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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US destroyer fires warning at Iranian ships

BY TARA COPP

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A U.S. destroyer opened fire Sunday to warn off a group of Iranian ships fast approaching the American vessel in the Strait of Hormuz, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command said Monday.

Four vessels of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps navy sped quickly toward the USS Mahan as the ship cruised through the strait, which is the entrance to the Persian Gulf, said Cmdr. Bill Urban, a spokesman for Naval Forces Central Command.

The Iranian vessels ignored “multiple

radio and visual warnings” to remain clear of the Mahan, Urban said. “Mahan then fired three warning shots with a crew-served .50-caliber machine gun, and the [Iranian] vessels arrested their high-speed approach.”

Naval Forces Central Command called the interaction “unsafe and unprofessional” because of the Iranian vessels’ high-speed approach on Mahan with weapons manned and their disregard for repeated warnings “via radio, audible siren and ship’s whistle,” he said. “[The Iranians] only arrested following warning shots being fired.”

The incident is the latest in a string of U.S. encounters with Iranian warships in

the Strait of Hormuz. At its narrowest point, the strait is only 21 miles across, and Iran and pro-U.S. Oman claim the 12 nautical miles off their coasts as territorial waters.

The United States has cited the international right of innocent passage to send warships through the strait to escort commercial vessels after incidences of harassment by Iran patrol craft.

Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said there have been 58 incidents involving Iranian vessels deemed unsafe or unprofessional since the beginning of 2015. There were 23 in 2015 and 35 in 2016, he said.

US troops carry out raid in Syria, kill militants

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon’s special operations force charged with gathering information about the Islamic State group conducted a raid Sunday deep in the terrorist organization’s territory in Syria, a Defense Department spokesman said.

Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, described the raid conducted by the Joint Special Operations Command-controlled Expeditionary Targeting Force as “successful,” but he declined to provide specific information about the mission near Deir al-Zour in eastern Syria.

“It was focused on [Islamic State group] leadership,” Davis told reporters Monday at the Pentagon. “We don’t provide specific details on these types of operations.”

Davis said the mission was focused on gathering intelligence that could be used to inform future operations against the Islamic State group, such as the continuing assault on Mosul, the militants’ last urban stronghold in Iraq, and the future attack on Raqqa, its de facto capital in Syria.

No Americans were killed or injured during the operation, he said. Some Islamic State group fighters were killed.

The raid took place near a remote village along the Euphrates River, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based watchdog organization, which reported 25 Islamic State group militants

were killed.

Davis said the estimate was “grossly exaggerated,” but he did not provide a number of enemy casualties in the raid.

Additionally, Davis denied local Syrian news reports that claimed American commandos had arrested several Islamic State fighters in the raid and freed hostages.

The special operators were able to gather useful intelligence from the raid, Davis said.

“The goal of the Expeditionary Targeting Force ... is to be able to provide an additive capability to [the anti-Islamic State group coalition] to not just kill people with airstrikes and hit targets with airstrikes, but to have a force on the ground — a special operations force — to use to gain intelligence,” Davis said.

Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced the formation of the Expeditionary Targeting Force in December 2015. He described the unit as a group of about 200 Iraq-based commandos tasked with conducting raids, freeing hostages, gathering intelligence and capturing Islamic State leaders.

The ETF’s operations are rarely publicized. Davis said Monday that the unit routinely conducts raids to gather intelligence or to target top terrorist leaders in Iraq and Syria.

“We’ve done them before and we’ll do them again,” he said. “The U.S. and the entire anti-[Islamic State group] coalition will continue to pursue [Islamic State] leaders wherever they are, to ensure the stability of the region and the safety of our homelands.”

Activists: Raid seemed to target ‘important figure’

BEIRUT — Syrian activists reported what appeared to be a U.S.-led special operations raid on Islamic State militants in eastern Syria.

Omar Abou Leila, who runs Deir Ezzor 24, an underground group reporting from Islamic State-held territory, said four helicopters landed in the desert between the Islamic State-held cities of Deir el-Zour and Raqqa on Sunday. Commandos set up checkpoints and intercepted a vehicle carrying several Islamic State militants, killing all of them and flying off with the bodies, he said.

“It’s an operation that apparently targeted an important figure,” Abou Leila told The Associated Press from Germany, where he is based.

Local witnesses said at least some of the commandos spoke Arabic. There was no immediate comment from the U.S.-led coalition.

Meanwhile, Syrian President Bashar Assad said in remarks published Monday that he was prepared “to negotiate everything” at upcoming talks in Kazakhstan, seeking to cast himself as a peacemaker after his forces recaptured Aleppo.

From The Associated Press

Iraqi troops reach bank of Tigris River in Mosul

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraqi troops in Mosul have battled their way to the Tigris River running through the center of town, marking a milestone in the nearly 3-month-old offensive aimed at reclaiming the northern city from Islamic State militants.

Lt. Gen. Abdul-Amir Rasheed Yar Allah said special forces reached the river late Sunday and now control the eastern side of one of the city's five bridges, all of which have been disabled by U.S.-led airstrikes in support of the offensive.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said the recent advances were "big achievements for all the factions of the Iraqi security forces."

"Thank God, our forces are liberating neighborhood after neighborhood," he said Monday in a joint news conference with his Jordanian counterpart in Baghdad.

In Mosul, Maj. Gen. Sami al-Aridi, of the special forces, told The Associated Press that troops were battling the Islamic State group in the Baladiyah and Sukar neighborhoods after driv-

ing the extremists out of Muthana and Rifaq the day before. He said Iraqi forces repelled an overnight attack, killing 37 militants, without elaborating.

