nine points in overtime, including the go-ahead free throw, to lift the Atlanta Hawks to a 114-112 victory over the San Antonio Spurs on Sunday night.

Hardaway made the first of two free throws with 10.8 seconds remaining in overtime for a 113-112 lead. Paul Millsap grabbed the missed free throw before Dennis Schroder also made only one of two attempts with 3.9 seconds remaining.

Millsap scored a season-high 32 points and had 13 rebounds for the Hawks, who ended a string of 11 straight losses to San Antonio since 2010.

Kawhi Leonard missed a last-second layup for San Antonio in overtime. Leonard also had a potential winning short jumper spin around the rim before falling out to end regulation.

LaMarcus Aldridge had 27 points and 13 rebounds to lead San Antonio.

Raptors 123, Lakers 114:

Kyle Lowry scored 20 of his season-high 41 points in the fourth quarter as Toronto held on to stop a two-game losing streak with the victory over host Los Angeles.

Lowry also had nine rebounds and seven assists while DeMar DeRozan scored 31 points in another big game in his hometown as the Atlantic Division-leading Raptors got back in winning form on the fifth stop of their six-game trip.

Nick Young hit seven three-pointers and scored 26 points for the Lakers. They emerged from a miserable December with their 15th loss in 17 games.

Trail Blazers 95, Timberwolves 89: C.J. McCollum scored a career-high 43 points as visiting Portland overcame a 14-point first-half deficit to beat Minnesota.

Mason Plumlee had 18 points and eight rebounds for the Blazers. They were without star point guard Damian Lillard for the fourth straight game because of a sprained left ankle. McCollum made 16 of 25 shots,

including a 30-foot three-pointer with just over 2:30 to play to put the game out of reach.

Andrew Wiggins scored 24 points for the Timberwolves.

Pistons 107, Heat 98: Reggie Jackson scored 27 points and Andre Drummond finished with 25 points and 18 rebounds as Detroit wore down depleted host Miami.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope added 23 points for Detroit.

James Johnson scored 20 points and Wayne Ellington had 18 for Miami. The Heat were without what could have been a starting lineup — Goran Dragic (back), Dion Waiters (groin), Justise Winslow (shoulder), Josh McRoberts (foot) and Hassan Whiteside (eye).

Pacers 117, Magic 104: Myles Turner had 23 points and 12 rebounds to lead Indiana past visiting Orlando.

Paul George added 19 points for the Pacers. They have won two straight after a season-worst four-game losing streak. Nikola Vucevic had 18 points and 11 rebounds for Orlando.

Minnesota tops Purdue

Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Nate Mason made sure it was a very special weekend in Indiana for the Pitino family — son Richard, who is the Minnesota coach, and father Rick, the Louisville coach.

Mason contributed 31 points, 11 assists and six rebounds on Sunday, and Minnesota pulled away in overtime for a 91-82 Big Ten victory against No. 15 Purdue in Mackey Arena.

On Saturday, Rick Pitino's No. 6 Cardinals dominated Indiana 77-62 in Bankers Life Fieldhouse. Rick was in the crowd Sunday to watch his son's team improve to 13-2, 1-1 in the Big Ten after struggling to an 8-23, 2-16 mark last season.

Louisville also defeated Purdue 71-64 on Nov. 30 in Louisville in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

But Sunday's game was all about Mason, who made 11 of 18 field goal attempts and 7 of 10 free throws.

"It was a big win," Mason said. "It means a lot, not only to me but to the young guys. We were just so excited to get the big win. Everybody was locked in, and everybody was focused. The rim got pretty big for me. I just kept shooting, and they just kept falling."

No. 13 Butler 78, Providence 61: Kelan Martin had 15 points and eight rebounds, and Andrew Chrabascz and Avery Woodson each had 11 points to help host Butler.

Kethan Savage added 10 points for Butler (12-2, 1-1 Big East).

No. 18 Arizona 91, Stanford 52: Rawle Alkins scored 19 points, Dusan Ristic added 18 and Lauri Markannen 15 to help Arizona beat host Stanford to complete a weekend road sweep to open Pac-12 Conference play.

No. 23 Cincinnati 92, Tulane 56: Jarron Cumberland scored a career-high 19 points and host Cincinnati routed Tulane.

Cincinnati (12-2, 2-0 American Athletic Conference) was picked to win the conference in the preseason coaches' poll.

Leafs win Centennial Classic

Associated Press

TORONTO — Auston Matthews put on a show for the Toronto Maple Leafs in his first outdoor game.

Matthews scored in regulation and overtime to lead the Maple Leafs to a 5-4 victory over the Detroit Red Wings on Sunday in the Centennial Classic.

In a game delayed 30 minutes at the start because of sun on the ice at BMO Field, Matthews won it with the 20th of his rookie season after the Maple Leafs blew a three-goal lead in the third period. Toronto has won five straight to improve to 17-12-7.

After eluding Red Wings defender Danny DeKeyser, the 19-year-old Matthews flipped a quick backhand into the upper reaches of the cage at 3:40 of overtime.

"Definitely one of the best moments in hockey I've ever experienced for myself," Matthews said. "It's pretty special."

Toronto won after Detroit's Anthony Mantha tied it with 1.1 seconds left.

"To get a big goal like that, you don't want to

call it a storybook (ending), but you may as well, right?" Toronto defenseman Morgan Rielly said about Matthews' first OT goal.

Leo Komarov, Mitch Marner and Connor Brown also scored for Toronto and Frederik Andersen made 33 saves. Matthews has scored in four straight games and has 13 goals in the last 17 games.

"I don't think there's anybody in this room that's surprised by it," Rielly said. "He's got a skillset that allows him to do things that a lot of other people can't do. But on top of that, he's got a good brain, he works hard and he's been playing with good teammates. We have lots of faith that it's going to continue to roll the way it is."

Ducks 4, Flyers 3 (SO): Corey Perry scored the decisive shootout goal while Ryan Kesler had a hat trick and goalie John Gibson made 51 saves to set career and franchise records in host Anaheim's victory over Philadelphia.

Capitals 2, Senators 1: Defenseman Taylor Chorney broke a tie early in the third period with his first goal of the season as host Washington held on to beat Ottawa.