

STARS AND STRIPES®

Wednesday, January 11, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Trump rebukes report of Russia ties

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A defiant President-elect Donald Trump on Wednesday adamantly denied reports that Russia had obtained compromising personal and financial information about him, calling it a “tremendous blot” on the record of the intelligence community if such material had been released.

The incoming president, in his first news conference since late July, firmly chided news organizations for publishing the material late Tuesday night. Trump’s extraordinary defense, just nine days before his inauguration, dominated a highly anticipated press conference in which the president-elect also announced a new Cabinet member, detailed his plans to disentangle himself from his sprawling global business empire, gave his outlook on

the future of the “Obamacare” health care law and said he would soon nominate someone to fill the current vacancy on the Supreme Court.

“I think it’s a disgrace that information would be let out. I saw the information, I read the information outside of that meeting,” he said, a reference to a classified briefing he received from intelligence leaders.

“It’s all fake news, it’s phony stuff, it didn’t happen,” Trump said in a news conference that saw him repeatedly joust with reporters.

“It was gotten by opponents of ours.”

Asked about his relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Trump boasted that it is an improvement over what he called America’s current “horrible relationship with Russia.”

“If Putin likes Donald Trump, guess what, folks, that’s called an asset not a liability. I don’t know if I’m going to get along with Vladimir Putin — I hope I do — but there’s a good chance I won’t.”

After weeks of scoffing at reports the Russians had hacked Democratic websites to pass along emails damaging to Hillary Clinton, he said yes, he thought Russia had hacked the Democratic National Committee.

A U.S. official told The Associated Press on Tuesday night that intelligence officials had informed Trump last week about an unsubstantiated report that Russia had obtained compromising personal and financial information about him. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because the official was not allowed to publicly dis-

cuss the matter.

Trump and President Barack Obama were briefed on the intelligence community’s findings last week, the official said.

Media outlets reported on the document late Tuesday and Trump denounced it on Twitter before his news conference as “fake news,” suggesting he was being persecuted for defeating other GOP presidential hopefuls and Democrat Hillary Clinton in the election.

The dossier contains unproven information about close coordination between Trump’s inner circle and Russians about hacking into Democratic accounts as well as unproven claims about unusual sexual activities by Trump among other suggestions attributed to anonymous sources. The Associated Press has not authenticated any of the claims.

Navy has ‘flown wings off’ its aircraft, Mabus says

By TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Departing Navy Secretary Ray Mabus said Wednesday that the Navy and the Marines continue to fly their aged fleet of aircraft, though he would not say whether he supports a push by President-elect Donald Trump to buy more Hornet fighter jets as a stopgap as they wait for the new F-35 to replace them.

“We have flown the wings off of every one of our types of aircraft, not just Hornets,” Mabus said during a final interview with reporters before he leaves office.

The F/A-18C Hornet has come under scrutiny recently because several jets have crashed during training flights. In 2016, seven F/A-18C Hornet crashes resulted in the loss of the aircraft and the deaths of three Marine pilots.

But Mabus said Wednesday that the crashes did not reflect that the Hornet has become too old to fly safely. A Stars and Stripes investigation in September showed

since the Navy was forced to cut its budget, the accident rate for Hornets and Super Hornets has jumped 44 percent, according to data provided by the Naval Safety Center in Norfolk, Va.

“Flying a Hornet off a carrier, or anywhere, is an inherently dangerous business,” Mabus said. “We don’t put people up in aircraft we think are even marginal.”

The Hornets were envisioned to last 6,000 flight hours. The Hornets used by the Navy and Marines are undergoing service extensions to make the remaining aircraft fly between 8,000 and 10,000 hours, the Navy has previously said, so there’s no gap as the services transition to the F-35 joint strike fighter. As of September, the Navy had 259 Hornets, but only 55 that were ready for a mission. The Marines had reported 276 Hornets remaining, 87 of which were mission ready.

Mabus said the Hornets used by the Marines would be upgraded for extended use within in two years.

In December, President-elect Donald

Trump tweeted he had asked the Boeing Co. to “price out” substituting more F/A-18 Super Hornets for the F-35s, citing the programs cost overruns and delays. On Wednesday, in his first press conference as president-elect, Trump went after the F-35 again, saying: “It’s way, way behind schedule and many, many billions of dollars over budget. I don’t like that. We’re going to do some big things on the F-35 program and perhaps the F-18 program.”

But the Marines only operate the Hornet version of the F/A-18. The service opted not to buy the more advanced Super Hornet. Moreso, the service deployed its first squadron of F-35s to Japan on Tuesday and has a second operational squadron in Arizona. “The Marines have no backup,” Mabus said. “And so they have to have the F-35.”

When asked whether the Navy should buy more Super Hornets, he said: “I would just go on my history. We have bought F-18s every single year to make sure we don’t have a shortfall.”

After backlash on titles, Navy moves ahead with jobs reforms

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii — The Navy has backed off on a controversial decision to scrap job-oriented titles, but the effort to reform how those jobs are attained and offered is moving forward, a top Navy official said Tuesday.

“Now that we’ve got the distraction of the naming issue put aside, we’re focusing on things of substance that we wanted to tackle — the rating modernization — as well as Sailor 2025,” Vice Adm. Robert Burke, chief of Naval Personnel, told a media roundtable in Hawaii.