The offensive resumed last month after a two-week lull due to Islamic State resistance and bad weather. Since then, Iraqi forces have recaptured new areas in the city's eastern half after receiving reinforcements.

Mosul is Iraq's second-largest city and the extremist group's last major urban bastion in the country. Iraqi special forces have done most of the fighting within the city, while Iraqi troops have advanced on it from different sides. Kurdish forces and Shiite militias have driven Islamic State fighters from surrounding areas and have sought to cut off militants' escape routes.

Mosul fell to the Islamic State group in the summer of 2014, when the extremists swept across much of northern and western Iraq. Iraqi forces gradually have retaken most of that territory during the past three years, and outside of Mosul, the militants are largely confined to smaller towns and villages.

Israeli police arrest 9 after fatal truck attack

JERUSALEM — Israeli police stepped up security measures in Arab neighborhoods in east Jerusalem on Monday, searching trucks and arresting relatives of the Palestinian truck driver who rammed his vehicle into a crowd of Israeli soldiers at a Jerusalem tourist spot the previous day, killing four soldiers and injuring 17 others.

Nine people were arrested, five of them relatives of Fadi Qunbar, 28, the attacker. All arrested were from the Jabel Mukaber neighborhood of east Jerusalem where Qunbar lived, police said.

Police forces checked drivers and searched parked cars and trucks throughout east Jerusalem in an effort to prevent copycat attacks, police spokes-

man Micky Rosenfeld said.

An investigation is underway as to how Qunbar managed to make his way on Sunday to the Jerusalem promenade where the soldiers gathered; who owned the truck he drove; and whether he planned his attack ahead of time, Rosenfeld said.

Police used concrete slabs to block some entrances of Jabel Mukaber, and a police officer checked cars leaving it. Israeli special forces dismantled a mourning tent erected to receive visitors paying respects for Qunbar, who was fatally shot at the scene of the attack. Overnight, police say, Palestinians shot fireworks at Israeli forces at a police post near the neighborhood.

From The Associated Press

North Korea says it can launch an ICBM 'anytime, anywhere'

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea warned it can launch an intercontinental ballistic missile "anytime and anywhere," the latest salvo in a war of words over the communist state's nuclear-weapons program.

The statement, carried Sunday on the state-run Korean Central News Agency, came a week after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said preparations to test an ICBM have "reached the final stage."

That prompted U.S. President-elect Donald Trump to respond by tweeting, "It won't happen!"

KCNA, quoting a spokesman for North Korea's Foreign Ministry, stepped up the threat.

"The ICBM will be launched anytime and anywhere determined by the supreme headquarters of [North Korea]," the news agency reported.

It didn't mention Trump by name but appeared to allude to his incoming administration.

"Anyone who wants to deal with [North Korea] would be well advised to secure a new way of thinking after having clear understanding of it," KCNA said.

The message blamed the U.S. for antagonizing Pyongyang and forcing it to develop the long-range weapon in what it insists is self-defense.

It also denounced remarks by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who said North Korea has shown a "qualitative improvement in their capabilities" and vowed that Washington would maintain sustained pressure and sanctions against the country.

It's unclear how close the North is to achieving its goal

of developing a nuclear-tipped ICBM that could reach the U.S. mainland. Experts have said Pyongyang could have one ready as early as 2020, but it has displayed such a missile only during military parades and has not flight-tested one.

The country also has demonstrated clear technical progress with an unprecedented number of ballistic missile tests and two underground nuclear explosions last year.

U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter promised to shoot down any missiles that threaten the U.S. or its allies, although he stressed that would not include missiles test-fired into the sea.

"We only ... would shoot them down, and that is use an interceptive for that purpose, if it was threatening. That is, if it were coming towards our territory or the territory of our friends and allies," he said in an interview this past weekend on NBC's "Meet the Press."

South Korea's Ministry of National Defense said Monday it is closely monitoring the possible launch of road-mobile KN-08 or KN-14 missiles. It also warned the North would face retaliation and harsher sanctions for any provocation.

South Korea's Unification Ministry, which oversees inter-Korean affairs, called the warning an effort to persuade the U.S. to change its policies in dealing with the North, which rely heavily on sanctions and diplomatic pressure.

"It seems to have been put out as a means of pressure on the U.S. We see they have the intention of changing U.S. attitudes (toward Pyongyang) ... and an intention to shift the blame on others when they stage future launches," ministry spokesman Jeong Joon-hee told a media briefing.

Senate to meet on waiver for Mattis

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Gen. James “Mad Dog” Mattis will get his shot this week to convince senators that he should be President-elect Donald Trump’s defense secretary.

The retired Marine general will testify Thursday to the Senate Armed Services Committee, which could make a recommendation on his nomination and tee it up for a final Senate vote this month.

Mattis, 66, will almost certainly face questions about the Russian election hacking and how his positions on defense align with Trump’s. He might also be grilled by Democrats on the committee who worry about a recently retired general taking over the Pentagon’s top civilian role.

To become defense secretary, Mattis will need a special waiver from Congress because he has not been out of active-duty for at least seven years. The Senate committee planned to hold a hearing Tuesday, ahead of the confirmation hearing, on

civilian control of the military.

Still, the general’s nomination was shaping up as a relatively easy sell despite the concerns, and Republicans were hoping he could be confirmed right after Trump takes office Jan. 20.

