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Civilian casualties mount in Mosul fight

Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq — The mortar attack that left Um Yousef blind in one eye and killed two of her children came on the same day that Iraqi forces retook her neighborhood in eastern Mosul from the Islamic State group.

“We were supposed to be liberated that day,” she said from her hospital bed in the nearby city of Irbil. She asked to be identified only by a nickname to protect her family members still living inside Mosul.

Doctors at West Erbil Emergency Hospital say cases like Um Yousef’s are on the rise as Iraqi forces continue to make gains against the Islamic State group in their effort to take control of Mosul.

The blast of the attack that wounded Um Yousef ripped open her daughter’s stomach and killed her instantly. Her son, Yousef, was hit in the head with shrapnel and he slowly bled out as they waited for hours for help. As Um Yousef was evacuated by the Iraqi military, her husband stayed behind in Mosul to bury the two children.

“I called him by phone, but he just cries, saying nothing,” she said. Her youngest daughter, just over a year old, who lost three of her toes to the blast, played in her lap.

When the operation to retake Mosul was launched in October, more than a million people were estimated to still be living inside the city. While Iraqi forces largely evacuated civilians from cities such as Ramadi and Fallujah that were retaken from the Islamic State group last year, in Mosul, they told people to stay put.

Since Iraqi forces pushed into Mosul’s city limits in November, the fight has seen relatively high numbers of civilian casualties. In the first week of January, the United Nations said 683 people were injured in the city and at least 817 were wounded during the last week of December.

“You would expect in a conflict like this that the number of civilian casualties would be around 15 percent, a high of 20 percent. What we’re seeing in Mosul is that nearly 50 percent of all casualties are in fact civilians,” Lise Grande, the U.N.’s humanitar-

ian coordinator in Iraq, told reporters at a briefing last week.

“It’s clear that this is because of direct targeting by combatants,” she said, explaining that Islamic State fighters are targeting civilians as they try to flee militant-held parts of the city.

Aid groups opened two new hospitals closer to Mosul this month in an effort to see more civilians faster, but West Irbil Emergency Hospital still receives dozens of injured civilians from Mosul every day and is still operating above capacity, said the hospital’s administrator, Dr. Lawand Meran.

“We are running out of everything, clean gauze, hospital gowns, even simple saline solution,” said Hazhen Mama, a surgeon.

The slow pace of the Mosul fight has also contributed to the high number of killed and injured civilians. As Iraqi forces slowly push the Islamic State group out of the city, neighborhoods remain front lines for longer and it’s more difficult for severely wounded civilians to be evacuated.

US-Japan deal on SOFA could end some coverage

BY ERIK SLAVIN
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — The United States and Japan signed an agreement Monday that could end Status of Forces Agreement coverage for some military contractors without specialized skills.

The SOFA supplemental agreement negotiations were made public last year, shortly after a former Marine working as a cable company employee in Okinawa was arrested on charges that he raped and killed a 20-year-old Japanese woman.

During a visit to Okinawa, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called it “questionable” that the accused employee was SOFA-sponsored.

While SOFA does not prevent U.S. personnel who com-

mit crimes off-base from being prosecuted, in many cases it does allow them to remain in U.S. custody pending trial.

The agreement establishes a working group that will review whether contractors meet new SOFA standards.

“Such criteria are to be established so that those who are eligible to receive designation as members of the Civilian Component have skills or knowledge required for the accomplishment of mission requirements,” the agreement states.

Defense Department civilian public employees under the appropriated and nonappropriated funding systems retain SOFA rights under the agreement, as do civilians aboard U.S. military vessels and aircraft.

Non-DOD federal workers arriving in Japan to work with the military still have SOFA coverage, according to the agreement.

SOFA also includes services’ employees in Japan on official business solely related to the military, such as the United Services Organization, the American Red Cross and base financial institutions.

Private contractors must be officially invited to Japan by the U.S. government for official purposes only in order to get SOFA visas.

The contractor must be “essential to the mission of the United States armed forces and [have] a high degree of skill or knowledge for the accomplishment of mission requirements,” according to the agreement.

The criteria can include specialized training or education, security clearance, professional licensing, short-term need or other reasons “specially authorized” by the U.S.-Japan Joint Committee.

Contractors considered “ordinarily resident” in Japan, or who already have non-SOFA visas, will be denied SOFA status, according to the agreement.

When the U.S. terminates SOFA status, the contractor will have up to one year either to change their status or to leave Japan, according to the agreement.

Local immigration bureaus and U.S. bases are directed to share information on U.S. contractor visa status, the agreement states.

Davos chief: 'Important to listen' to populists

Associated Press

At the Davos economic conference, "it's important to listen to the populists," says the founder of the annual gathering of movers and shakers, adding that he hopes to welcome U.S. President Donald Trump "expressing his ideas" at the Swiss forum one day.

Critics often accuse the yearly World Economic Forum in the Swiss Alps of being a snow-covered playground for well-heeled business and political elites. But founder Klaus Schwab said this year's event, which opens Monday before a public start Tuesday, is reaching out to populist politicians who have ridden a wave of discontent among the masses.

"It's important to listen to the populists, and actually we have several sessions where we deal with these issues, and we have representatives of populist parties here with us," Schwab said in an interview Sunday with The Associated Press.

"We have to take it (populism) seriously."