Sailor 2025, an overhaul of the Navy’s personnel system, is intended to modernize policies, operating systems and training.

The service announced in September it would end the 2-century-old job-ratings system that identifies sailors by occupation and rank, though many vehemently opposed the

change.

“Our sailors have many allegiances,” Burke said of the backlash. “They have allegiance to their ships, to their warfare designations, to their squadrons and to their tribe. Ratings are another tribe, and there’s tradition associated with it. I think there’s that aspect of it.”

At least for now, a yeoman first class will remain a yeoman first class, he said, adding that “everything else in the project is continuing forward.”

The Navy oversees a massive and sprawling personnel pool, with roughly 40,000 sailors entering the service each year and the same number heading out. There are about 90,000 annual permanent-change-of-station moves for operational and rotational tours alone, he said.

The Navy is hoping to attract and retain sailors through the modernization effort designed to reduce the cost and toll of turnover.

Part of that reform is aimed at

increasing flexibility so sailors don’t find themselves at career dead ends. Too many “proven performers” aren’t promoted because their job specialties are “over-manned,” he said.

The modernization would create more flexibility by managing personnel by career tracks. For example, a dental technician could qualify to be an X-ray technician after an additional month of schooling, Burke said.

The Navy is working on identifying and categorizing similar jobs.

Burke said the sailors he’s talked to have liked the proposal to change the way advancement exams are structured.

However, increased job flexibility as the norm could cause the Navy to revisit the naming issue, he said.

“For example, if you come in as a cryptologic technician and you later become an electronics technician, what do we call you?” he said.

F-35Bs on way to Japan

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A squadron of F-35B Lightning II fighters is headed for Japan to begin the jet’s first overseas mission in the Pacific.

The stealth aircraft from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 121 departed Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz., Monday bound for Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, a Marines Corps statement said Tuesday.

“The transition of VMFA-121 from MCAS Yuma to MCAS Iwakuni marks a significant milestone in the F-35B program as the Marine Corps continues to lead the way in the advancement of stealth fighter attack aircraft,” the statement said.

The jets had not arrived at Iwakuni as of Wednesday morning Japan time, said the base’s public affairs office, which did not provide information on when they would touch down. Marines fly a “short take-off vertical landing” version of the plane, which is designed to replace F/A-18 Hornet, AV-8B Harrier and EA-6B Prowler jets.

In November 2012, VMFA-121, which had flown F/A-18 Hornets, became the Marines’ first operational F-35 squadron. Since then, it has taken part in numerous drills in the U.S. and was declared combat-ready in July 2015, the statement said.

The aircraft is controversial for cost over-runs but won’t spark the safety concerns that the MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft aroused when it arrived in Japan in 2012, said Carl Baker, a defense expert at the Pacific Forum in Hawaii.

Deploying the F-35B to Iwakuni is the first phase of a plan that will boost America’s military strength in the Western Pacific, Baker said.

Navy’s new strategy: ‘Distributed lethality’

BY TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy must adapt to stay ahead of rapidly improving anti-ship weapons that could one day keep an American fleet from sailing to the aid of an ally, the top commander of U.S. surface warships said Tuesday.

That means “if it floats, it fights,” according to the Navy’s new “Surface Force Strategy,” which was released Tuesday.

The new strategy relies on “distributed lethality,” in which the fleet will network each ship in a way that any one of them could engage a threat by detecting or directing responses, or having the needed weapons for a fight. It’s a strategy designed to move away from battle plans with aircraft carriers and big-deck amphibious ships as the hubs of sea-based military responses.

The strategy seeks to make the Navy less reli-

ant on carriers as potential rivals’ anti-ship technologies improve. It’s structured to force another navy to monitor more American ships, taking some attention away from U.S. carriers.

“The world has changed and so must we,” said Vice Adm. Thomas Rowden, the top commander of the Navy’s surface fleet. “As time passes, it appears that China’s maritime ambitions are more than just regional. They have continued to upgrade both their Navy and their sea denial capability.”

Russia has made similar strides in modernizing its fleet, said Rowden, who spoke Tuesday at the Navy Surface Association annual conference in Washington.

The Navy has 274 warships ready for deployment. Under President-elect Donald Trump’s administration, the fleet could increase to 355 ships, according to the shipbuilding plan the service released in December.

US seeks 2 years in jail in leak case

The Washington Post

U.S. prosecutors on Tuesday sought a two-year prison sentence for a retired four-star Marine Corps general who served as the nation's second-ranking military officer and who pleaded guilty in October to a felony count of lying to the FBI in a classified leak investigation.

James "Hoss" Cartwright, who was vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff before he retired in 2011, admitted to falsely telling investigators he did not confirm classified information to reporters writing about the Stuxnet computer worm and a covert U.S.-Israeli cyberattack on Iran's nuclear program.

In the government's sentencing request to U.S. District Judge Richard Leon, of Washington, prosecutor Leo Wise cited the need for deterrence.

"This was not a mistake or an error in judgment," wrote Wise, who handled the case with U.S. Attorney Rod Rosenstein, of Maryland, at the request of then-Attorney General Eric Holder Jr. Those "entrusted

with highly sensitive classified information ... must understand that disclosing such information to persons not authorized to receive it has severe consequences," Wise wrote.