Trump called the retired general, who has cultivated a reputation as a warrior monk, “the closest thing we have to Gen. George Patton of our time.”

Mattis, who commanded infantry troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, remains widely popular among lawmakers and troops. He spent last week meeting with senators on the Armed Services Committee and drew praise from Republicans such as Ted Cruz, of Texas, and Joni Ernst, a combat veteran from Iowa.

But Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., the committee chairman, and Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., are likely to raise tough questions for Mattis over the Russian interference in the presidential election following a hearing last week with top U.S. intelligence officials that underscored the cyber-

threat. Russian President Vladimir Putin waged a campaign through hacking and propaganda aimed to influence the election in Trump’s favor, according to an unclassified report by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released Friday.

Mattis has been firm against Russia in the past, calling it a “predatory state” that destroys the sovereignty of other countries in an August article that he co-authored. But Trump has called for a warming of Russia relations, tweeting last week that only “stupid” people oppose such a move.

The possible divide could put the general in the difficult position of clashing with his future president during sworn testimony to the Senate committee.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell upped the pressure Sunday during an interview on “Meet the Press.” He said Mattis is not in “any way conflicted about the view that the Russians are not our friends and are a big problem.”

But Mattis must first get over the special waiver hurdle.

The general retired in 2013 and needs the waiver from Congress exempting him from a law requiring any defense secretary to have been out of active-duty service for at least seven years.

The law is meant to create a firewall to ensure the military remains under civilian control. If confirmed, Mattis, who was commander of U.S. Central Command before retiring, would be the first defense secretary to receive a waiver since Gen. George C. Marshall served as secretary in the early 1950s.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., has steadfastly opposed the waiver and other Democrats have voiced concern.

Another Democrat on the committee, Sen. Richard Blumenthal, of Connecticut, said he was impressed by Mattis during a meeting last week. But Blumenthal also said civilian military control is a “bedrock principle critical to our democracy” and he will carefully weigh whether a waiver is appropriate.

East Coast in deep freeze; West prepares for flooding

Associated Press

As the East Coast waits to thaw out from a weekend icy mess, another storm is bringing rain and the potential of the worst flooding in more than a decade to the West Coast.

At least four deaths have been blamed on the East Coast storm, which dropped more than a foot of snow in southern New England.

Out West, forecasters are warning of heavy rains in northern California and Nevada through the middle of the week along with an ice storm in Oregon.

In the East, the worst, lingering problems were expected in North Carolina, where up to 10 inches of snow and sleet fell in places Saturday. The deep freeze followed.

Forecasters predict temperatures won’t get above freezing

in much of the state before Tuesday afternoon, a big problem in a place where officials depend on usually mild weather to melt away the ice and snow on less-traveled routes. One person died in Montgomery County when a car slid off icy Interstate 73/74 into a tree Sunday morning, Gov. Roy Cooper said.

The other three deaths related to the storm occurred in Virginia, Georgia and Kentucky, and officials said they were the result of cars traveling on roads made slick by ice. Other traffic deaths were being investigated to determine if weather played a factor.

Early Monday, low temperatures in North Carolina ranged from zero in Reidsville and Roxboro near the Virginia state line to 29 degrees at Cape Hatteras.

The National Weather Ser-

vice had winter weather advisories in effect for 75 of North Carolina’s 100 counties until late Monday morning. Driving conditions were dangerous because of leftover snow and ice and cold temperatures.

There was one happy ending. Two hikers missing for more than a day in the frigid North Carolina mountains without food and water and only a small fire for warmth were rescued from waist-high snow. A helicopter using a tool that can detect heat found the hikers late Saturday afternoon in the Shining Rock Wilderness area about 25 miles southwest of Asheville. Cooper said rescuers got to the men about two hours later, just in time to save them.

School systems across North Carolina went ahead early Sunday and canceled Monday’s classes in part because of icy roads, but also because of bitter

cold temperatures making it dangerous for children without proper clothes to wait for buses and difficult to keep buildings warm.

Many schools and government offices were closed Monday. North Carolina State University also canceled classes.

When the thaw does come later in the week, it will be quick. Highs in the South are forecast in the 70s on Friday.

In the West, forecasters said flooding from the storm moving onshore and a second predicted bout of heavy rain Tuesday could cause flooding in northern California and Nevada similar to problems in 2005 and 2006 that sent 5 feet of water into warehouses in Sparks, Nev., and hazardous waste barrels floating away.

Trump's nominees prepare to face grilling in Senate

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Donald Trump and his Cabinet picks are preparing to face public questioning over their business conflicts, their approach to Russia and other issues during a critical week of confirmation hearings and the president-elect's first news conference in nearly six months.

Trump plunged Monday into another fight with a high-profile critic, this time in a three-part tweet responding to actress Meryl Streep's denunciation of him from the stage of the Golden Globe awards.

Trump called the Academy Award winner who had supported Democrat Hillary Clinton "one of the most over-rated actresses in Hollywood" and "a Hillary flunky who lost big."

Bigger issues await the president-elect and at least nine of his Cabinet and other nominees this week. He becomes the nation's 45th president on Jan. 20.

His nominees to be the nation's top diplomat, lead law enforcement officer and head of homeland security are among at least nine picks set to parade before Senate committees beginning Tuesday. A day later, Trump faces reporters about how he'll disentangle his global empire from his administration, and more. Trump has pledged to step away from the Trump Organization during his time in office, but has yet to

say specifically how he will do that.

Perhaps the most pressing issue is how Trump responds to the U.S. intelligence community's briefing Friday on its conclusion that Russia meddled in the election to help him become president.