For a forum that strives to take the pulse of the world each year and produce "a real hub of a global discussion," Schwab said "it would be soundly unrealistic and far from realities if we did not integrate the concerns of populists very much into our own deliberation."

For this 47th Davos conference, a record turnout of some 3,000 people will gather around the theme of "Responsive and Responsible Leadership," alluding to the challenge of wise decision-making during a time of populist fervor.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, the first Chinese head of state ever to attend the forum, is perhaps the standout among 46 heads of state expected to be on hand.

As for the U.S., the incoming Trump administration will be represented by adviser Anthony Scaramucci, a financier who has attended Davos in the past.

MLK holiday puts shift from Obama to Trump in focus

Associated Press

ATLANTA — As Americans celebrate the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., civil rights leaders and activists are trying to reconcile the transition from the nation's first black president to a president-elect still struggling to connect with most non-white voters.

King's daughter on Monday encouraged Americans to fight for the slain civil rights leader's vision of love and justice "no matter who is in the White House."

In Atlanta, Bernice King addressed more than 2,000 people gathered at her father's Ebenezer Baptist Church four days before Donald Trump's presidential inauguration. She spoke hours before her brother, Martin Luther King III, is scheduled to meet with the president-elect at Trump Tower in New York.

Trump won fewer than 1 out of 10 black voters in November after a campaign of racially charged rhetoric, and tensions have flared anew with his recent criticism of famed civil rights figure Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., whom the president-elect called "all talk" and "no action."

Bernice King avoided a detailed critique of Trump, but said the nation still has a choice between "chaos and community," as her father once said.

"At the end of the day, the Donald Trumps come and go," Bernice King said. But, she added, "we still have to find a way to create" what her father called "the beloved community."

The Rev. Raphael Warnock, Ebenezer's senior pastor, didn't call Trump by name, but blasted the president-elect for his treatment of Lewis, whose Atlanta-based

congressional district includes Ebenezer.

Lewis angered Trump when he told NBC's "Meet the Press" that he views Trump as an "illegitimate president" because of suspected Russian interference in the campaign. Trump retorted Saturday on Twitter that Lewis is "all talk" and said his district is "falling apart" and "crime infested."

"Anybody who suggests that John Lewis is all talk and no action needs a lesson in American history," Warnock said. As a young man, Lewis was arrested many times and was beaten by authorities as he demonstrated for civil and voting rights for black Americans. Warnock called him "the hero of Bloody Sunday and the conscience of the Congress."

Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed piled on, quoting Trump when he was in Lewis' district a decade ago to open a Trump Tower project that later would fail. Trump, recalled the mayor, said Atlanta, at least then, was doing "a great job" and he was "glad to be here."

"I don't know what changed," Reed said mockingly before praising Lewis as a personal hero.

Lewis was in Miami at King Day events.

Warnock, meanwhile, praised outgoing President Barack Obama as a model for the office. "Thank you, Barack Obama. I'm sad to see you leave," he said. But, he said, Trump's inauguration will mean "one less brother experiences racial profiling."

Some Republicans have defended Trump's criticism of Lewis, arguing it is inappropriate for a congressman to question an incoming president's legitimacy.

Official: Orlando nightclub shooter's widow arrested

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The wife of the Orlando nightclub shooter was arrested Monday by the FBI, a U.S. law enforcement official told The Associated Press.

The official said Noor Salman was taken into custody Monday morning in the San Francisco area and is due in court Tues-

day in California. She's facing charges in Florida including obstruction of justice.

The official was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Noor Salman moved to the San Francisco area after her husband, Omar Mateen, was killed in a shootout with SWAT team members during the June

12 massacre at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando.

He was the only shooter, and by the time a three-hour standoff between Mateen and law enforcement had ended, 49 patrons were killed and another 53 people required hospitalization.

Mateen pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group during the standoff.

Prior to the attack on Pulse, a handful of other U.S. gay bars had been targeted, including Neighbours, a popular gay nightclub in Seattle. It was packed with New Year's Eve revelers on Dec. 31, 2013, when a man poured gasoline onto a carpeted stairway and set it ablaze. No one was injured. Masab Masmari was sentenced to 10 years in prison for arson.

Land swap for THAAD might be delayed

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Officials may have to delay the signing of a land-swap deal that is needed for the deployment of an advanced U.S. missile defense system to counter the growing threat from North Korea, the Defense Ministry said Monday.

In November, the ministry reached a tentative agreement with the Lotte Group, one of South Korea's largest conglomerates, to exchange military land near Seoul for its hilltop golf course in a southeastern area that was selected as the home

for the anti-missile battery.

Defense officials had hoped to conclude the deal this month after appraisals of both sites, but a spokesman said the acquisition may be delayed due to administrative reasons on the retailer's side.

Moon Sang-gyun, the Defense Ministry spokesman, said the appraisals were conducted last week and the results will eventually be made public.

"But the swap deal originally scheduled to be completed by January has a chance of being pushed back a bit due to the need to follow a set process by Lotte," Moon told a regular

media briefing. He said that once the administrative work is completed, Lotte's board of directors must hold a meeting to sign off on the deal.

Officials have said the deal would be adjusted if there was a large gap in value between the Lotte Skyhill Country Club and the military land in Gyeonggi province.

