

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## 3 female Marines head to infantry unit

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Three female Marines, the first women approved to transfer into the infantry, will report Thursday to their new unit at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, according to Marine Corps officials.

Each woman previously served in other jobs in the Marines and requested to transfer into the infantry after graduating the School of Infantry as part of a 2015 research initiative the Corps conducted to study the impact of gender integration, Capt. Philip Kulczewski, a service spokesman, said Wednesday. All three are enlisted Marines.

They will report to 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, and each will serve in a different infantry specialty — one rifleman, one machine gunner and one mortar Marine, said 1st Lt. John McCombs, a spokesman for the II Marine Expeditionary Force at Camp Lejeune. The Marines

did not identify the women by name or rank.

Defense Secretary Ash Carter paved the way for women to serve in traditionally all-male, front-line combat units in December 2015 when he ordered all military jobs and units open to qualified women. Only the Marines recommended against opening all specialties to women, citing gender-integration research that found mixed-gender units did not function as well as all-male teams and women were more likely to be injured in front-line combat jobs.

Despite initial objections, the Marines are “on track” in integrating women into previously closed positions, Kulczewski said.

“All 337 [Military Occupational Specialties] are open and currently female Marines are enlisting through all program specialties,” he said. “Regardless of any demographic qualifier, any person who is qualified has the opportunity

to volunteer to serve in any occupational specialty or unit.”

The service has had a cadre of senior female Marines in place at Camp Lejeune for the last three months to help ensure other female Marines are properly transitioned into the infantry, Kulczewski said.

“This process ensures the Marine Corps will adhere to its standards and will continue its emphasis on combat readiness,” he said.

The Marines are expecting more women to join the infantry later this year.

There are nine female Marines now conducting initial entrance training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island in South Carolina who are scheduled to attend the nine-week infantry school upon their graduation later this month, Kulczewski said. Since they began their training in October, the women have all exceeded performance standards and are expected to graduate from Parris Island, he said.

The Marines have not yet had a female officer complete its Infantry Officers Course. Thirty-one women attempted the course during the gender-integration study. Several women have since attempted the course, but none have graduated, Kulczewski said.

In comparison, 10 female Army officers have completed the Army’s Infantry Officer Basic Course, but that service has yet to send an enlisted female soldier to infantry training.

It is unclear what impact President-elect Donald Trump could have on women serving in the previously closed roles. Trump has said Carter’s decision was based on “political correctness” and called for its reversal at times during his campaign.

Marines Commandant Gen. Robert Neller said last month that the Marines do not have plans to reverse the gender-integration order.

## Coalition doubles number of advisers in Mosul

BY TARA COPP

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The number of U.S.-led coalition advisers embedded with Iraqi troops has doubled to 450 in recent weeks, the top American spokesman for the campaign to retake Mosul said Wednesday.

The additional coalition forces were deployed to Iraq to help accelerate the battle against Islamic State fighters entrenched in the city, said Col. John Dorrian, a Baghdad-based spokesman for Opera-

tion Inherent Resolve.

He said the advisers are embedded with Iraqi forces to “advise them as they move forward” on Mosul, which is Iraq’s second-largest city and the Islamic State group’s urban stronghold in the country.

Embedded U.S. advisers have entered Mosul with some Iraqi units, Dorrian said.

Previously, the Pentagon had not confirmed whether American troops would go into the city.

He said Wednesday that U.S. advisers “remain behind the

forward line of troops, [but] they have been in the city at different times.”

Iraqi forces have increased pressure on Mosul and now surround the city, Dorrian said.

Forces have begun clearing the city’s estimated 200,000 buildings, he said, but the process would be slow due to the complex defenses that the Islamic State group assembled during its two-year control of the city. Mosul fell to the Islamic State group in summer of 2014.

To secure an area in the city, Iraqi forces “end up having to clear each [building],” Dorrian told reporters at the Pentagon.

“And that goes from rooftop level, often in four-story, or higher, buildings through every single room and every single closet and into tunnels that have been dug between these buildings, and sometimes beneath them. It is just slow-going and is going to take some time.”

The Pentagon estimates there are still 3,000 to 5,000 Islamic State fighters in Mosul.

# Turkey weighs limits to US Incirlik use

By JOHN VANDIVER

*Stars and Stripes*

A top Turkish official suggested on Wednesday that coalition access to the strategic Incirlik Air Base could be put into jeopardy because of domestic outrage over the United States' limited support of a Turkish offensive in war-torn Syria.

"We hope that all coalition forces, primarily the U.S., give air and other support that Turkey needs in the Euphrates Shield operation and the necessary step will be taken soon," Turkish Defense Minister Fikri Isik told reporters in Ankara.

The public rebuke is the latest sign of tension between the U.S. and Turkey over the war in Syria, where Ankara recently deployed troops in an offensive against the Islamic State group in the border town of al-Bab.

The U.S. has been widely criticized for not being supportive of Turkish interests. Conspiracy theories have flourished in Turkey about U.S. involvement in a failed coup last summer, accu-

sations the U.S. has denied.

Now, perception of tepid U.S. support for Turkey's offensive is exacerbating tensions, Isik said.

"This is leading to serious disappointment in the Turkish public opinion," Isik was quoted as saying by The Associated Press. "We are telling our allies ... that this is leading to questions over Incirlik."