Cartwright, 67, requested probation, and included letters seeking to help him avoid prison from two journalists whose interviews formed the basis of charges, from the former executive editor of *The Washington Post*, and from a bipartisan group of current and former senior government officials, members of Congress, and military leaders.

The false statements charge against Cartwright carries a maximum prison term of five years. Cartwright has also filed a pardon request with the Justice Department.

Cartwright was to be sentenced Jan. 17, but Leon last week postponed it to Jan. 31, after President Barack Obama's administration leaves office.

Cartwright's sentencing is likely to stir controversy whatever his punishment.

Navy clears judge cited in ethics complaint

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

The Navy has cleared a top judge accused in an ethics complaint of lying in his previous job as prosecutor in a high-profile sexual assault case.

The ethics probe into Navy-Marine Corps Court of Criminal Appeals Judge Cmdr. Aaron Rugh was closed after the investigation "found that the available evidence failed to support a violation" of the Rules of Professional Responsibility governing Navy lawyers, according to a memo signed by Vice Adm. J.W. Crawford III, the Navy Judge Advocate.

"Accordingly, no further inquiry will be conducted and the matter is now closed," said the brief memo dated Monday and received Tuesday by *Stars and Stripes*. The memo was addressed to Kevin McDermott, the civilian lawyer who represented the sexual assault defendant, Marine Maj. Mark Thompson, a former history instructor at the U.S. Naval Academy convicted of having sex with two students at the academy.

The widely respected Rugh came under investigation for a statement he made while testify-

ing by phone in a 2014 Marines Board of Inquiry convened to determine whether Thompson should be dismissed from the Marine Corps. Charged with raping one student and having a consensual relationship with another in 2011, Thompson had been convicted of indecent conduct and fraternization. He was sentenced to two months of confinement and a \$60,000 fine.

Although court-martial convictions are treated normally as conclusive proof of misconduct, the board decided that the verdict was wrong. It ruled that, as Thompson had testified, he had not committed misconduct and should remain an active-duty Marine.

Rugh was the lead prosecutor at Thompson's 2013 court-martial. He testified to the board about the facts of the case and said his prosecution team had spoken with family members of one of the students for corroboration of her account in a key piece of testimony.

That was the first Thompson's defense counsel had heard of the prosecution's discussion with the family member, and they raised it as an issue of non-disclosure in an effort to reverse Thompson's convictions.

SIGAR seeks to guide Trump on Afghanistan

By E.B. BOYD
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Less than two weeks before President-elect Donald Trump takes office, the watchdog for U.S. reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan delivered a searing indictment of the lack of progress in the two years since NATO ended its combat mission and assumed a new advisory role designed to get the country to stand on its own.

"As much as I wish I could say much has improved in Afghanistan over the last two years, I cannot," Special Inspector General for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan John Sopko said Wednesday in prepared

remarks for a speech at a Washington-based think tank.

Sopko spelled out a series of problems, any one of which, he said, could "fatally undermine" U.S. efforts to rebuild Afghanistan: shortcomings of Afghan security forces, corruption among Afghan officials, the thriving narcotics trade, and U.S. agencies' poor oversight of their expenditures.

The remarks were aimed at the incoming Trump administration. Sopko said he did not know what direction the new administration would take in Afghanistan but he hoped his agency's assessment would help guide White House and congressional policymaking in the

coming year.

The speech coincided with the release of a SIGAR report that identifies the greatest threats to Afghan's successful reconstruction.

Since 2002, Congress has signed off on more than \$155 billion to rebuild the country, the report said. That's the most the United States has paid for any country's reconstruction in history.

"Despite this enormous expenditure, the reconstruction effort remains tenuous and incomplete," the report said.

Underlying the country's many challenges were two main factors: the "questionable capabilities" of the country's

security forces and "pervasive corruption."

The report offered a negative assessment of Afghan military and police performance in last year's fighting against insurgents, in which security forces struggled to contain Taliban gains.

"This is a reportedly 320,000-strong force, and it's basically playing whack-a-mole following the Taliban around Afghanistan," Sopko said Wednesday.

The government forces, Sopko said, are plagued by poor leadership, which leads some officers to bolster their ranks with "ghost soldiers" whose salaries they pocket; others sell equipment and fuel to the Taliban.

Russia hot topic at secretary of state hearing

By TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump's pick for secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, said Wednesday during his Senate confirmation hearing that the United States and Russia may never be friends but new dialogue could ease their increasingly hostile relationship.

Tillerson, 64, the former chief executive of ExxonMobil, said the two countries have starkly different values and he would support a powerful U.S. response in the face of Russia's aggressive moves in Ukraine and its annexation of Crimea. But he said his time in the country has convinced him that there is room for productive new dialogue.

"I think the important conversation we have to have is, 'Does Russia want to now and forever be an adversary to the United States,'" he said. "Do you want this to get worse or does Russia desire a different relationship?"

Senators grilled the oil executive about Russia, a rising U.S. adversary where Tillerson worked extensively with the world's

largest publicly traded oil company and developed a close personal relationship with President Vladimir Putin that goes back two decades. The hearing comes after the U.S. intelligence community determined Russia interfered in the election last year and explosive — yet unsubstantiated — new allegations Tuesday night that it could possess compromising personal information about Trump.

Tillerson's firm stance on Russia during the hearing was likely to allay some concerns on both sides of the political aisle in the Senate, which is expected to vote this month on his confirmation.