It's the latest setback in efforts to station a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, known as THAAD, on the peninsula. Washington and Seoul agreed on the deployment last summer, but the plan has faced numerous obstacles, includ-

ing public health concerns and strong diplomatic opposition from China.

The ministry plans to hand over the golf course to U.S. Forces Korea according to the Status of Forces Agreement between the two countries. An environmental impact evaluation is also needed.

Political uncertainties also threaten to complicate the situation. South Korea is facing the possibility of early elections if the constitutional court upholds lawmakers' decision to impeach President Park Geun-hye over a corruption and influence-peddling scandal.

Servicemembers honored for rescue efforts in fatal crash

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The city of Yokosuka honored servicemembers Monday for their rapid rescue efforts after a car plunged five stories from atop a parking garage with five people inside.

Yokosuka Mayor Yuto Yoshida presented the four Marines and two sailors with certificates expressing the community's appreciation. Yoshida said he was impressed by their fast response and that their actions helped Japanese medical responders. Three adults died when the ve-

hicle landed upside-down, but two boys were pulled out alive.

"Because of everyone's quick rescuing efforts, emergency officials were able to finish their on-site response quickly and take [the boys] to the hospital immediately," Yoshida said.

Yokosuka base commander Capt. Jeffrey J. Kim told Yoshida that it was a natural for the servicemembers to want to help. "We have sailors and visiting Marines who instantly acted as if this was their home community," Kim said.

The vehicle accidentally backed over a parking stone

Dec. 31 at the Saikaya parking garage.

Petty Officer 1st Class Garrett Osborne was walking with his wife, Alisha, and their 4-year-old son and 1-year-old daughter when he heard a loud crash that sounded like construction.

"Out of the corner of my eye I see this big object coming out of a building, and sure enough, it's an SUV flying out backward from this parking garage," said Osborne, assigned to the Navy Munitions Command. Osborne said he ran toward the car and began yelling for help. He was joined by Petty Officer 2nd Class

Derhon Finch, from the Yokosuka-based USS McCampbell, as well as Marine lance corporals James Flores, Raheem Gillim and Manaure Arellano and PFC Jacob Boerner.

The servicemembers and a group of Japanese citizens first tried to rescue the boys, ages 11 and 16, who were pinned in the car. They were able to extricate the younger boy but the older youth remained trapped. The servicemembers tried unsuccessfully to remove the vehicle's doors. The group then flipped the car over, freeing the remaining victim.

Military presses ahead with low-flying-jet plan

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine — A proposal to lower the flight ceiling for noisy fighter jets has dragged on for so long that residents can be forgiven if they've put it out of their minds.

The Air National Guard is pressing forward with the plan with a goal of submitting a revised environmental impact report this year for the Federal Aviation Administration to consider. Public hearings on the proposal could happen as soon as this summer or fall.

Fighter jet pilots who say the airspace is needed for low-level training have been waiting 14 years for a final answer.

Critics among the 78,000 people who live in the sparsely populated training area — about 20 people per square mile — want the plan spiked. They say the screeching jets startle people and wildlife, ultimately hurting tourism and real estate values.

"It's terrifying. You'd dive for the bushes for cover as they passed over," said Toni Seger, a vocal critic in North Lovell. "They're supposed to be sur-

prising the enemy. I'm not the enemy. I live here. I pay taxes here."

The proposal is led by the Massachusetts National Guard, whose fighters were first on the scene in New York after 9/11.

The 104th Fighter Wing contends the airspace is needed for training to defend the Northeast. The proposal would essentially drop the flight deck across the 4,000-square-mile Condor Military Operations Area, which is in western Maine and the northern tip of New Hampshire.

Service held for Navy SEAL Devon Grube

CAVALIER, N.D. — Hundreds of people gathered in a small North Dakota town to celebrate the life of a husband, father and Navy SEAL who died in a kayaking accident off the Virginia coast.

Devon Grube grew up in the community of Cavalier, where family, friends and others attended a memorial service at the public school gym Sunday. Grube, 35, died Dec. 28 with six months of service left as a Navy SEAL.

From The Associated Press

Cambodia cancels US exercise

Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — Cambodia has informed the United States that it is canceling an annual joint military exercise this year, even though planning for the event had already begun, officials from both countries said Monday.

Defense Ministry spokesman Gen. Chhum Socheath said the Angkor Sentinel exercise had to be postponed because Cambodian forces would be unable to fully participate as a result of local elections in June and a six-month campaign to eradicate drug-related crime.

U.S. Embassy spokesman Jay Raman confirmed in an email that the exercises for 2017 and 2018 have been canceled. He said military exchanges and training programs are not affected. After the local elections in June, Cambodia will hold a general election in 2018 in which long-serving Prime Minister Hun Sen is expected

to face a strong challenge.

Some analysts tied the cancellation more closely to China's influence in the region, which they believe will be exercised more vigorously after Donald Trump becomes U.S. president. Trump's rhetoric on China has been unfriendly, and he has suggested that the U.S. may reduce its involvement in the region.

Southeast Asian nations, even traditional allies of the United States such as the Philippines, have drawn closer to China as Beijing flexes its diplomatic and military muscle in the region. Cambodia depends on China as its most important ally and has demonstrated its willingness to do Beijing's bidding in diplomatic initiatives, especially regarding Chinese claims in the South China Sea.