The Pentagon on Tuesday said the U.S.-led coalition dispatched aircraft to al-Bab to support Turkish forces but didn't drop any bombs.

Incirlik serves as a key hub for U.S. airstrikes against Islamic State group targets in Syria and Iraq. The American presence dates to the Cold War, but Turkey analysts have noted that Ankara has a history of using Incirlik for political leverage.

Still, Turkey is unlikely to follow through anytime soon on Isik's threat, particularly as the country's political leadership anticipates the arrival of President-elect Donald Trump, said Doruk Ergun, an analyst with

the Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies in Istanbul told Stars and Stripes in an email.

"The Turkish government has high hopes for the Trump administration," said Ergun. "Therefore, it is likely that it would wait to see how the new administration would shape its Syria policy, specifically regarding the PYD (Democratic Union Party), before it makes a move regarding the Incirlik airbase."

Turkey views the PYD, a U.S.-backed Kurdish group fighting in Syria, as aligned with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, another Kurdish group that Ankara regards as a top security threat.

Turkey has demanded that the PYD evacuate the border city of Manbij, where Turkish troops could be headed next should the U.S. fail to persuade the fighters to pull out, Ergun said.

The U.S., which lacks a large ground force to coordinate with in Syria, sees the Kurds as some of the most effective fighters

against the Islamic State group. But its support of the Kurds has threatened the U.S.'s 60-year alliance with Turkey, a NATO ally.

As relations have become more tense between Washington and Ankara, Turkey has increasingly sought to coordinate more of its actions with Russia, whose campaign in Syria has stabilized the government of President Bashar Assad.

For years, the U.S. largely stood on the sidelines as the civil war steadily intensified in Syria, focusing on the campaign against the Islamic State group in Iraq and arguing that fighting in Syria could be ended only through political dialogue.

Long before the Russian military campaign, the White House resisted calls to heavily arm rebel forces in Syria. While the policy of the administration was that "Assad must go," the White House was skeptical about whether there was a credible opposition force worth arming.

## Long-delayed execution case heads back to military court

By NANCY MONTGOMERY

*Stars and Stripes*

The longest-serving prisoner on the military's death row was facing an imminent execution date in 2008. Two decades after a horrific rape and murder spree on and around Fort Bragg, N.C., that left four young women dead and several more injured, former Spc. Ronald Gray's military appeals appeared to have been exhausted.

President George W. Bush had approved Gray's execution — the first by the military in more than 50 years — and the Army had selected a December day to kill him by lethal injection.

But Gray, 51, still on death row at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., is unlikely to be executed anytime soon. His case, after languishing in federal court for eight years, is headed back to

the military courts.

"I think that process could take some time," said James Cross, a spokesman for the Kansas U.S. Attorney's Office, which was prosecuting the case at the federal level.

The long-delayed development reflects the confusion among the courts over jurisdiction and procedures in what is essentially the first military death-penalty case "in the modern era," said Robert Dunham, executive director of the non-profit Death Penalty Information Center.

"What made it more complicated here is that nobody knew what the process was because it hasn't happened before," Dunham said. "The courts were having a problem determining who had to decide what, when."

In 2008, after Gray received his execution date, the U.S. Dis-

trict Court for Kansas accepted his habeas corpus petition — usually the final stage of the appeals process — and stayed his execution while it reviewed the case.

In the meantime, judges and lawyers retired or moved on; the case moved at a glacial pace.

Eventually, in 2015, Judge J. Thomas Marten denied most of Gray's appeal, according to court documents. He also dismissed new or "unexhausted" claims included in Gray's petition "without prejudice," meaning Gray could refile those claims later.

But the 10th Circuit Court concluded that process was incorrect. Marten vacated his judgment.

Federal prosecutors argued for Marten to instead rule entirely against Gray, including against the new claims, which

they said were either without merit or procedurally barred.

They pointed out that in 2012 the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces had declined to review Gray's new claims.

But that court's ruling, also "without prejudice," appeared to have "left open the door for (Gray) to present these claims to the military courts again upon learning what this court would do," Marten wrote.

As a result, Marten dismissed Gray's entire habeas corpus petition without prejudice two months ago.

The additional delay was "regrettable," he wrote, but would "avoid injecting unnecessary procedural error that would only further delay final disposition."

Five men besides Gray remain on the military's death row.



# Dueling Hill visits for Pence, Obama

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump's "first order of business" will be to repeal President Barack Obama's health care law and replace it, but Republicans must avoid hurting consumers as they do that, Vice President-elect Mike Pence said Wednesday.

Sixteen days before leaving the White House, Obama championed his landmark overhaul before Democratic lawmakers and urged them to remind voters of how the statute has helped them.

"Look out for the American people," Obama said as he left the meeting in response to shouted questions.

"Keep up the fight," Obama told congressional Democrats at a strategy meeting in the Capitol visitors' center, according to Rep. Tim Ryan, D-Ohio. "Tell the stories about the people who have benefited from it. The more you can get that

message through, the better off we're going to be."

Pence spoke to reporters after holding an hourlong session with House Republicans in the Capitol. Rep. Dave Brat, R-Va., said Pence told them the goal was to get legislation dismantling the health care law to Trump for his signature by Feb. 20.

"The first order of business is to repeal and replace Obamacare," Pence said, using the overhaul's nickname. He said Americans "voted decisively for a better future for health care in this country, and we are determined to give them that."