He appeared to differ with Trump on the issue of Crimea and Ukraine, saying the United States should have done more to deter Russian aggression around the east-ern edge of the NATO alliance.

Tillerson spent his entire career rising through the ranks of ExxonMobil and cutting deals with foreign entities such as Russia, Iran and Kurds in Iraq. In 2013, he received the Order of Friendship from Putin, which is a top award for foreigners,

and he has acknowledged a relationship with Putin that began in the 1990s.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., pressed Tillerson on whether he would support new sanctions on Russia and any countries that hack a U.S. election as well as Russia's human rights record and associates of Putin who have died under suspicious circumstances.

Sen. Ben Cardin, D-Md., the top Democrat on the Senate committee, said Tillerson must convince lawmakers that his past relations with Russia are not a problem.

Tillerson received some support at the hearing from a widely respected former Cabinet member and civilian Pentagon chief.

Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who served under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, said Tillerson is the right person to stop a "dangerous downward spiral" in relations with Russia.

The committee will weigh Tillerson's nomination and make a recommendation to the full Senate, which must vote to approve it before Tillerson can become secretary of state.

Tornado surprises forecasters in Calif.

Associated Press

A small tornado was whipped up as part of a powerful band of thunderstorms that moved through Northern California during the latest deluge that has downed trees, swollen rivers and prompted evacuations over flood fears.

The tornado was on the ground for about 3/8 of a mile just south of Sacramento, tearing limbs off trees and ripping awnings from buildings late Tuesday, said National Weather Service meteorologist David Rowe. No injuries were reported from the twister, which was about 100 yards wide and registered on the low end of the tornado scale.

The twister got the attention of forecasters at the weather service's Sacramento office.

"It came as a little bit of a surprise considering that we're so focused on all the heavy snow and rain," Rowe said, adding that the Sacramento area received about 2 inches of rain Tuesday.

While the heaviest down-

pours have moved through, the risk of flooding remains from runoff and showers predicted to continue into Thursday.

Interstate 80 remained closed Wednesday between the Nevada border and Colfax, Calif., after more than 6 feet of snow fell along the key mountain corridor. There was no estimate when it could reopen.

In Southern California the second fast-moving storm this week dumped steady rain.

A blizzard warning was in effect for parts of the Sierra Nevada, the first issued in the past nine years, said Scott McGuire, a forecaster for the National Weather Service based in Reno, Nev.

Forecasters warned of up to 10 feet of snow in the highest mountains, with up to 7 feet of snow around the resorts of Lake Tahoe, high risk of avalanches, and wind gusts to 60 mph. The Sierra ridge had gusts of more than 100 mph.

A series of storms already has added 33 billion gallons of water to Lake Tahoe since Jan. 1.

Court verifies sentence for Bible study killer

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. — Families of the nine people killed in a racist massacre at a South Carolina church have expressed a broad range of feelings when it comes to how the convicted killer should be punished.

Some think there is no justification for the death penalty, while others believe in the biblical Old Testament justice of an eye for an eye.

Dylann Roof will soon be off to federal death row, but the families he shattered when he entered Emanuel AME Church in Charleston and fired 77 shots at the end of Bible study got one last chance to confront him Wednesday as U.S. District Judge Richard Gergel verified the jury's sentence at a hearing.

The willingness to forgive dominated the news in the days after the June 17, 2015, shootings as victims' families and survivors offered Roof forgiveness at his bond hearing. But there are many like Melvin

Graham who said forgiveness is still a work in progress and he will forever grieve the death of his sister, Cynthia Hurd.

He told reporters he has struggled because he feels like it isn't quite right to see someone ordered to die, but he also knows Roof must be punished as severely as possible for what he did on Earth.

While forgiveness has been offered from one side, Roof has shown no remorse for the slaughter during weeks in court. He had a final chance to ask the jury to spare his life Tuesday.

"I still feel like I had to do it," the 22-year-old avowed white supremacist told the jury instead.

Roof specifically selected Emanuel AME Church, the South's oldest black church, to carry out the cold, calculated slaughter, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jay Richardson said.

The jury convicted Roof last month of all 33 federal charges he faced, including hate crimes.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Most charges dropped in bunny suit incident

NJ HOPATCONG — Prosecutors have dropped most charges against two New Jersey brothers stemming from an incident in which one of them wore a bunny costume and repeatedly blew an air horn inside a police station.

The New Jersey Herald reported the Sussex County Prosecutor's Office will not pursue charges of harassment, obstruction, and resisting arrest against Kevin Hemmerich because of insufficient evidence. Similar charges were also dismissed against Jason Hemmerich.

Prosecutors are still charging Kevin Hemmerich with disorderly conduct.

On Nov. 17, Kevin Hemmerich, accompanied by his brother, entered the Hopatcong Police Department lobby to turn himself in for an outstanding warrant. Kevin Hemmerich was dressed in a bunny costume and repeatedly blew the air horn.

A police officer slapped Kevin Hemmerich after asking him why he was blowing the horn. The officer was charged with assault.

Woman in naked chase says she was drugged

AZ PHOENIX — A Mesa woman who was naked when she stole a sheriff deputy's vehicle and led officers on a 70-mile pursuit that ended near Eloy said she was dosed with drugs before the incident.