"China is going to test the United States," said Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a professor of political science at Bangkok's

Chulalongkorn University. "This is one of the early test signals. Cambodia is a bit part in the overall picture."

Cambodia in December hosted an unprecedented "Golden Dragon" joint exercise with Chinese troops similar in size and purpose to Angkor Sentinel.

Washington has a complicated relationship with Cambodia, whose human rights record is strongly criticized by groups such as Amnesty International. U.S.-based Human Rights Watch criticized the 2014 Angkor Sentinel exercise for providing "training that would assist Cambodia's military in government crackdowns on the political opposition and civil society activists."

However, U.S. policy toward Hun Sen's government has generally been conciliatory.

Last year's exercise was the seventh in the series, which emphasizes humanitarian and peacekeeping operations.

EU defiant over Trump comments

Associated Press

BERLIN — European Union nations reacted with defiance Monday to comments by President-elect Donald Trump, who said in an interview that he believed NATO was "obsolete" and that more member states would leave the 28-nation EU.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, speaking ahead of an EU foreign ministers meeting, said Trump's view on NATO and criticism that allied members weren't paying their fair share has "caused astonishment."

His French counterpart, Jean-Marc Ayrault, added that the best response to such an interview was simple — Europeans uniting.

In Berlin, Chancellor Angela Merkel said Trump's positions have been "long known" but added, "I think we Europeans have our fate in our own hands."

"I'm personally going to wait until the American president takes office, and then we will naturally work with him on all levels," she told reporters.

Though Trump had made similar comments during his tempestuous election campaign, a repetition of the same points still came as a bit of a surprise since his choice for defense secretary, retired Marine Gen. James Mattis, stressed his support for NATO in his congressional confirmation hearings in Washington last week.

Trump's views, in an interview with German daily Bild and The Times of London, contradict Mattis, Steinmeier said.

Trump indicated he was indifferent to whether the EU stays together or not, a sharp break from the Obama administration, which encouraged British people to vote to remain in the EU in the June referendum.

"I believe others will leave. ... I do think keeping it together is not gonna be as easy as a lot of people think," Trump said in the interview.

The British exit from the EU would "end up being a great thing," he said.

Oman accepts 10 Gitmo detainees

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Oman said Monday it accepted 10 detainees from the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay ahead of President Barack Obama leaving office.

Oman's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it had accepted the prisoners at Obama's request. It did not name the prisoners.

The U.S. Defense Department did not immediately respond to questions about the transfer.

A U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity as the transfer had yet to be publicly announced by the U.S., confirmed the prisoners had been sent to Oman.

The Omani Embassy in Washington said it had no other information about the transfer. The U.S. Embassy in Muscat declined to comment.

The sultanate of Oman previously accepted 10 Guantanamo prisoners from Yemen in January 2016. Oman also took another six in June 2015. Neighboring Saudi Arabia took four prisoners earlier this month, and the United Arab Emirates took 15 in August, in the largest single transfer during Obama's administration.

Oman, ruled by Sultan Qaboos bin Said since 1970, has served as an interlocutor between the West and Iran. It has negotiated a number of prisoner releases in recent years.

Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, remains in the grip of a civil war and a Saudi-led

military offensive against the rebels making returning Guantanamo detainees there impossible.

Days earlier, authorities said 19 of the remaining 55 prisoners at the U.S. military base in Cuba were cleared for release and could be freed in the final days of Obama's presidency.

Obama has been unable to fulfill promises to close the facility in part because Congress banned the transfer of prisoners to U.S. soil.

Donald Trump, who will be inaugurated Friday as America's 45th president, said during his campaign that he not only wants to keep Guantanamo open but "load it up with some bad dudes." That's put pressure on the Obama administration to find places to send as many of the prisoners abroad as possible this week.

The U.S. began using its military base on southeast Cuba's isolated, rocky coast to hold prisoners captured during the Afghanistan invasion, bringing the first planeload on Jan. 11, 2002. At its peak, 18 months later, the facility held nearly 680 detainees.

There were 242 prisoners when Obama took office in 2009.

A September report released by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence said 122 of 693 detainees transferred out of the prison, or 17.6 percent, returned to fighting. An additional 86 detainees are suspected of having returned to the battlefield, according to the report.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Naked driver leads cops on high-speed chase

MI CLIO — A 48-year-old woman who was driving naked was taken to a hospital for observation after leading police on a high-speed chase through two mid-Michigan counties.

Police said the 25-mile chase reached speeds topping 100 mph Saturday morning on southbound Interstate 75 before the woman's vehicle was forced by officers into a utility pole and a ditch.

The woman, who has a Georgia driver's license, was not injured.

Michigan State Police Lt. David Kaiser said the chase started near Buena Vista Township in Saginaw County. The driver eventually was stopped near Clio in Genesee County, north of Flint.

Kaiser said authorities aren't sure if the incident was "a drug-related incident or a medical condition."

Gunshot into ceiling hits mom; son charged

IA WEST DES MOINES — A 21-year-old West Des Moines man was arrested after a gun he was handling fired, sending a bullet through a basement ceiling that hit his sleeping mother.

Paramedics were called to the home about 5 a.m. Friday and found a 43-year-old woman shot in her upper body. She was taken to a hospital with injuries not believed to be life-threatening.