Pence said Trump's team was already working with GOP congressional leaders on plans to undo Obama's law with both legislation and executive action the president and federal agencies would be able to take.

Pence did not specify what those actions would be. But House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., told reporters that

they would involve "transition relief." That phrase has been used to describe help for consumers and insurers while Obama's law is being phased out and replaced with a GOP alternative, a process expected to take years.

Republicans are discussing delaying when the repeal of major provisions of that law would actually take effect, perhaps in 18 months or more. It is expected to take at least that long for GOP lawmakers to rally behind a plan to replace it.

Minutes before Obama and Pence met with lawmakers, Trump tweeted that voters are faulting Democrats for the health care law and its rising premiums, deductibles and other problems.

"Massive increases of ObamaCare will take place this year and Dems are to blame for the mess. It will fall of its own weight — be careful!" he wrote.

Pence told reporters that the president-elect was referring to the need to protect consumers during the transition period.

"Look, we're talking about peoples' lives; we're talking about families," Pence said.

Trump pledged during the presidential campaign to erase the health care law, though he's said he wants to retain popular provisions like ensuring coverage for people with pre-existing medical problems.

Obama's and Pence's strategy sessions came on the second day of the new, GOP-led Congress. When Trump enters the White House, it will put the party's longtime goal of annulling much of the 2010 health care overhaul within reach.

Plenty of questions remain, including the repeal bill's details, costs and when it would take effect. Republicans also face divisions over the next step — replacement legislation — that will likely take months or years to resolve.

## Trump backs WikiLeaks, blames DNC for hacking

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President-elect Donald Trump is using WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to cast doubt on the U.S. intelligence community's case that Russia was behind hacking of the Democratic National Committee ahead of the 2016 election.

And he's suggesting that the DNC is to blame for the hacking of its computers and emails, including those of top Hillary Clinton adviser John Podesta.

Trump continued his tweet-storm Wednesday by arguing the DNC did not have a "hacking defense" and questioning why the Democratic Party had not responded "to the terrible things they did and said." He appeared to be referring to information in the DNC emails that was made public and led to the resignation of the DNC

chairwoman and other officials.

"Julian Assange said 'a 14 year old could have hacked Podesta' — why was DNC so careless? Also said Russians did not give him the info!" Trump tweeted early Wednesday.

It was a striking spectacle for the incoming president to give credibility to Assange, whose organization has been under criminal investigation for its role in classified information leaks. Assange has said his source for the hacked emails WikiLeaks published during the campaign was not a government, but his assertion has left open the possibility they came from a third party.

The American intelligence community and Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill insist that Russia was behind the hacks, but Trump has repeatedly dismissed that allegation.

## Police put end to NAACP sit-in against Sessions

Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — The national president of the NAACP and five others were arrested after staging a sit-in Tuesday at the Alabama office of Sen. Jeff Sessions, the nominee for U.S. attorney general, the civil rights group said.

The organization held the demonstration to protest Sessions' nomination by President-elect Donald Trump, criticizing Sessions' record and views on civil rights, immigration, criminal justice reform and voting rights enforcement.

"We have an attorney general nominee who does not acknowledge the reality of voter suppression while mouthing faith in the myth of voter fraud," NAACP President Cornell William Brooks said by phone earlier in the protest. Brooks

called Sessions a poor choice to lead the Justice Department.

The sit-in at Sessions' office in Mobile, Ala. — the city the Republican senator calls home — began around 11 a.m. Tuesday. Demonstrators refused a request by the manager of the building — which includes several other tenants in addition to Sessions — to leave when the building closed for the day at 6 p.m. Police could be seen on video footage coming and handcuffing the six protesters and escorted them to a police van.

"We all are aware of the laws of trespass. We are engaging in a voluntary act of civil disobedience," Brooks told the officers who arrived at the scene.

The NAACP broadcast the events live on the organization's Facebook page. The all-day protest ended in handcuffs but without confrontation.

# Russia to expand ties with Philippines

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Russia is eyeing naval exercises with the Philippines and deployed two navy ships for a goodwill visit to Manila on Tuesday as Moscow moves to expand defense ties with a Filipino president known for being hostile to the U.S.

Rear Adm. Eduard Mikhailov, deputy commander of Russia's Pacific Fleet, led the five-day visit of vessels including an anti-submarine ship and showcased what his country can offer to a Southeast Asian nation that's long been a staunch American treaty ally.

"You can choose ... to cooperate with United States of America or to cooperate with Russia," Mikhailov told reporters through an interpreter at the Manila harbor after a welcoming ceremony. "But from our side we can help you in every way that you need."

"We are sure that in the future we'll have exercises with you," he said. "Maybe, just

maneuvering or maybe use of combat systems and so on."

The anti-submarine ship Admiral Tributs and sea tanker Boris Butoma have a wide range of combat features. Filipinos will be allowed to tour the huge ships and Russian marines will demonstrate their combat capability during the high-profile visit, according to the Philippine navy.

With an underfunded and underequipped military, the Philippines has struggled to deal with attacks by ransom-seeking Abu Sayyaf militants and allied gunmen, who have kidnapped crewmen of tugboats and ships from neighboring Malaysia and Indonesia in the Sulu Sea and outlying waters.

Russia can help through future combat drills, Mikhailov said. "We have an experience in fighting these (threats)," he said. "We will share to you our knowledge on these problems, how to solve piracy and terrorism."