Trump's incoming chief of staff, Reince Priebus, said Sunday that Trump indeed has accepted that Russia was responsible for the hacking, which targeted the Democratic National Committee and a top aide to former rival Hillary Clinton.

"He's not denying that entities in Russia were behind this particular campaign," Priebus said in an appearance on a Sunday television news show.

Intelligence officials allege that Moscow directed a series of hacks in order to help Trump win the White House in the race against Clinton. Trump has expressed skepticism about Russia's role and declined to say whether he agrees that the meddling was done on his behalf. He's also said improving relations with Russia would be a good thing and that only "stupid" people would disagree.

"My suspicion is these hopes will be dashed pretty quickly," said Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky. "The Russians are clearly a big adversary. And they demonstrated it by trying to mess around in our election."

Poll: Most Americans view Obama favorably

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More than half of Americans view President Barack Obama favorably as he leaves office, a new poll shows, but Americans remain deeply divided over his legacy. Fewer than half of Americans say they're better off eight years after his election or that Obama brought the country together.

An Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll conducted after the 2016 election illuminates one of the key contradictions of Obama's presidency. By and large, Americans like him. Yet Obama has been unable to translate that approval to many of his policies or to parlay his popularity into fulfillment of his goals.

Fifty-seven percent of Americans said they view Obama favorably, while 37 percent said they have an unfavorable view. Just over half said Obama's presidency has been great or good.

Those figures contrast sharply with how Americans viewed Obama just a few years ago. In December 2014, the month after Democrats lost control of the Senate, just 41 percent said they viewed Obama favorably in an AP-GfK poll.

Did Obama keep his promises? He did not, in the minds of 2 of 3

Americans. Forty-four percent say he tried to make good but failed, more than the 22 percent who say he didn't keep promises at all or the 32 percent who said he did keep them.

Those figures reflect the frustrations felt even among many longtime Obama supporters about the lack of progress on major priorities such as overhauling the nation's immigration laws, enacting gun control measures and shuttering the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"He acted very presidential, but he just couldn't get things done," said Dale Plath, a retired sales manager from Mason City, Iowa. He said he voted for Obama the first time, voted against him the second, and this year, Plath said, "I voted for change, frankly" — in the form of Donald Trump.

"Yes, I understand the Republicans were against Obama," Plath said. "But there have been other presidents in the same situation, and they were able to pull through."

Still, Obama will exit the White House in far better shape than his predecessor, President George W. Bush, who was viewed favorably by just 40 percent of Americans in polling conducted by Gallup as his presidency closed in January 2009.

Suspect in Fla. airport shooting appears in court

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — The Iraq War veteran held in the fatal shooting of five people inside Fort Lauderdale's airport answered questions in a clear voice Monday as he was appointed public defenders and told he could face the death penalty.

Esteban Santiago, 26, appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge Alicia Valle, who ordered him held until his next hearings.

Shackled in a red jumpsuit in the heavily guarded federal courtroom, Santiago answered mostly yes or no to questions, and told the judge he understands the charges,

which include committing violence against people at an international airport resulting in death, and two firearms offenses.

She told him the death penalty could apply.

"We are telling you the maximum penalty allowed by law so that you understand the seriousness of the charges," the judge said.

He said he had been in the Army, where he made about \$15,000 per year. He mentioned expenses including \$560 in monthly rent, plus phone and other utility bills. He said he owns no property and doesn't have

a vehicle. He said he had worked for a security company, Signal 88, in Anchorage, Alaska, until November, making \$2,100 per month, but currently only had \$5 to \$10 in the bank.

Valle set a detention hearing for Jan. 17, followed by an arraignment for entering a plea for Jan. 23.

Santiago has been in custody since Friday's shooting at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport. The FBI said Santiago flew on a one-way ticket aboard a Delta flight from Anchorage to Fort Lauderdale.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Cat that fell from car on highway found alive

MA BOSTON — A cat that fell from a moving car on a Massachusetts highway on Christmas Day has been found alive.

Owner Erin McCutcheon was taking 6-year-old Juno from Boston to her mother's house in New Hampshire when it slipped out of its carrier. McCutcheon's boyfriend, James Norton, opened and re-shut their rattling van door, and the cat tumbled onto Interstate 93. The couple spent days searching for the cat.

The Boston Globe reported electricians doing maintenance work at I-93 on Wednesday found the cat crouched and hiding 80 feet in the air on a steel girder that runs under the highway in Charlestown.

A worker lured the cat with food before grabbing it and taking it to safety.

The electricians recognized the cat from a poster McCutcheon and Norton had put up and contacted them.

Couple charged after overdosing at eatery

OH SHARONVILLE — Police said a married couple has been charged with child endangering after overdosing in front of their two small children at a White Castle restaurant in Southwest Ohio.

The Cincinnati Enquirer reported that police said Marc Williams, 37, and Jessica Williams, 28, of Lebanon, had to be revived after overdosing on heroin Friday at a White Castle in Sharonville with a 3-year-old and 9-month-old at their table.

Police were called to the restaurant after Marc Williams slumped against a window and Jessica Williams fell to the floor. A manager took the children to

an office in the restaurant.

The couple was each charged with two counts of child endangering and one count of illegal use or possession of drug paraphernalia.

Fishing boat rescues crew of sinking vessel

OR WARRENTON — The Coast Guard said the crew of one fishing vessel rescued the crew of another when the latter boat capsized and sank near the mouth of the Columbia River.