In a jailhouse interview, Lisa Ann Luna, 31, said she had taken methamphetamine in the past but last week when she stole a Maricopa County Sheriff's Office pickup truck she had been poisoned by a relative.

Luna said a cousin put drugs

in her food, causing her to hallucinate and panic. She said she felt like her skin was burning and she was possessed at the time of the incident.

Black waitress finds racist note on receipt

VA ASHBURN — A racist note left on a receipt for a black Virginia waitress has sparked outrage.

News outlets, which ran pictures of the receipt, report the message scrawled at the bottom of the bill at Anita's New Mexico Style Cafe in Ashburn read "great service don't tip black people."

Restaurant server Kelly Carter said it was left Saturday, with no gratuity, by a white man and woman to whom she had served breakfast. Carter said there was no indication the couple was unhappy with her for any reason.

Restaurant owner Tommy Tellez Sr. called the note "disheartening," saying Carter is a loyal employee and beloved by her customers. Since then, the restaurant manager said customers are now requesting Carter as their server and some are even stopping by to give her hugs and money.

University opens food pantry for students

NE LINCOLN — The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is marking the opening of a food pantry inside the student union on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus.

KETV reported the Huskers Helping Huskers Pantry Plus will offer food and hygiene items to enrolled students.

University officials were prompted to open the pantry by a survey that showed three of every 10 UNL students reported occasionally worrying about

having enough food. About 10 percent say they rarely or never could afford a balanced meal.

More than 400 universities and colleges across the country have opened similar pantries.

Houdini Museum raising money for board game

PA SCRANTON — A Pennsylvania museum honoring illusionist Harry Houdini is raising money for a limited-release "Monopoly"-like board game for collectors.

Officials at Scranton's Houdini Museum started a Kickstarter crowd-funding effort to raise \$8,000 to develop "Houdini-Opoly." They'll print at least 1,000 copies, depending on the success of the fundraising campaign that ends March 9.

The game will teach players about the famed escape artist by using properties named after significant places in Houdini's life. Anyone who contributes at least \$35 gets a copy of the game. Larger donors can get multiple copies or even have their names inscribed on game boxes, game pieces or the fake money players use.

SUV plows through garage, into pool

NC APEX — Police said an Apex woman accidentally drove her SUV through her garage and into her backyard swimming pool last weekend.

Local news outlets reported that Apex police said the incident happened Sunday night. No one was hurt.

Police spokesman Capt. Blair Myhand said the woman was returning home when her vehicle slipped on a patch of ice as she pulled into her driveway. The SUV crashed through the back of her garage, over the deck and into her above-ground pool in

the backyard.

Myhand said that, based on the damage, it's likely the woman hit the gas instead of the brake accidentally.

Deer barrels through car dealer's showroom

GA ROSWELL — Employees at an Atlanta area car dealership were in for a surprise when a deer came barreling through the showroom.

Local news outlets reported that the unlikely customer paid a visit to Nalley Lexus in Roswell.

The dealership posted a video Monday on Facebook showing the deer, which had jumped through an open window.

Footage shows the animal slipping and sliding on the tile floor of the showroom before running into the garage area and out one of the doors.

No one was injured.

Stranded cow winched across frozen pond

OR MONMOUTH — A cow stranded on ice in western Oregon experienced what might be called a mooing rescue.

The Polk County Sheriff's Office got a report Friday about a cow that had ventured onto a frozen pond, fallen and couldn't get back up.

A sheriff's deputy, the cow's owner and a friend of the owner rushed to the rescue. The sheriff's office said the owner used some lassoing skills to get a rope around the cow from shore.

Video shows the bovine being steadily winched across the ice on its belly, safely reaching shore, and then moseying back toward the barn.

From wire reports

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Chiefs' Smith gets a boost in playoffs

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Two distinctly different versions of Chiefs quarterback Alex Smith have emerged over the years.

Regular-Season Alex and Playoff Alex.

The regular-season version may be the most boring player you will ever meet. He rarely says anything inflammatory.

He is exceedingly polite. His answers to even the most blasé of questions during his weekly availability are mind-numbingly rote, a talent he's honed over 11 seasons as a pro.

His play is a reflection of that, too. Smith is the consummate game-manager, content to dink and dunk and avoid major mistakes, and let his opportunistic defense carry Kansas City to victories.

The playoff version of Smith is the antithesis. He is brash and confident and carries a gunslinger's swagger, and his numbers in five games put him among the best quarterbacks in NFL history.

His passer rating of 99.1 trails only Bart Starr, Kurt Warner, Aaron Rodgers and

Drew Brees.

"I would agree," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said, "he's had some good games in the playoffs. He's a competitive guy. He loves the situation.

"But I'd tell you he's done a pretty good job this year, too. I have a lot of respect for the quality of his play this year."

Rather than using an often-arbitrary statistic such as quarterback rating to explain how good Smith has been in the playoffs, though, try comparing his numbers in the regular season with those in the postseason.

He's averaged 197.5 yards passing while throwing 157 touchdown passes and 91 interceptions in the regular season.

Those numbers alone would be enough to drive him to the bench in many cities, and in fact did just that when Colin Kaepernick earned the starting job over him in San Francisco.

But when the pressure of the playoffs is on, Smith has averaged 261.8 yards passing with 11 touchdown throws and one interception.