After Russian and Philippine officials met in Manila in August, the two countries began drafting a proposed defense cooper-

ation accord that could be signed during a planned visit by President Rodrigo Duterte to Russia in April.

The visit by the Russian navy ships is the third to the Philippines and the first under Duterte, who took office in June. Duterte has lashed out at President Barack Obama and his administration for criticizing Duterte's deadly crackdown on illegal drugs which is feared to have left more than 6,000 suspected drug users and dealers dead.

In contrast, Duterte has reached out to China and Russia — whose leaders he has met recently — in a dramatic shift in Philippine foreign policy that has put Washington in a dilemma.

The Philippines has depended heavily on the U.S., its treaty ally, for weapons, ships and aircraft for years, although it has turned to other countries for defense equipment. After visiting Moscow last month, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the Philippine military was considering purchasing sniper rifles from Russia.

## FDA probes exploding e-cigarette batteries

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is probing the dangers of exploding batteries in e-cigarettes following dozens of reports of devices that have combusted, overheated or caught fire and sometimes injured users.

The agency announced a two-day public meeting for April, according to an online posting.

The Associated Press reported last month that 66 explosions were identified by the FDA in 2015 and early 2016.

E-cigarettes are hand-held devices that vaporize liquid nicotine.

Their safety has not been extensively studied and there's no scientific consensus on whether they help reduce rates of cigarette smoking.

Last year the FDA announced it would begin to regulate the fast-growing industry, requiring makers of e-cigarettes to submit their devices and ingredients for review for the first time.

From The Associated Press

## Turkey identifies gunman in attack

Associated Press

ISTANBUL — Turkey has identified the gunman in the Istanbul nightclub massacre, the foreign minister said Wednesday as the president vowed that the country won't surrender to terrorists or become divided.

The gunman, who killed 39 people during New Year's celebrations at the Reina club, is still at large. But Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said authorities had identified the man, without providing details.

"The identity of the person who carried out the attack on the Reina nightclub has been established," Cavusoglu told Anadolu in a live televised interview.

Turkish police, meanwhile, detained at least five suspected Islamic State group militants believed to be linked to the attack, the state-run news agency reported. The operation was launched in the Aegean port city of Izmir and was ongoing, Anadolu Agency said.

The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for the attack, which also wounded nearly 70 people. Of those killed 27 were foreigners, many from the Middle East.

The Islamic State group said a "soldier of the caliphate" had carried out the mass shooting to avenge Turkish military operations against the Islamic State in northern Syria.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the attack aims to set Turks against each other and deepen fault lines, but the country won't fall for this game.

Erdogan made the comments in a live speech from Ankara, the first time he has publicly addressed the nation since the attack.

Responding to accusations in the past that Turkey had given support to the Islamic State group, Erdogan said that "to present the country which is leading the greatest struggle against Daesh as one supporting terrorism is what the terror organization wants."

Erdogan said that "in Turkey, no one's way of life is under any threat. Those who claim this have to prove it. It is my duty to protect everyone's rights."

He also said that "to say Turkey has surrendered to terrorism is to take sides with the terrorists and terror organizations."

Police in Istanbul have set up checkpoints and are checking vehicles across the city as security levels remained high. Police were stopping cars and Istanbul's ubiquitous yellow taxis, with passengers and drivers holding up their identifications while officers inspected inside the vehicles. Istanbul has been on high alert since the attack, with the gunman still at large.

The private Dogan news agency said that Wednesday's police operation targeted three families who had arrived in Izmir about 20 days ago from Konya — a city in central Turkey where the gunman is thought to have been based before carrying out the nightclub attack. It said 27 people, including women and children, were taken into custody.



## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Mystery noise prompts dozens of calls to police

**CT** SOUTHLINGTON — Authorities in Southington have been unable to determine what caused a loud noise that prompted dozens of people to call police.

Police and fire departments responded to the area where most of the calls came from about 10:30 a.m. Monday but did not find anything unusual.

More than 30 people called police in the central Connecticut town to report what sounded like an explosion. Some residents wrote on social media that their windows shook from the noise. Authorities also received calls in neighboring towns, including Cheshire and Wolcott.

Energy utilities were contacted but were not aware of anything that might have caused such a noise. Also, earthquake monitors said there was no temblor.

### Fossil could be ancient reptile, 90M years old

**TX** DEL RIO — Paleontologists say a fossil found in limestone along a remote South Texas riverbed could be that of a dolphinlike reptile that swam in ancient oceans some 90 million years ago.

The discovery was made two years ago by a petroleum geologist for the Texas Railroad Commission, and it went largely unnoticed until a photo of the fossil appeared recently on the cover of the commission's 2016 annual report.

The find is unique because it appears to be a nearly complete fossil of an ichthyosaur, which grew to about 6 feet long and had the sleek body of a dolphin and long, toothy jaws of a dinosaur.

The Houston Chronicle reported that the fossil was found on private land near the border town of Del Rio.

### Woman investigating noise shoots herself

**RI** COVENTRY — Police said a woman in Rhode Island had taken out a gun to investigate a noise when she accidentally shot herself.

Coventry police said the woman slipped Friday night and the gun she was carrying discharged, striking her. She had been looking into a noise she heard from behind her home.

WJAR-TV reported the woman was taken to Kent Hospital to be treated for injuries. Her condition wasn't clear.