Police said her son told officers he had been holding the handgun in the home's basement when it fired, sending the round into the ceiling and through a bed on which his mother was sleeping. He called 911.

The son faces charges of reckless use of a firearm causing injury and drug possession.

Buffalo blamed in accidental shooting

KS YODER — Authorities said a man accidentally was shot while trying to help kill a buffalo at a south-central Kansas meat-processing business.

The Reno County Sheriff's Department said Duane Helms, of Moundridge, was wounded in the leg shortly before 12:30 p.m. Friday at Yoder Meats in Yoder.

Authorities said Helms was assisting a Yoder Meats employee in trying to shoot a buffalo so the animal could be butchered.

The sheriff's department said a Yoder Meats employee with a rifle was atop a ladder, trying to shoot a buffalo confined in a trailer, when the animal turned, jarring the ladder and knocking the employee off balance. That's when the rifle discharged, shooting Helms.

The department did not immediately disclose Helms' medical status Saturday.

School employee fired for tweet over spelling

MD FREDERICK — A school system employee in Maryland who mixed it up with a student on Twitter over the student's poor spelling has been fired.

Katie Nash told The Frederick News-Post that she was fired on Friday afternoon from her \$44,000-per-year job. A Frederick County Public Schools spokesman confirmed that Nash had been let go, without providing details.

Nash ran the school district's Twitter account. On Jan. 5, a student tweeted to the account, asking that schools be closed

"tammarow." Nash responded from the district's account, "But then how would you learn how to spell 'tomorrow?'"

Nash said she understands why she was let go and that she didn't "want to be a distraction to the school system."

Man returns library book 100 years overdue

CA SAN FRANCISCO — A book of short stories titled "Forty Minutes Late" has been returned to a San Francisco library — 100 years late.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported that Bay Area resident Webb Johnson returned the book Friday. There was no fine.

Johnson's great grandmother had checked it out from the city's old Fillmore branch in 1917. She passed away a week before the due date, and the Fillmore branch is no longer around.

Johnson found the 1909 book, by F. Hopkinson Smith, in an old steamer trunk in 1996. He assumed the library wouldn't want it back, but a recently announced "fine forgiveness program" that runs through Feb. 14 inspired him to return it.

Court says buildings have a right to be ugly

VT MONTPELIER — The Vermont Supreme Court says buildings are allowed to be ugly.

The court made the ruling in response to a pair of challenges to planned solar power developments. Nearby landowners sued, contending that the developments would be ugly and would hurt property values.

The Rutland Herald reported the Supreme Court found unsightliness does not render a building a nuisance under the law. It cites a long-standing rule that bars private nuisance actions based on aesthetic disap-

proval and nothing else.

Lawyers for the suing landowners argued that state nuisance law was broad enough to support their claim.

Police: Man stole 2 cars, 1 with child inside

KY COVINGTON — Police arrested a man accused of stealing two cars, including one with a child inside that the mother was able to remove from the vehicle.

WXIX-TV in Cincinnati reported the crime spree started in Covington and ended about 65 miles south on Interstate 71, where Justin Bowlin, 35, was arrested by Kentucky State Police.

The mother encountered Bowlin early Thursday morning when she stopped to help at the site of a car accident. Police in Independence said Bowlin fled from the wrecked car and jumped into the woman's car. Police said Bowlin assaulted the woman, but she was able to escape and to retrieve her child from the backseat.

Machine gun, grenade launcher are seized

MT MISSOULA — A machine gun with a grenade launcher attached is among the weapons seized in a methamphetamine case.

The Missoulian reported eight people were sentenced in the case Friday. Authorities said the group brought more than 11 pounds of the drug into Montana.

FBI special agent Monte Shaide said detectives found 68 firearms during home raids along with drugs and \$11,000 in cash. Two grenade launcher attachments were found as well as a rifle modified into a fully automatic weapon.

From wire reports

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Rodgers' heroics propel Green Bay win

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — After another improbable throw from Aaron Rodgers that propelled the Green Bay Packers to a playoff win, coach Mike McCarthy was asked if it was the best one yet from his star quarterback.

"It's the best one today, that's for sure," McCarthy said after a wild 34-31 divisional playoff win Sunday over the Dallas Cowboys that was the Packers' eighth straight and sent them to the NFC championship game.

"He's an incredible player, incredible talent," McCarthy added. "And to do it when it's all on the line like that, that's what great players do."

Rodgers threw a 36-yard pass to a toe-dragging Jared Cook on the sideline, and Mason Crosby kicked a 51-yard field goal on the next play as time expired, sending the two-time MVP into a showdown next Sunday with the possible winner this year, Atlanta's Matt Ryan.

"We're going to enjoy this one, and then we'll get on to Atlanta tomorrow," said Rodgers, who threw for 356 yards and two touchdowns. "But this one's special, more special than we've had around here in a while."

The throw on the run from Rodgers to Cook came on third-and-20 with 12 seconds left, and after the Cowboys (13-4) tied the score twice in the final 4:08 after trailing by 18 in the first half and by 15 to start the fourth quarter in their fifth straight

divisional-round loss.

Dallas' rally was led by rookie sensations Dak Prescott and Ezekiel Elliott in their playoff debuts, and the first two career postseason touchdown catches for star receiver Dez Bryant along with the first for 14th-year tight end Jason Witten.