Five people were plunged into the water about 4:30 a.m. Saturday when the Star King, a 55-foot stern trawler homeported in Astoria, Ore., started listing hard to starboard and suddenly capsized.

The crabbing boat Sea Balad was nearby and quickly plucked the Star King's crew from the water. Coast Guard responders then arrived and took the five to Ilwaco, Wash., to be checked out.

Man dies trying to jump onto a moving train

PA PHILADELPHIA — Officials said a man who was rushing to catch a subway train in Philadelphia died after trying to jump onto the moving train.

SEPTA Assistant General Manager Fran Kelly told The Philadelphia Inquirer the doors closed before the man could make it aboard early Saturday at the Olney Transportation Center. He said the man then tried getting onto the train by jumping from the platform onto the section between two cars. The man fell and landed on the tracks.

The victim wasn't discovered until the next train came and ran over his body. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

Authorities did not immediately know his identity.

Escaped prisoner found after 10-day manhunt

NY NEW YORK — Police in New York arrested an escaped prisoner after a 10-day manhunt.

The prisoner, Daniel Ortiz, 31, was arrested Saturday in Penn Station. Ortiz escaped from officers guarding him at a hospital following his Dec. 29 arrest on a shoplifting charge. He was at the hospital being treated for cuts.

Officials said an officer was on the phone when he was supposed to be watching Ortiz. That officer has been suspended until an internal review is completed.

Amtrak police officers patrolling Penn Station on Saturday morning saw Ortiz acting suspiciously. He reportedly told them he was the man who fled police custody. He also faces an escape charge.

Hiking challenge is completed in a year

NH LITTLETON — A Vermont woman is believed to be the first person to complete an ambitious White Mountains hiking challenge in a single year.

The Concord Monitor reported that Sue Johnston said she's hiked all 48 of New Hampshire's 4,000-foot mountains in every single month of the year in 2016.

The challenge is known as the Grid, and it takes most hikers years to complete. Completing the Grid requires hiking each mountain in every month — for example, hiking Mount Eisenhower in January 1999, in February 2005, in March 2016, in April 2017, etc.

Johnston, 51, is from Dan-

ville, Vt., but moved to New Hampshire to complete the challenge.

Man guilty of killing neighbor over mower

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A Minneapolis man has pleaded guilty to killing his neighbor after a dispute over a broken lawn mower.

The plea agreement calls for Edward Holzinger, 61, to serve nearly 22 years in prison on one count of second-degree intentional murder. Authorities said Holzinger shot Bruce Brown, 47, twice in the chest on Aug. 9.

Court documents show that the two men had been feuding for days after Holzinger let Brown use his lawn mower and then accused him of breaking it.

Brown's wife and three young children were in the courtroom Friday when Holzinger pleaded guilty.

4 hikers are rescued during mountain trek

NM ALBUQUERQUE — Authorities said four hikers were rescued from the East Mountains in Albuquerque.

The Bernalillo County Sheriff's Office said two groups of hikers were reported lost Saturday.

KOB-TV reported that three of the four people were located by air and had supplies dropped to them. Search-and-rescue crews had to go in by foot to bring them down from the mountains.

Authorities said the fourth hiker managed to make it to the tram and ride it down to get help.

From wire reports

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Rodgers' magic sparks Packers

Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — To beat Dallas next week, the Green Bay Packers figure that they'll need to build a big lead to make the Cowboys one-dimensional on offense.

The Packers look as if they can beat anybody with the way quarterback Aaron Rodgers is throwing the ball, even if they could be without receiver Jordy Nelson with a rib injury.

Rodgers overcame a sluggish start and finished with four touchdown passes, including a momentum-swinging 42-yard score on a Hail Mary throw to Randall Cobb at the end of the second quarter, and Green Bay advanced to the divisional round with a 38-13 win over the New York Giants on Sunday.

Next up is a trip to Dallas on Jan. 15 in a rematch of a Week 6 matchup won by the Cowboys, 30-16.

"Hopefully, we can take this momentum down to Dallas and steal us a win. We'll see," Packers linebacker Clay Matthews

said.

Rodgers was 25 of 40 for 362 yards, continuing a remarkable run of quarterback play that helped the Packers win their final six games of the regular season to take the NFC North. Cobb finished with five receptions for 116 yards and three scores.

For much of the first half, the Giants' defense flustered the two-time NFL MVP. They got pressure on Rodgers and the secondary blanketed the Packers' talented receiving corps. A few boos even rained down from the stands after New York built a 6-0 lead.

As it turned out, Rodgers was just getting started.

"We hit a Hail Mary. That got us going," Rodgers said.

Green Bay scored two touchdowns in the final 2:20 of the second quarter, punctuated by another astonishing throw by Rodgers.

"They boxed us out better than we played it," Giants coach Ben McAdoo said. "It was a heck of a throw, heck of a catch."

The Packers outscored the Giants 24-0 over the game's final 20 minutes. They might need to get out in front a little sooner next week with the way that the Cowboys can control the clock behind running back Ezekiel Elliott.

"We've got to start faster," Rodgers said when asked about how the Packers need to improve following the Week 6 loss to Dallas. "We've got to start fast and make them as one-dimensional as possible."

As for the Giants, they exited quickly from the playoffs after returning to the postseason for the first time in five years.

"There were opportunities to score points, we didn't get it done. We need more, we need better," McAdoo said.

It will have to wait until next season.