And just about every other statistical takes a jump, from yards-

per-attempt to more obscure metrics, driving home the notion that Smith shines brightest when the lights are brightest.

"I think, honestly, it's a reflection of the people around me," said Smith, who will try to continue that postseason history when the Steelers visit in the divisional round Sunday.

"When the guys are playing well around you, you look good," he continued. "Good game plans, executing well, all that stuff and certainly, you're a reflection of that."

OK, so the brash and confident version of Playoff Alex may only extend to the field.

He's still Regular-Season Alex in interview settings.

"No quarterback goes out there and plays well on his own," he insisted. "Certainly you get a lot of the attention and credit but, obviously, you're not doing that on your own."

Smith is 2-3 in his five playoff games, leading the 49ers to the doorstep of the Super Bowl during his resurgent 2011 season.

He also helped the Chiefs snap an eight-game postseason losing streak that stretched to

the 1993 season with a win in Houston in last year's wild-card round, before losing to New England in the divisional round the following week.

Smith was a near-flawless 17-for-22 for 190 yards with a TD in that game against the Texans, and threw for 246 yards and a score against the Patriots.

His other playoff game with Kansas City may have been the finest performance of his career — except for the outcome.

In what turned into a memorable shootout in Indianapolis, the quarterback whose arm has always been questioned threw for 378 yards and four TDs without a pick in a 45-44 defeat.

Pressed for why things seem to change in the playoffs, Smith replied: "It gets picked up. Everything gets stepped up a notch. The intensity increases, the margin of error — all that stuff.

"I think really, though, going back to everybody feeling that — coaches, players, the whole unit — everybody kind of feels that and kind of picks up their game even just the smallest amount."

Multiple Patriots get first postseason taste

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Being a member of the New England Patriots during the Tom Brady-Bill Belichick era has generally meant a guaranteed place in the playoffs.

Still, for 20 players on the Patriots' active roster Saturday will mark the first taste of the postseason of their NFL careers.

That group includes a pair of starters who have filled significant roles for New England this season in defensive end Chris Long and receiver Chris Hogan.

Long hadn't won more than seven games in any of his eight years with the Rams from 2008 to 2015 prior to signing with New England this offseason.

Hogan, in his fourth season, spent the previous three seasons playing for AFC East rival Buffalo. The closest he came to the playoffs with the Bills was a 9-7 finish in 2014.

"I've never experienced it before so this is all new to me," Hogan said. "Just talking to some of the guys, the playoffs, you

talk about preseason going into the regular season, the speed kind of picks up, and I've heard that from a number of guys that the playoff speed picks up a little bit more."

Long's playoff drought is the longest of any of the Patriots.

"I think everything happens for a reason. Sometimes you might not like it, but listen, it is what it is," he said.

"I've been very lucky throughout my career in a lot of ways, so whatever brought me to this point... I'm just going to be excited to be in the moment. Everybody earns it."

Hogan has fit right into the Patriots receiving group, making 14 starts. He's fourth on the team with 38 catches for 680 yards and four touchdowns.

Long has appeared in 16 games this season with 35 tackles and four sacks. He's helped fortify New England's pass rush following the trades of Chandler Jones and Jamie Collins.

Defensive coordinator Matt Patricia said Long's efforts haven't gone unnoticed by the coaching staff.

"I think he has enjoyed the process and just really as far as that is concerned has been a guy that's out there working really hard every day to get better and play hard for his teammates," Patricia said. "That's all you can really ask for."

Another Patriots offseason addition is being reacquainted with playoff football.

Tight end Martellus Bennett spent his first four NFL seasons with the Dallas Cowboys, and had a forgettable experience of the postseason in 2009 in which he was targeted just four times in two games.

He's back seven seasons later, and is trying not to take anything for granted this time with a franchise used to making deep postseason runs.

Offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels pointed to Bennett's unselfishness as being the thing that's helped him integrate so well into New England's system.

He leads the team with seven receiving touchdowns and is second in yards (701) behind only Julian Edelman (1,106).

ACC celebrates along with Clemson

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — The national champions. The Heisman Trophy winner. More bowl wins than any other league.

Such was the Atlantic Coast Conference's mark on college football this season, and all that prompted Clemson coach Dabo Swinney to let the other leagues in America in on what's apparently no longer a secret.

"You don't want to play a team from this conference," Swinney said Tuesday, a day after Clemson beat Alabama 35-31 for the national championship. "You just don't."

Clemson will be the team getting the national title rings in a few months and the Tigers were the team smudging the trophy with their celebratory fingerprints on Monday night, and the conference enjoyed seeing one of its own back atop the college football mountain-top. Several ACC schools sent congratulatory messages to the Tigers while the confetti was still flying in Tampa, and

Commissioner John Swofford basked in the Tigers' party.

"It's probably the best year, football-wise, that this conference has ever had," Swofford said. "It's been building the last four or five years. Terrific regular season, a great postseason and this really caps it — without question."

The ACC went 9-3 in bowl games this season, the best record of any conference in terms of both percentage and total wins. Louisville's Lamar Jackson won the Heisman, Florida State won the Orange Bowl and the ACC finished with five schools in the season-ending AP Top 25.

Virginia Tech and Miami took steps forward. Half the league was ranked nationally at some point in 2016. Clemson won it all, and later this month moves into a spectacular new football complex that will surely help the Tigers' recruiting hauls.