A police investigation confirmed it was an accidental, self-inflicted gunshot wound.

### Mechanic finds wallet lost on bus 4 years ago

**IA** CEDAR RAPIDS — A wallet lost on a Cedar Rapids school bus has been returned four years later.

Alex Fernandez told Cedar Rapids television station KCRG that he thinks he lost it on the bus while going to a pep rally. He remembers panicking about the loss because the wallet contained his driving instructional permit.

His family recently received a notice from the school district that a mechanic had found it. Frank Stephenson said he was fixing heaters on the bus when he found the wallet wedged under one of the heaters.

Fernandez said the wallet contained only the old permit and \$7, but he's grateful. He said its return shows there are still "some honest people out there, I guess."

### Airline: Worker spent flight in cargo hold

**DC** WASHINGTON — United Airlines said it is investigating after a vendor employee was found unharmed in an aircraft's cargo hold following a flight from Charlotte, N.C., to Washington Dulles International Airport.

The airline said in a statement to The Associated Press on Monday that United Express flight 6060 operated by Mesa Airlines landed safely at Dulles on Sunday.

The statement said that once at the gate, an employee of the airline's ground-handling vendor was found in the cargo area. The employee wasn't identified.

A spokeswoman for the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority directed questions to United.

### Rock song encourages clearing snow off cars

**ME** BANGOR — Police in Bangor, Maine, are using a 1970s progressive rock hit by Manfred Mann's Earth Band to encourage people to clear the snow off their cars before driving.

Sgt. Tim Cotton posted on Facebook on Tuesday morning that the group's song "Blinded by the Light" can serve as a reminder of how dangerous it is to drive with vision obscured by snow.

He said he thought of renaming the song "Blinded by the White" to make the point. He said it's a "crude attempt to connect the rock 'n' roll classic to one of our local problems."

Bruce Springsteen originally wrote and recorded "Blinded by the Light" for a 1973 record. Manfred Mann covered it in 1977, and their version was a worldwide hit that became a

radio staple.

### Woman born Jan. 1 has baby on New Year's Day

**ID** BURLEY — A woman born on Jan. 1 gave birth to an Idaho hospital's only 2017 New Year's Day baby.

The Times-News reported that Cataleya Sia Alvarez arrived 10 days earlier than expected at Cassia Regional Hospital in Burley. Her mother, Briana Leon, was the seventh baby born on New Year's Day in Burley in 1993.

Leon and Samuel Alvarez, of Oakley, said their baby girl's early birth was unexpected but everything was OK.

Cataleya is one of six babies born Sunday in Magic Valley. Cataleya and the first New Year's babies in Twin Falls and Ketchum are all girls measuring 19 inches long.

### Manatee stuck in storm drain released into wild

**FL** ORANGE CITY — A 950-pound manatee that was rescued after being trapped in a Florida storm drain is being released back into the wild.

State wildlife officials said the female manatee is being released into the water at Blue Spring State Park near Orange City in central Florida.

The 9-foot-long manatee became trapped in November in a Jacksonville storm drain.

After being rescued by Jacksonville firefighters and staff from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the manatee was taken to SeaWorld Orlando for rehabilitation.

Staffers from SeaWorld and the wildlife agency are releasing the manatee.

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STARS AND STRIPES®

# Raiders' run fueled by 19 undrafted

Associated Press

ALAMEDA, Calif. — The rebuilding job that turned the Oakland Raiders from a three-win team to the first playoff berth since 2002 centered around a core of high draft picks led by Derek Carr, Khalil Mack and Amari Cooper, and several key free-agent signings.

Those stars got plenty of help from players who arrived in Oakland with much less attention.

The Raiders feature 19 players who entered the league as undrafted free agents, including key contributors such as running back Jalen Richard, receiver Seth Roberts and left tackle Donald Penn.

"It's just testament to this organization and the staff upstairs to find guys that are somewhat overlooked," Richard said. "They give those guys a chance, and they turn out to be good players and give depth to the team."

The undrafted Raiders have accounted for 15 of the team's 46 touchdowns and play key roles at almost every spot on the field, from skilled positions to the trenches — even quarterback.

Oakland's commitment to keeping the best players regardless of draft status can be

personified by backup quarterback Matt McGloin's spot on the team. He came to Oakland on a tryout after being passed over by all 32 teams in the 2013 draft, was impressive enough to get a contract and camp invitation.

He wasn't expected to stick around, with Oakland having traded for Matt Flynn and drafted Tyler Wilson in the fourth round that offseason to go with returning quarterback Terrelle Pryor. But McGloin beat out Wilson for the No. 3 spot, moved up the depth chart when Flynn was cut, and even made six starts as a rookie in place of Pryor.

"We have so many of these young guys that are creating their own stories," coach Jack Del Rio said. "Their desire and their effort, their energy, it's healthy for the team to have that around. We let guys earn their way and these guys that have come in, no matter how you get here, once you get here take advantage of the opportunity."

Despite entering the season with the most talented roster in years, the Raiders kept four players from this year's undrafted class on the original 53-man roster, including Richard and defensive tackle Darius Latham.

Richard finished second on

the team with 491 yards rushing, added 29 catches for 194 yards, scored three touchdowns and was the team's primary punt and kickoff returner as he moved ahead of fifth-round pick DeAndre Washington.

Latham has been a rotation player on the line alongside Denico Autry, who joined the team two years ago.