Other notes and takeaways from the game:

Hail Mary: With the ball on the Giants 42, Rodgers took the snap with 6 seconds left. He rolled to his right before heaving a throw from about the Packers

47. Cobb somehow got behind three defensive backs near the back of the end zone to haul in the pass, getting both feet down before falling out of bounds. The Giants looked stunned, just like how the Detroit Lions and Arizona Cardinals looked last season after Rodgers pulled off similar feats.

Watered down: Odell Beckham Jr., finished with four catches and 28 yards on 11 targets. The Giants' other top receivers, Sterling Shepard and Victor Cruz, also didn't get into the end zone either against a banged-up Packers secondary. The receivers were plagued by drops — not the kind of outing that the trio envisioned after taking heat from some fans and media for a trip to Miami on their day off to celebrate a regular-season-ending win over Washington.

"There was nothing that could connect seven days ago to today and how we came out and played and executed," Beckham said. "There's just nothing in the world. That's not realistic."

'Big Three' power Pittsburgh to win

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Le'Veon Bell spent the last two Januarys watching helplessly while the Pittsburgh Steelers tried to make a deep postseason run without him. The slippery running back made up for lost time Sunday against the Miami Dolphins.

So did Ben Roethlisberger and Antonio Brown, the other members of Pittsburgh's "Big Three" together in the playoffs for the first time.

Pounding away relentlessly at a defense that hardly seemed interested in stopping him at frigid Heinz Field, Bell ran for a franchise postseason record 167 yards and two scores as the Steelers overwhelmed the beaten-up and mistake-prone Miami Dolphins 30-12 on Sunday.

"We wanted to go out there and make a statement," Bell said.

Bell, Brown and Roethlisberger, who wore a walking boot on his right foot afterwards, more than wiped away the bitter taste from a 30-15 whipping at the hands of the Dolphins in mid-October. Given a shot

at redemption, Pittsburgh didn't let it go to waste. The Steelers (12-5) led by two touchdowns before the game was 10 minutes old on long touchdown passes from Roethlisberger to Brown. Miami never got closer than 11.

"Le'Veon was beastly," said Brown, who finished with five receptions for 124 yards and the two scores. "All day, controlling the line of scrimmage, just running guys over and finding a way to put the ball in the end zone. Any time he's playing like that, we're going to be a hard team to beat."

Certainly, at least, teams like the Dolphins (10-7). Given a chance to prove their first playoff berth in eight years wasn't a fluke despite being outgained and outscored during the regular season, Miami never found a rhythm. The problem wasn't the single digit wind chill or a vicious hit absorbed by quarterback Matt Moore in the second quarter as much as it was the Steelers.

Pittsburgh sacked Moore five times, forced turnovers on three consecutive possessions in the middle of the game, and

never really let the Dolphins up off the deck.

"It's hard to win when you turn the ball over," said Moore, who completed 29 of 36 passes for 289 yards with a touchdown and an interception. "In the playoffs, you can't make mistakes and that's on me."

Pittsburgh (12-5) ran off its eighth straight victory to set up a visit to AFC West champion Kansas City (12-4) next Sunday. The Steelers rolled by the Chiefs 43-14 on Oct. 2.

"We have to understand the same passion and dedication that we put in this week to beat Miami, that's how Kansas City is going to try to beat us," Bell said.

At least Bell will be around for the challenge. He missed the playoffs each of the last two seasons with knee injuries. All he did in his postseason debut was break Hall of Famer Franco Harris' team mark for yards rushing in a playoff game. Harris ran for 158 yards in a Super Bowl win over Minnesota 42 years ago. Bell reached that total by the end of the third quarter.

Purdue ends Wisconsin's winning streak

Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Caleb Swanigan and No. 20 Purdue beat No. 13 Wisconsin at its own game Sunday.

The Boilermakers played better defense, were more efficient on offense and even bested the Badgers above the rim.

Swanigan scored 18 points and grabbed 13 rebounds, but it was Purdue's disciplined defenders that finally created an obstacle the Badgers couldn't overcome in a 66-55 victory. Wisconsin had won nine straight.

"We felt we could play really good defense against them because of the way we matched up with them," Swanigan said. "We wanted them to shoot over our size all night."

The Boilermakers (14-3, 3-1) certainly made it difficult on the Badgers, holding them 39.0 percent shooting and a dismal 2-for-14 on three-pointers. The threes made and percentage were season lows.

Plus, Purdue had a 34-22 rebounding edge against one of the nation's best in that category.

To coach Matt Painter, the numbers looked picture perfect.

The Boilermakers have won nine of 10 and three straight in the series — matching the school's longest winning streak against the Badgers (13-3, 2-1) in eight years. For now, it also puts them on top of the conference standings.

Ethan Happ had 17 points and five rebounds for Wisconsin and Nigel Hayes added 10, but without more help they couldn't keep the score close.

"We knew Happ and Hayes were guys who were going to get lots of opportunities," Painter said. "We just tried to keep them in front, to the best of our ability, and make them score in front of us."

And the gritty Boilermakers had an answer for everything.

After Wisconsin made its first five shots to start the second half, closing to 40-36 with 14:35 left, it had a chance to cut the lead to two with an open

layup from D'Mitrik Trice.

Instead, the ball rolled off the rim, Alex Illikainen committed a foul and the Boilermakers responded with 12 straight points to make it 52-36 with 10:16 to play. The Badgers didn't get closer than 11 the rest of the way.

"You have to make shots against a team like this. Historically, that's been our key," Badgers coach Greg Gard said. "Especially against a team that has that much presence inside, you have to be able to counter from the perimeter."