Prescott threw for 302 yards and was the first rookie QB in the Super Bowl era with three touchdown passes in a playoff game. Elliott, the NFL rushing champion, had 125 yards.

"We've built the team in such a way where we've got a lot of young guys who are cornerstone players for us," coach Jason Garrett said. "I think the mix of youth and guys who are in the prime of their careers and some veteran guys has really been beneficial to the chemistry of this football team."

Things to consider after the Packers beat the Cowboys in the divisional round for the second time in three seasons:

Half Mary: Rodgers, who threw his first interception during the eight-game streak, didn't have another Hail Mary after three in 13 months, the latest before halftime in last week's wild-card win over the New York Giants. But the throw to Cook had the same effect, allowing the Packers to get in scoring range after the Cowboys tied it for the second time in the last 4:08 with 35 seconds remaining.

"We've got a good repertoire of plays toward the end of the game, whether it's obviously the well-publicized Hail Marys or other plays we've made over the years

to kind of draw from," said Rodgers, who celebrated in his first appearance on the Cowboys' field since he was the Super Bowl MVP while winning his only title six years ago.

Spreading it around: If Rodgers is without Jordy Nelson again at Atlanta after his No. 1 receiver injured his ribs against the Giants, the options seem plentiful. Rodgers found six different receivers, including a 34-yard touchdown to Richard Rodgers that was his longest since catching one of those Hail Marys from Aaron Rodgers to stun Detroit late in the 2015 season.

Dazzling Dez: This was Bryant at his best. Healthy for most of this season after his injury-filled 2015 when the Cowboys won only four games, Bryant had nine catches for 132 yards and his first two career postseason touchdowns. Things are looking up two seasons into his \$70 million, five-year contract. "For Dez, it's physical preparation, it's mental preparation, but it's also emotional preparation," Garrett said.

Roadies: Rodgers' third NFC title game will be on the road, just like the previous two. He split those, beating Chicago on the way to the title and losing to San Francisco two years ago. He doesn't mind the road through. Green Bay ended a 12-game playoff winning streak for home teams. The previous road winner? The Packers at Washington in the wild-card round last season.

Steelers hold off Chiefs behind Boswell's 6 FGs

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Who needs to reach the end zone when you have Le'Veon Bell chewing up yards and the clock and Chris Boswell setting an NFL playoff record with six field goals? Throw in a stingy Pittsburgh defense for most of Sunday night, and a multitude of mistakes by Kansas City, and the Steelers' 18-16 victory sent them into the AFC championship game.

The Steelers needed to hold off a last-ditch threat by the Chiefs before advancing to face New England on Sunday night for a spot in the Super Bowl. The Patriots won on Oct. 26 at

Pittsburgh 27-16, but Ben Roethlisberger was injured and didn't play.

"I think it's going to be a showdown," Bell said. "Two great quarterbacks going head to head. Two of the best teams in the AFC. It's time to settle it next week."

Since 2001, the Patriots and Steelers have combined to win nine AFC titles.

Spencer Ware's 1-yard touchdown run took Kansas City within 18-16. The Chiefs at first converted the 2-pointer to tie it, but tackle Eric Fisher — the first overall selection in the 2013 draft — was penalized for holding. The next try failed.

With 2:43 remaining, Jus-

tin Gilbert misplayed the kick return and was tackled at the Pittsburgh 5. Roethlisberger hit Antonio Brown for 7 yards on third down and Pittsburgh then ran out the clock, securing a ninth straight victory for the Steelers. The Chiefs have not won a home playoff game since 1994, losing five in a row.

"I feel like we left a lot of plays on the field that we should have made," linebacker Justin Houston said. "We didn't; it's the playoffs, every play counts."

The scoring started furiously in the opening minutes then the game became a kicking exhibition by Boswell, who also had six field goals in the regular

season against Cincinnati. And Bell put on a virtuoso running performance, patiently finding holes and then exploding through them. He added a team-record 170 yards rushing to the 167 he had in a win over Miami last week.

"The coaches put a lot of trust in me to get the job done," Bell said of his 30 carries. "Just run hard. Just picked my spots where I could and run hard."

The Steelers became the first team to win a playoff game without a TD since eventual Super Bowl champion Indianapolis in the 2006 AFC divisional round at Baltimore.

Metu lifts USC over Colorado

Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — The last-minute play was drawn up something like this: Get the ball down low to lanky big man Chimezie Metu and let him do his thing.

His team showed confidence in him. So he showed confidence in himself.

Metu scored a career-high 24 points, including a go-ahead hook shot with 29 seconds remaining, and No. 25 Southern California held off slumping Colorado 71-68 on Sunday night.

“It feels really good for them to have confidence in me,” Metu said.

It’s not hard to see why the Trojans (16-3, 3-3 Pac-12) showed so much faith in him — Metu scored 20 points in the opening half with an array of hook shots, mid-range jumpers and powerful dunks. His previous high for a game was 21 at UCLA last January.

On his winner, Metu arched a shot over his defender moments after Xavier Johnson gave the Buffaloes a one-point lead on a three-pointer.

“He played a terrific basketball game,” USC coach Andy Enfield said. “He was active, he got into a little foul trouble so we had to take him out, but in this altitude it was probably a blessing for him to sit on the bench for a few minutes.”

George King had a final chance to tie it at the buzzer, but the ball bounced off the rim.