"I've been in this league a long time, and this league has never gotten the respect that it

deserves," Swinney said. "You know, I said about five years ago or something, just keep your mouth shut and go play. If we want to change the story, then we've got to change it from the inside out."

And they have.

Clemson's win over Alabama was the 17th by an ACC team over a Power 5 school in a non-conference matchup this season. No other league won more than 11 such games. So if any notions still exist that suggest the ACC is merely a basketball league, consider them further debunked now.

"This is the best conference in college football," Swinney said. "It's the deepest, it's the most competitive, 11 bowl teams ... that's why we're ready to go play Oklahoma two years in a row. That's why we're ready to go play Ohio State two out of the last four years. We're ready, because of what we see week in and week out in this conference."

Swofford said he was particularly happy for Swinney,

who survived some time on the proverbial hot seat early in his tenure before getting Clemson on what became its path to the title.

"Dabo's one of the guys that just represents everything good in college football in my opinion," Swofford said. "He does it the right way and it's good to see people who do it the right way and loves his players like he does. He's just good for the game. He's good for Clemson, he's good for the Atlantic Coast Conference, he's good for the game of football."

The Big Ten and the SEC, combined, got nine bowl wins — and needed 22 bowl-qualifying teams to get there. Before this season, the ACC never had more than five bowl wins in a season.

"The SEC is a great conference, too," Swinney said. "But the best and deepest league is this league that we're competing in."

Rathan-Mayes helps No. 9 Florida State top No. 7 Duke

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Florida State celebrated its return to the top 10 with another impressive performance, wearing down Duke with its size and depth.

Xavier Rathan-Mayes scored 18 of his 21 points in the second half, helping the ninth-ranked Seminoles pull away from the No. 7 Blue Devils for an 88-72 win on Tuesday night.

Playing its first regular-season game as a top-10 team since 1993, Florida State rolled to its school-record 12th straight victory, breaking a mark that had stood since 1970. The Seminoles (16-1, 4-0) also improved to 4-0 in the Atlantic Coast Conference for the first time.

"They definitely got frustrated in the second half because they don't have as many guys they can sub as we do,"

said Dwayne Bacon, who had 13 points. "We're gonna wear teams down all year until a team that can match our depth will be able to play with us like we have."

Florida State's reserves outscored their counterparts 21-4, but the biggest difference was points in the paint. With Duke's Amile Jefferson sidelined by a bone bruise in his right foot, the Seminoles enjoyed a 56-28 scoring advantage inside.

When Duke started putting more pressure on Bacon and Terance Mann (13 points) in the second half, it created more space for Rathan-Mayes, who was 7-for-13 from the floor for the game.

"It was me taking and reading what the defense gave me," Rathan-Mayes said. "They were trying to take Bacon out of his sweet spot and I saw a

few gaps where I was able to be aggressive and knock down a few jumpers."

The Blue Devils took a 50-48 lead on a Luke Kennard jumper before the Seminoles grabbed control with a 16-4 run over a five-minute span.

No. 10 West Virginia 89, No. 1 Baylor 68: Nathan Adrian broke out of a shooting slump with a career-high 22 points, and the host Mountaineers beat the Bears in their first game as the top-ranked team in program history.

Baylor (15-1, 3-1 Big 12) committed a season-high 29 turnovers — the school record is 31 — and never led in its second true road game of the season. The loss means No. 5 Gonzaga is the only remaining unbeaten team in Division I.

No. 2 Kansas 81, Oklahoma 70: Frank Mason scored 19 of

his 28 points in the second half, leading the Jayhawks to the road win.

No. 3 Villanova 79, No. 15 Xavier 54: Kris Jenkins and Josh Hart each scored 20 points and the host Wildcats beat the Musketeers.

No. 6 Kentucky 87, Vanderbilt 81: Malik Monk scored six points in the final 32 seconds, and the visiting Wildcats remained unbeaten in the Southeastern Conference.

No. 23 Florida 80, Alabama 67: Keith Stone had 14 points, including a pair of key three-pointers during the second half, and the visiting Gators rallied after squandering an 18-point lead.

Texas Tech 66, No. 25 Kansas State 65: Keenan Evans made a go-ahead layup with 15 seconds left, helping the host Red Raiders beat the Wildcats.

Harden's triple-double propels Rockets

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Forget slowing down James Harden. Right now, his opponents can't even put his play into words.

Harden had 40 points, 15 rebounds and 10 assists for his second straight triple-double and the Houston Rockets outlasted the Charlotte Hornets 121-114 on Tuesday night for their ninth straight win.

"There's not enough good words in the English dictionary that can describe what he's been doing," Charlotte's Marvin Williams said. "He's literally making history."

Harden has five triple-doubles in the past seven games and is averaging 32.4 points, 11.4 assists and 9.9 rebounds during this winning streak.

Harden got his 11th triple-double this season and 20th in his career. Tuesday's performance comes after he had 40 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds in a win over Toronto on Sunday to make him the fourth player in NBA history with at least 40 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists in consecutive games. Pete Maravich, Michael Jordan

and Russell Westbrook are the three others to do it.

"As long as I play the right way and be unselfish and we win games, all that is going to come," Harden said. "I don't think about it too much. If it happens, it happens and the most important thing is winning and it's been a total turnaround from last year to this year ... so [win] and great things will come."