No. 14 North Carolina 107, N.C. State 56: Justin Jackson scored 21 points and the host Tar Heels ran off a 20-0 first-half run and routed the Wolfpack.

Joel Berry II added 19 points for North Carolina (14-3, 2-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) in the game postponed from Saturday night because of snow and ice.

North Carolina beat the Wolfpack (12-4, 1-2) for the 20th time in 22 games.

And the Tar Heels did it in an unexpectedly lopsided fashion, jumping to a 26-4 lead and pushing that to 56-23 by halftime on Jackson's three-pointer just before the horn.

N.C. State (12-4, 1-2) came in with momentum after blowing out No. 21 Virginia Tech behind a triple-double from star freshman point guard Dennis Smith Jr. But Smith got in quick foul trouble Sunday, while the Wolfpack committed a bevy of turnovers that fueled the Tar Heels' attack.

No. 4 UCLA 89, Stanford 75: Lonzo Ball scored 21 points and the host Bruins led all the way in beating Stanford.

Bryce Alford added 17 points and TJ Leaf had 15 points and 10 rebounds to help the Bruins (16-1, 3-1 Pac-12) improve to 10-0 at Pauley Pavilion. They hit 11 three-pointers, led by Ball and Alford with four apiece.

Michael Humphrey had a career-high 27 points and 14 rebounds before fouling out in the last two minutes for Stanford (8-8, 0-4).

The Bruins dominated the

first half, shooting 53 percent on their way to a 48-30 lead at the break. They made eight three-pointers in the half

No. 11 Virginia 79, Wake Forest 62: London Perrantes scored 24 points and host Virginia used a 10-0 second-half run to pull away from Wake Forest, sending the Demon Deacons to their 25th consecutive road loss in Atlantic Coast Conference play.

Perrantes scored all but five of his points in the second half as Virginia (12-3, 2-2) rebounded from back-to-back losses to No. 12 Florida State and at Pittsburgh. Marial Shayok added 17 points.

John Collins scored 16 points, and Bryant Crawford had 15 for the Demon Deacons (10-6, 1-3). Wake Forest is 0-20 in conference road games under third-year coach Danny Manning.

California 74, No. 25 USC 73: At Los Angeles, Ivan Rabb scored 17 points, including the go-ahead free throws with five seconds left, and had a key block at the buzzer to lift the Bears past the Trojans.

With his team up one, Rabb blocked Jordan McLaughlin's driving layup at the buzzer in the Bears' first road victory over a ranked opponent in three years.

Charlie Moore added 16 points for Cal (11-5, 2-2 Pac-12) McLaughlin and Chimezi Metu each scored 20 points to lead Southern California (15-2, 2-2).

Navy 67, Colgate 55: Tom Lacey scored 14 points and grabbed 11 rebounds and host Navy picked up its first Patriot League win over Colgate to snap a four-game losing streak.

Lacey posted his third double-double this season. Hasan Abdullah added 14 points, five rebounds, five assists and five steals with Shawn Anderson scoring 14 points for the Midshipmen (6-10, 1-3).

Tom Rivard scored a season-high 21 points with eight rebounds for the Raiders (3-14, 1-3), who lost their third in a row.

Navy led 27-16 at halftime, the fewest points it has given up

in a first half this season, and led by its largest margin, 21, with 8:38 left after George Kiernan scored all of his points, including two 3-pointers, in a personal 9-0 run for a 50-29 lead.

Army 66, Loyola Maryland 57: Jordan Fox scored 14 points, John Emezie had 13 and host Army ended a three-game losing streak.

Fox had two free throws to cap a 13-0 run to give Army a 20-6 lead with 7:49 left in the first half. The Black Knights led 29-19 at the half and Fox converted a 3-point play making it 37-21 early in the second.

The closest the Greyhounds would get after that was 45-40 on a 3-pointer by Ian Langendoerfer and his two free throws with 11:01 to play but Emezie answered with two quick baskets and added a threath 8:54 and it was back to a 10-point game.

Luke Morrison added 11 points for Army (7-9, 1-3 Patriot League), which went 7 of 19 behind the arc and made 13 of 14 free throws.

Cam Gregory had 16 points and Andre Walker 14 for Loyola (8-7, 2-2), which had won four of five.

Maryland 77, Michigan 70: Justin Jackson scored 15 points, and Maryland's freshmen kept their poise in the second half, holding off host Michigan.

The Terrapins (14-2, 2-1 Big Ten) led by 11 in the first half, but Michigan (11-5, 1-2) had the deficit down to one early in the second. Every time the Wolverines were on the verge of moving ahead, however, Maryland had an answer. The Terps went 10-for-15 from three-point range.

With three freshman starters — Jackson, Cowan and Kevin Huerter — the Terrapins executed impressively throughout the second half. They made their final five shots from the field while Michigan was trying to rally.

Boudreau gets win in Anaheim return

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Matt Dumba and Jared Spurgeon scored early in the second period as the Minnesota Wild beat the Ducks 2-1 Sunday in coach Bruce Boudreau's triumphant return to Anaheim.

Boudreau was fired by the Ducks after their first-round playoff exit last year despite leading Anaheim to the past four Pacific Division titles and Game 7 of the 2015 Western Conference finals against Nashville.

Boudreau has been fired twice for playoff failures in his NHL career despite one of the most impressive regular-season records in hockey history. He has turned his third team into an early-season Stanley Cup contender, including 14 wins in Minnesota's last 16 games.