Among the other key undrafted players are Roberts, who has 38 catches and five TDs; receiver Andre Holmes, who has three TD catches and is a key special teams player; and fullback Jamize Olawale.

General manager Reggie McKenzie said credit for finding these players goes to his scouts, who identify possible targets before the draft and keep in close contact throughout the draft so the team can pounce.

Then, having a coaching staff filled with good teachers helps those players develop. When they have this sort of success, it is even more gratifying than hitting on a first-round pick.

"You expect to have good players early in the draft," he said. "But to have some of those later round guys and free agents not only make it but produce in years two, three and be warranted of that second contract. That's what it's all about."

## Rookie QB Cook to start against Texans

ALAMEDA, Calif. — The Oakland Raiders are going with rookie Connor Cook at quarterback in their wild-card game against the Texans.

Oakland coach Jack Del Rio announced the decision in a conference call with reporters in Houston on Wednesday.

Cook gets the nod with Pro Bowler Derek Carr out with a broken leg and backup Matt McGloin nursing a shoulder injury that could make it tough for him to practice enough before Saturday's game at Houston. Cook will be the first quarterback ever to make his first career start in the postseason.

Despite appearing in just one game as a rookie, the Raiders (12-4) say Cook showed some "swagger" when he replaced McGloin in the second quarter against Denver, and has their confidence heading into the game against the Texans (9-7).

"It's obviously not ideal, that's why it's never happened where a rookie gets his start in a play-off game," Del Rio said. "But he played well last week and he's the healthiest option so it makes it really an obvious choice."

From The Associated Press

# Tomlinson headlines 2017 Hall finalists

Associated Press

First-year eligibles LaDainian Tomlinson, Jason Taylor and Brian Dawkins are among 15 modern-era finalists for the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Also making the finals are Morten Andersen, Tony Boselli, Isaac Bruce, Don Coryell, Terrell Davis, Alan Faneca, Joe Jacoby, Ty Law, John Lynch, Kevin Mawae, Terrell Owens and Kurt Warner.

Previously selected as a finalist by the veterans committee is former Seattle safety Kenny Easley.

In the contributors' category, the nominees are former NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue and Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones.

The class of 2017 will be elected on Feb. 4, the day before the Super Bowl in Hous-

ton. Inductions will be Aug. 5 in Canton, Ohio.

Other than Tomlinson, Taylor and Dawkins, first-time finalists are Boselli, Bruce, Law, Mawae, Easley and Jones.

Most-frequent finalists are Lynch, Tagliabue and Coryell, four apiece. Davis and Warner are three-time finalists.

Coryell, an offensive mastermind with the Cardinals and Chargers, is in his 30th year of eligibility. Easley is in his 25th, while Jacoby, the left tackle on the Redskins' offensive line known as the "Hogs", is in his 19th.

Tomlinson played 11 NFL seasons, nine with San Diego, winning league MVP honors in 2006 when he set a record with 28 rushing touchdowns. He won two rushing titles.

Dawkins spent 16 seasons in the NFL,

13 with Philadelphia, and was considered a prototype modern safety. He made four All-Pro teams and was the first player with a sack, interception, fumble recovery and touchdown catch in the same game (vs. Houston in 2002).

Taylor was one of the NFL's top pass rushers for 15 seasons, mostly with Miami. The 2006 Defensive Player of the Year with 13½ sacks, he had 139½ sacks for his career.

Among the other modern-era finalists, Andersen is the NFL's career scoring leader with 2,544 points, has the most field goals (565) and games (382) playing for five franchises. He made two all-decade teams (1980s and '90s).

Bruce, Davis, Faneca, Jacoby, Law, Lynch and Warner all won Super Bowls.



# Minnesota fires Claeys in wake of protest

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Minnesota fired coach Tracy Claeys on Tuesday, just over two weeks after the football program became embroiled in a standoff with the administration over the suspension of 10 players in connection with allegations of sexual assault.

Athletic director Mark Coyle said he made the decision to “address challenges in recruiting, ticket sales and the culture of the program. We need strong leadership to take Gopher football to the next level and address these challenges.”

“Academically the team was doing well. We finished 9-4. But if I could show you all the emails I got after the Wisconsin game,” Coyle said of the 31-17 loss in Madison to end the season. “That’s the great thing about our fans, you hear from

them. Moving forward, there’s no reason we can’t compete at a high level academically, athletically and socially, through all 25 programs, through all 700 student-athletes.”

The Golden Gophers beat Washington State in the Holiday Bowl last week, a game overshadowed by a threatened boycott of the bowl by the entire team a week earlier. The players ultimately decided against a boycott.

Claeys publicly supported his players in lobbying for fairness in the sexual assault investigation. A tweet he sent out in support of their movement drew wide criticism from victims’ rights groups and faculty on campus. Claeys later said he chose his words poorly and planned to donate \$50,000 to raise awareness for sexual assault victims.

Claeys, 48, went 11-8 in a

year and a half leading the Gophers. The former defensive coordinator became a head coach for the first time when he took over midway through 2015 after Jerry Kill was forced to retire because of health issues. Coyle said in late November that Claeys and his staff would return next season.

But that was before the standoff in mid-December.

“I saw a team that competed. I saw a team that gave up half-time leads, the same thing you all saw,” Coyle said. “But again, it was just an overall evaluation of the program and moving forward, we want to find a leader who embraces what Minnesota is all about. That’s what our goal’s going to be.”