No. 22 Cincinnati 55, East Carolina 46: Kyle Washington had 16 points and 11 rebounds and visiting Cincinnati beat East Carolina for its eighth straight win.

Jacob Evans III added 10 points for the Bearcats (15-2, 5-0 American Athletic Conference). Cincinnati extended its longest winning streak since the 2013-14 team reeled off 15 straight.

Federer returns with victory

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Roger Federer returned from a six-month layoff to beat fellow 35-year-old Jurgen Melzer just before midnight on day one of the Australian Open, agreeing it felt a bit like coming home.

The 17-time major winner hadn’t played at tour level since Wimbledon, giving his injured left knee time to heal.

He served 19 aces and had only one double-fault in a 7-5, 3-6, 6-2, 6-2 win on Monday over Melzer, but dropped serve three times and had moments of frustration.

“It’s nice to be playing normal tennis again,” he said. “It was a long road [but] I’m in the draw, which is a beautiful thing.”

Federer surprised himself by still feeling nervous when the match started, and took a while to settle down.

“I was fine all day ... I felt fine. Then I hit four frames in a row,” he said. “It was like, ‘Whew, it’s not as easy as I thought it was going to be,’” he said. “Think I struggled for a while to find that groove, that

rhythm.”

Federer has won four Australian titles and reached the semifinals or better in 12 of the previous 13 years, and making himself at home on Rod Laver Arena.

He’ll play another qualifier in the second round after Noah Rubin beat Bjorn Fratangelo.

Plenty of highly-ranked players concurred that first rounds are never easy, including defending champion and top-ranked Angelique Kerber and U.S. Open champion Stan Wawrinka.

In his first Grand Slam match with the elevated status of having a knighthood and the No. 1 ranking, Andy Murray berated himself when he made mistakes and frequently yelled during a 7-5, 7-6 (5), 6-2 win over Ilya Marchenko.

The five-time finalist comfortably navigated what he hoped was the first step to a drought-breaking Australian Open title.

Kerber, who is defending a major title and is also the No. 1 seed at a Grand Slam for the first time, had some nervous

moments in her 6-2, 5-7, 6-2 win over Lesia Tsurenko.

Kerber won her first Grand Slam title here last year, beating Serena Williams in the final after saving match point in the first round.

So after wasting a match point before her serve was broken as Tsurenko rallied to win the second set, Kerber said her mind raced back 12 months.

“To be honest, I was thinking about this,” she said. “When I lost the second set, and I had match point, I was thinking about my match last year in the first round — first rounds are always tough.”

Murray has lost four of the last six finals here — including the last two — to six-time champion Novak Djokovic. But he did take something off his long-time friend at the end of last year when he replaced Djokovic in the top ranking during a stunning finish to the season.

Wawrinka, who made his Grand Slam breakthrough in Australia in 2014, scraped past 35th-ranked Martin Klizan 4-6, 6-4, 7-5, 4-6, 6-4.

US starts strong Down Under

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Shelby Rogers thoroughly dominated the No. 4 player in the world, Simona Halep. A teary-eyed CoCo Vandeweghe battled nausea to outlast another top-20 veteran, Roberta Vinci.

And the grande dame of the women’s tour, 36-year-old Venus Williams, refused to cede the spotlight for at least another match at the Australian Open, beating Kateryna Kozlova in the first round of her 73rd career Grand Slam tournament, an Open-era record.

It’s been a fast start for many of the 32 Americans in the men’s and women’s singles draw in Melbourne — both the old guard and the unproven youngsters of the next generation. Thirteen won their first-round matches on Monday, compared to six losses — two of which were to American opponents.

The power-hitting Rogers scored the biggest upset of the day. Newly confident after her surprising run to the French Open quarterfinals last year, the 24-year-old South Carolina native outplayed Halep with an aggressive, all-court game, winning 6-3, 6-1.

“The biggest thing I took away from [the French Open] was just that I can compete with the top players in the world,” she said. “[There are] little things here and there I need to work on, but I’m here. I need to believe in myself.”

Vandeweghe fell to her knees with nausea while trailing in the second set of her match against Vinci, but after an extended medical timeout and a couple sips of a soft drink, she recovered to break back and finish off a 6-1, 7-6 (3) victory.

Her first thought, she said, was “I’m going to be that person who’s going to barf on the court. And I hate throwing up.”

The 13th-seeded Williams had dramas of her own against Kozlova, rallying twice from a break down in the opening set before prevailing 7-6 (5), 7-5. When she finally closed out the first set with an ace on her third set point, the normally stoic Williams bent low, pumped her fist and let out a roar.

On the men’s side, the 19th-seeded John Isner, 23rd-seeded Jack Sock and 31st-seeded Sam Querrey notched first-round wins, as did Ryan Harrison, a one-time rising star who is rediscovering his love for the game.

Capitals rout Flyers for 9th straight win

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Washington Capitals showed they could get away with a slow start and still pull out another win.

Despite a sluggish beginning that forced backup goaltender Philipp Grubauer to be on top of his game, the Capitals' offense came to life in a 5-0 blowout of the Philadelphia Flyers on Sunday.

Washington has won a season-best nine in a row to climb atop the Metropolitan Division, Eastern Conference and NHL standings with 63 points.