"The first one is always nice when you come back, because it becomes more normal every time after that," Boudreau said. "But at the same time, you're usually pretty nervous. Your players all know you want

to win, so it's nice to see that they played as well as they did."

Devan Dubnyk made 23 saves for the Wild, while Ryan Kesler scored and John Gibson stopped 34 shots for the Ducks, whose three-game winning streak ended.

Blue Jackets 2, Flyers 1 (OT): Nick Foligno scored 2:33 into overtime to lift host Columbus.

The Flyers' Brayden Schenn tied it with 17 seconds left to send the game into the extra period.

Foligno then lifted a shot over Philadelphia goalie Steve Mason's shoulder to get the win for the Blue Jackets, their first since a 16-game winning streak ended with two straight losses.

Blackhawks 5, Predators 2: Ryan Hartman scored off a goalmouth scramble in the third period and tacked on two empty-netters to help host Chicago beat banged-up Nashville.

Artemi Panarin and Niklas Hjalmarsson also scored for the Blackhawks while Patrick Kane added three assists, running

his team-best total to 32 in 43 games, and Corey Crawford made 25 saves.

Hurricanes 4, Bruins 3 (OT): Sebastian Aho's second goal of the game, 1:34 into overtime, lifted Carolina over visiting Boston.

Derek Ryan and Jay McClement also scored for the Hurricanes and Camm Ward finished with 32 saves. Carolina won two of the three meetings between the teams, with all three going beyond regulation.

Penguins 6, Lightning 2: Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 28 shots in his fifth straight win, leading host Pittsburgh past Tampa Bay.

Connor Sheary had a goal and an assist and Eric Fehr, Chris Kunitz, Scott Wilson, Phil Kessel and Kris Letang also scored for the Penguins. Sidney Crosby and Matt Cullen each had two assists.

Senators 5, Oilers 3: Mark Stone had a goal and two assists and Mike Condon stopped 35 shots as Ottawa beat visiting Edmonton.

Harden, Rockets top Raptors, win 8th straight

Associated Press

TORONTO — James Harden had 40 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds for his 10th triple-double of the season to help the Houston Rockets beat the Toronto Raptors 129-122 on Sunday night for their eighth straight NBA victory.

Montrezl Harrell added 28 points on 12-of-13 shooting in 25 minutes, and fellow reserve Eric Gordon had 19 points to help Houston win consecutive road games over the Raptors for the first time.

DeMar DeRozan had 36 points for the Raptors, setting a career high with his 18th 30-plus-point game of the season. DeMarre Carroll tied a career high with 26 points and set a career high with six 3-pointers on 10 attempts.

Down 99-95 entering the fourth quarter, the Rockets went on a 15-0 run to take an 11-point lead. DeRozan's run of 12 consecutive points for the Raptors cut into that advantage, but Toronto could get no closer than five points.

Cavaliers 120, Suns 116:

LeBron James scored 12 of his 28 points in the fourth quarter as visiting Cleveland fought off Phoenix down the stretch.

Kyrie Irving added 27 points and Kevin Love 25 for the Cavaliers. They led by as many as 22 in the first half and 20 early in the third quarter.

Pistons 125, Trail Blazers 124 (2OT): Kentavious Caldwell-Pope hit a three-pointer with 9.4 seconds left as Detroit outlasted host Portland in a game postponed a day because of a winter storm.

Reggie Jackson led Detroit with 31 points, Andre Drummond had 28 points and 14 rebounds, and Caldwell-Pope finished with 26. The Pistons have won two straight for the first time since Dec. 2.

Warriors 117, Kings 106: Stephen Curry made five three-pointers and scored 30 points as visiting Golden State took its first lead midway through the third quarter on the way to the victory over Sacramento.

Kevin Durant had 28 points, seven rebounds, six assists and four blocks, and Klay Thomp-

son added 18 points. With their 17th straight victory after a loss, the Warriors reached 124 straight regular-season games without suffering back-to-back defeats.

Lakers 111, Magic 95: Julius Randle scored 19 points and rookie Brandon Ingram matched his career high with 17 in host Los Angeles' victory over Orlando.

It was the first time in their last 30 games the Lakers put together consecutive victories.

Grizzlies 88, Jazz 79: Mike Conley had 19 points and nine assists and Marc Gasol scored 17 points in Memphis' victory over visiting Utah.

Zach Randolph added 13 points and 11 rebounds. Gordon Hayward led the Jazz with 22 points, and George Hill added 15 points.

Clippers 98, Heat 86: J.J. Redick scored 25 points as host Los Angeles beat Miami for its fourth straight victory.

Chris Paul had 19 points, 18 assists and one turnover, and DeAndre Jordan added 18 rebounds to help keep the Clip-

pers unbeaten in the new year after they closed 2016 on a six-game skid.

Goran Dragic scored 24 points, and Hassan Whiteside had 15 points and 13 rebounds for Miami.

76ers 105, Nets 95: Joel Embiid scored 20 points and Philadelphia reached 10 victories to match its total from all last season, beating host Brooklyn.

The 76ers broke it open with a 17-2 surge in the fourth quarter to win the matchup between the NBA's two worst teams and improve to 10-25 in their first season with former lottery picks Embiid and Dario Saric.

Wizards 107, Bucks 101: Bradley Beal scored 26 points and Markieff Morris added 20 points and 10 rebounds to help visiting Washington beat Milwaukee.

Jabari Parker led Milwaukee with 28 points. Malcolm Brogdon added a career-high 22 points, and Michael Beasley scored 18 points in 16 minutes.