Claeys was the first Gophers coach to win his first two bowl games, and he teamed with defensive coordinator Jay Sawvel to stock a stout defense with

NFL-caliber players. But the program was rocked in December when the university announced that 10 players would be suspended for the Holiday Bowl after a school-led investigation into allegations by a woman who said she was pressured into sex with multiple players.

Two days after the suspensions, the entire team held a news conference to announce that more than 100 players planned to boycott all team activities until their 10 teammates were reinstated.

“Have never been more proud of our kids. I respect their rights (and) support their effort to make a better world!” Claeys tweeted shortly after the news conference.

That stance seemed to clash with the administration, particularly Coyle and President Eric Kaler.

## No. 3 Kansas edges Kansas State on layup at buzzer

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Svi Mykhailiuk went the length of the court and threw in a fingertip layup as the buzzer sounded to give No. 3 Kansas a 90-88 victory over Kansas State on Tuesday night.

Josh Jackson matched a career high with 22 points to go with nine rebounds and six assists, and Landen Lucas added 18 points and 12 rebounds, as the Jayhawks (13-1, 2-0 Big 12) pushed their home winning streak to 50 in one of the closest games during that incredible streak.

The Wildcats (13-2, 1-1) had the first chance to take the lead in the final seconds, but Dean Wade missed a three-pointer and the ball bounced out of bounds with 5.6 seconds left on the clock.

Kansas struggled to get the ball inbounds, but once it got into Mykhailiuk’s hands, he used his long stride to carry him down the court. His buzzer-beating basket gave him 11 points in the game, not to

mention kept coach Bill Self from losing to Kansas State for the second time at Allen Fieldhouse.

Wade matched a career high with 20 points. Wesley Iwundu finished with 17, Kamau Stokes and Barry Brown added 13 points apiece, and D.J. Johnson had 10 points.

The Wildcats have often been shell-shocked by the Phog, the early minutes taking them right out of the game. But they never appeared to be intimidated by the atmosphere Tuesday night.

In fact, it was Kansas State that raced to a 21-13 lead in the opening minutes.

**No. 6 Kentucky 100, Texas A&M 58:** Malik Monk scored 26 points and De’Aaron Fox had 15 as the host Wildcats rode an early 15-0 run to an easy victory.

Playing at home for the first time in nearly a month, Kentucky (12-2, 2-0 Southeastern Conference) quickly answered the Aggies’ game-opening three-pointer with that surge over 2:39 to take control. The

Wildcats continued pouring it on for their most lopsided victory in a recently tight series with overtime deciding four of the last five. Monk continued his high-scoring ways by making 8 of 11 shots including five 3-pointers to pace Kentucky, which shot 52 percent and broke the century mark for the second time in four games. The Wildcats forced 25 turnovers, their second-highest total this season.

Tyler Davis had 13 points for Texas A&M (8-5, 0-2), which trailed by as many as 44 points in the final minutes.

**Texas Tech 77, No. 7 West Virginia 76 (OT):** Anthony Livingston hit a three-pointer from the corner with 4.6 seconds left in overtime to give the host Red Raiders the victory.

Jevon Carter missed a desperation three for the Mountaineers (12-2, 1-1 Big 12), who had won eight straight.

**No. 13 Wisconsin 75, No. 25 Indiana 68:** Ethan Happ scored 19 points and Bronson Koenig added 17 for the visit-

ing Badgers.

Wisconsin (13-2, 2-0 Big Ten) has won nine straight.

**No. 14 North Carolina 89, Clemson 86 (OT):** Joel Berry II had a career-high 31 points and Kennedy Meeks’ basket with 1:12 left in overtime put the visiting Tar Heels ahead for good as they went on to win their ninth straight in the series.

The Tigers (11-3, 1-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) had two chances to retake the lead after Meeks’ shot, but Jaron Blossomgame and Sidy Djitte missed close-in shots to lose to North Carolina for the 19th time in the last 20 games.

**No. 24 Florida 70, Mississippi 63:** Canyon Barry tied a season high with 20 points and KeVaughn Allen added 14 for the host Gators.

Overcoming a cold shooting start, Florida (11-3, 2-0 Southeastern Conference) built a 19-point lead that the Rebels (9-5, 0-2) only managed to get to single digits twice in the second half.

# Celtics use three-pointers to beat Jazz

Associated Press

BOSTON — Isaiah Thomas keeps setting personal bests, and the Boston Celtics keep winning games.

Thomas had 29 points and a career-high 15 assists for Boston, which made 17 three-pointers for the second straight game while defeating the Utah Jazz 115-104 on Tuesday night.

Thomas was coming off a 52-point night Friday against Miami, but it was his passing that helped the Celtics overpower the Jazz, who entered holding opponents to an NBA-low 94.5 points per game.

"I didn't plan on it but I just take what the defense gives me," said Thomas, whose previous high for assists was 13. "When I attacked, they showed more than one guy and my job was to just get the ball to the open guy."

Thomas did just that, 15 times while turning the ball over only once. Al Horford and Jae Crowder added 21 points apiece and Avery Bradley scored 14 for the Celtics, who have won four of five and eight of 10.

**Spurs 110, Raptors 82:** Kawhi Leonard had 25 points, LaMarcus Aldridge added 23 and host San Antonio held Toronto to its lowest score of the season.