The Rockets missed 10 straight shots and let an 18-point lead evaporate before coach Mike D'Antoni called a timeout with 2:26 left. Ryan Anderson made Houston's first shot in more than four minutes with a three-pointer out of the timeout, and after a block on the other end, Harden's layup put Houston up 115-111 with just over a minute to play.

Kemba Walker cut the deficit to one with a three-pointer, but another layup by Harden made it 117-114 with 28.6 seconds left. Charlotte missed three three-point tries in the final seconds.

Walker had 25 points for the Hornets, who dropped their third straight.

"It's going to come down to

the basic principles and those are things that until this year that we were really good at," Hornets coach Steve Clifford said. "And if we want to win, we'll get back to that."

Raptors 114, Celtics 106: DeMar DeRozan scored a season-high 41 points, Kyle Lowry had 24 and host Toronto rallied to end Boston's four-game winning streak.

Jazz 100, Cavs 92: Gordon Hayward went toe-to-toe with LeBron James in the second half to help host Utah beat Cleveland.

Hayward had 28 points and went back and forth with James during a decisive third quarter. James brought the Cavaliers back from a 15-point halftime deficit before Hayward drove the lead back to 14.

Wizards 101, Bulls 99: John Wall scored 26 points, including a game-winning baseline jumper with 5.9 seconds left, and added 14 assists as host Washington moved above .500.

Marcin Gortat had 10 points and 12 rebounds for Washington (19-18). He also set the screen that freed up Wall for

his tiebreaking jumper to seal a 10th straight home win.

Bucks 109, Spurs 107: Michael Beasley scored a season-high 28 points in place of an ill Giannis Antetokounmpo, and visiting Milwaukee rallied.

Kawhi Leonard had 30 points for the Spurs, who had their nine-game home winning streak snapped.

Hawks 117, Nets 97: Dennis Schroder had 19 points and 10 assists, Dwight Howard added 14 points and 16 rebounds, and Atlanta beat skidding host Brooklyn to win its season-high seventh straight.

Warriors 107, Heat 95: Stephen Curry had 24 points, nine assists and eight rebounds, Kevin Durant added 28 points and host Golden State picked it up late to beat Miami.

Trail Blazers 108, Lakers 87: C.J. McCollum scored 25 points and Portland used a dominant third quarter to defeat host Los Angeles for the 10th consecutive time.

Kings 100, Pistons 94: DeMarcus Cousins had 24 points, 13 rebounds and six assists to help host Sacramento stage a fourth-quarter comeback.

Hurricanes hand Blue Jackets third loss in four games

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Jordan Staal scored the go-ahead goal on a deflection with 16:10 to play, and the Carolina Hurricanes beat the Columbus Blue Jackets 5-3 on Tuesday night.

Victor Rask had two assists and an empty-net goal, Jeff Skinner had a goal and two assists and Derek Ryan also had a goal and an assist. Brock McGinn added a goal for Carolina, which has earned points in 13 of 14 home games.

Cam Atkinson scored his 20th goal on the same day he was left off the All-Star team, and Josh Anderson and Brandon Saad also scored for the Blue Jackets, who have a league-best 60 points but have lost three of four since winning 16 straight.

Predators 2, Canucks 1 (OT): Calle Jarnkrok scored a short-handed goal with 1.5 seconds remaining in overtime to lift host Nashville over Vancouver.

With time ticking down in the extra frame, Roman Josi blocked a shot from Troy Stecher just outside the crease of Nashville goalie Pekka Rinne. Josi immediately took possession of the puck and went up ice on a 2-on-1 with Jarnkrok. In the low slot, Josi slid a pass to his right, where Jarnkrok was there to one-time the puck past Vancouver goalie Ryan Miller.

Bruins 5, Blues 3: Brad Marchand scored twice, including an empty-netter, and David Backes got into a fight in his return to St. Louis with Boston.

Frank Vatrano, Brandon Carlo and Torey Krug also scored for the Bruins. Tuukka Rask made 14 saves.

Backes, who spent his first 10 seasons with St. Louis before signing with Boston as a free agent, fought with former teammate Joel Edmundson late in the second to the delight of the Scottrade Center crowd.

Sabres 4, Flyers 1: Evander Kane scored to cap a three-goal second-period surge in leading host Buffalo past Philadelphia.

Sam Reinhart had a goal and two assists in extending Buffalo's point-streak to 3-0-1 — the team's best run of the season.

Ducks 2, Stars 0: John Gibson made 34 saves in his third shutout of the season, and Jakob Silfverberg had a goal and an assist to lead host Anaheim.

Silfverberg scored a power-play goal in the second period, and the surging Swedish forward set up Andrew Cogliano's top-shelf shot with 5:18 to play.

Sharks 5, Oilers 3: Mikkel Boedker scored three goals for his fourth career hat trick to lead visiting San Jose over Edmonton.

Brent Burns and Logan Couture also scored for the Sharks, who have won two straight since losing three in a row. Martin Jones stopped 33 shots.

Blackhawks 4, Red Wings 3 (OT): Duncan Keith scored a power-play goal 38 seconds into overtime, lifting host Chicago to its fourth straight victory.

Keith, who also had an assist, beat Petr Mrazek with a rising screened shot from the top of the slot.