San Antonio dominated a matchup of teams with the second-best record in each conference, leading by as many as 34 points.

**Pacers 121, Pistons 116:** Paul George had 32 points and Indiana beat host Detroit.

Myles Turner and Jeff Teague each scored 17 for Indiana, which blew a 15-point first-half lead but pulled away in the fourth quarter to win its

third straight game. The Pacers (18-18) are 2½ games ahead of Detroit (16-21) in the Eastern Conference standings.

**76ers 93, Timberwolves 91:** Robert Covington made a fall-away shot off an inbounds pass with 0.2 seconds left to give host Philadelphia the victory.

The Sixers needed the late basket after they blew a 26-point lead and seemed headed to overtime.

**Mavericks 113, Wizards 105:** Harrison Barnes scored 26 points and Deron Williams added 21 as host Dallas rallied.

Devin Harris had 17 points and Seth Curry 16 for the Mavericks. Williams, Harris and Curry each hit four three-pointers as Dallas went 17-for-32 from long range.

**Kings 120, Nuggets 113:** DeMarcus Cousins scored 31 points, and Darren Collison had 26 points and seven assists

in Sacramento's victory over host Denver.

The Kings led most of the way to stop a two-game skid and win for the fifth time in seven games.

**Suns 99, Heat 90:** Devin Booker scored 27 points — 18 in the second half — and rookie Marquese Chriss added a career-best 18 as host Phoenix handed short-handed Miami its sixth consecutive loss.

The Suns snapped a 12-game losing streak against Miami. Phoenix hadn't beaten the Heat since Nov. 3, 2009.

**Lakers 116, Grizzlies 102:** Nick Young scored 20 points, D'Angelo Russell added 18 and they keyed an early barrage of three-pointers that sent host Los Angeles past Memphis.

Julius Randle had a triple-double for Los Angeles with 19 points, 14 rebounds and 11 assists.

# Blue Jackets beat Oilers, stretch winning streak to 16

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Blue Jackets were winding down another dominant victory when the near-sellout crowd at Nationwide Arena began to chant.

"We want 16! We want 16!"

Columbus delivered, and now it will try to tie an NHL record on Thursday night.

Cam Atkinson and William Karlsson scored power-play goals and Columbus beat the Edmonton Oilers 3-1 to extend their winning streak to 16 games — one away from the longest ever in the NHL.

Nick Foligno also scored for the Blue Jackets, who can tie the 1992-93 Pittsburgh Penguins with a victory Thursday at Washington.

"Everything feels good right now," Columbus coach John Tortorella said. "They deserve it. I'm proud of the team. I'm really happy with how they've handled these past three games, with all the talk (of the streak) and all that."

Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 21 shots for Columbus, which started the new year on the right note after winning all 14 games in December. The Blue Jackets haven't lost since Nov. 26 thanks in part to the league's best power-play unit.

Oscar Klefbom scored for Edmonton, which was limited throughout by Columbus' hard-pressing defense. Cam Talbot had 32 saves for the Oilers.

"We didn't come anywhere close to their pace or their tenacity, their relentlessness," Edmonton coach Todd McLellan said. "We weren't anywhere near it."

The Blue Jackets got on the board 12:32 into the first period when Atkinson's shot ricocheted in off the skate of the Oilers' Andrej Sekera. Atkinson padded his team-leading totals to 18 goals and 38 points, and Zach Werenski and Alexander Wennberg got the assists.

"That was a nice bounce," said Atkinson, who has 17 points (10 goals, seven assists) in his past 13 games.

Edmonton managed just four shots on goal against a hustling defense in the opening period.

Klefbom evened it 5:39 into the second period with a shot from the slot on an Oilers rush. Shortly afterward, the Blue Jackets' Brandon Dubinsky and the Oilers' Patrick Maroon — who got an assist on Klefbom's goal — slugged each other briefly and went to the box for fighting after Maroon threw a high elbow.

"I think that got a lot of guys going," Foligno said.

Karlsson, skating for Dubinsky during the fighting penalty, put Columbus ahead 2-1 on another power play 10:43 into the second when he ripped a shot from the middle of the left circle past Talbot. Brandon Saad, who fed Karlsson with a perfect pass, got the assist, along with Seth Jones.

Foligno put Columbus up by two 2:45 into the third period with an unassisted goal.

**Canadiens 2, Predators 1 (OT):** Shea Weber scored in the third period against his old

team and Max Pacioretty had a goal late in overtime to lift visiting Montreal over Nashville.

**Kings 2, Sharks 1 (OT):** Tanner Pearson scored 58 seconds into overtime to help visiting Los Angeles rally for a victory over San Jose and a sweep of the home-and-home series.

**Capitals 6, Maple Leafs 5 (OT):** Alex Ovechkin scored 22 seconds into overtime and host Washington rallied to end Toronto's winning streak at five.

**Sabres 4, Rangers 1:** Evander Kane and Justin Bailey scored 1:42 apart around the first intermission, leading visiting Buffalo over New York.

**Devils 3, Hurricanes 1:** Adam Henrique, Michael Cammalleri and Kyle Palmieri each had a goal and an assist, leading visiting New Jersey over Carolina.

**Jets 6, Lightning 4:** Nikolaj Ehlers had two goals, including a penalty shot during visiting Winnipeg's three-goal second period.