The Capitals have beaten New Jersey, Ottawa (twice), Toronto, Columbus, Montreal, Pittsburgh, Chicago and Philadelphia and outscored those opponents 40-11 over this stretch. They haven't allowed an even-strength goal in 298:54 going back to the Maple Leafs game on Jan. 3.

"I think guys are enjoying coming to the rink right now," said defenseman Matt Niskanen, who scored twice in a span of 2:27 of the third period.

"We're getting some offense, but we're also getting some shutouts mixed in there, too, so that's a good sign. We're playing really good hockey, still room to grow I think in the long term, but it's pretty fun right now."

It doesn't get much more fun than four

goals on seven shots in five minutes early in the third period, the onslaught the Capitals piled on the Flyers with two goals each by Niskanen and winger Justin Williams.

Grubauer was sharp especially early and on five successful penalty kills and made 24 saves, and Andre Burakovsky scored a power-play goal in the second period to fluster Philadelphia, which had 13 of the game's first 18 shots.

Wild 3, Blackhawks 2: At Chicago, Jason Pominville scored in the third period while Devan Dubnyk made 33 saves as Minnesota won its fourth straight to grab sole possession of the top spot in the Western Conference.

Nino Niederreiter and Chris Stewart also scored as the Wild beat the Blackhawks for the eighth straight time.

Minnesota jumped in front for good when Marco Scandella shot the puck behind the net and it caromed right to Pominville standing all alone on the right side of the crease. He knocked it into the open net for his sixth of the season at 5:08.

Wild defenseman Ryan Suter was sent off for tripping with 22.4 seconds left, but Chicago was unable to get a good look with a 6-on-4 advantage.

Patrick Kane scored twice for the Blackhawks and Corey Crawford made 29 stops.

Devils 2, Canucks 1 (OT): Taylor Hall scored 1:28 into overtime to lift visiting New Jersey past Vancouver

Skating on a 2-on-1 with Damon Severson, Hall chose to hold the puck and beat Canucks goalie Jacob Markstrom through the legs.

Kyle Quincey scored the tying goal with 3:03 left in the second period and Cory Schneider stopped 21 shots to help the Devils win their second straight after losing four in a row.

Loui Eriksson scored for the Canucks and Markstrom finished with 20 saves for the Canucks, losers of four straight after winning six in a row coming out of the holiday break.

Blues 2, Ducks 1 (OT): Patrik Berglund's second goal of the game, 51 seconds into overtime, lifted visiting St. Louis past Anaheim.

Carter Hutton stopped 22 shots for his second win in two nights for the Blues. Hutton made back-to-back starts for the first time this season and has played in the last five.

Rickard Rakell scored for Anaheim and John Gibson made 24 saves as the Ducks fell to 1-8 in overtime.

Harden, Rockets snap skid with Nets victory

Associated Press

NEW YORK — James Harden had 22 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists in his 12th triple-double of the season as the Houston Rockets easily ended their first losing streak of the season by beating the Brooklyn Nets 137-112 on Sunday night.

Held to 105 points in losses to Minnesota and Memphis, the Rockets bounced back to hand the Nets their 10th straight loss.

Eric Gordon led the Rockets with 24 points and Trevor Ariza added 23. Houston made 21 three-pointers and had five players with at least 16 points.

Trevor Booker scored 18 points for the Nets, who were still without Jeremy Lin (strained left hamstring) on the night they gave out his bobblehead and also rested Brook Lopez.

Thunder 122, Kings 118: Russell Westbrook had 36 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists for his 20th triple-double of the season as Oklahoma City beat host Sacramento.

Westbrook had 19 triple-doubles last season. He entered averaging a triple-double and is trying to match Hall of Fame guard Oscar Robertson as the only NBA player to average a triple-double for a full season.

DeMarcus Cousins had 31 points, 11 rebounds and seven assists for the Kings, who have lost two straight and five of six.

Raptors 116, Knicks 101: DeMar DeRozan had 23 points while Norman Powell added 21 as Toronto used a dominant third quarter to beat visiting New York.

DeRozan also had five rebounds and five assists before coming out late in the third quarter. The Raptors improved

to 27-13, winning their third straight game overall and fifth in a row against the Knicks.

Carmelo Anthony led the Knicks with 18 points, Justin Holiday had 17, and Derrick Rose added 16. The Knicks are 2-10 in their last 12 to drop to 18-23.

Hawks 111, Bucks 98: Kent Bazemore scored 24 points while Mike Dunleavy added 20 as host Atlanta beat Milwaukee for its eighth victory in nine games.

Dunleavy, in his second game since arriving in a trade last week with Cleveland, had his first 20-point performance since a first-round playoff game for Chicago on April 30, 2015.

Pistons 102, Lakers 97: Tobias Harris scored 23 points and hit a decisive three-pointer with 30.5 seconds to play as visiting Detroit snapped a three-game losing streak with

a victory over Los Angeles.

Detroit barely hung on down the stretch of a back-and-forth game with the Lakers, who lost their fourth straight despite 26 points from Lou Williams.

Bulls 108, Grizzlies 104: Doug McDermott scored a career-high 31 points while Jimmy Butler had a pair of key baskets in the closing minute as Chicago beat host Memphis.

The Bulls broke a 104-all tie with 25 seconds left on a 15-footer from Butler and a pair of free throws by McDermott. Butler also had a go-ahead 18-footer with 53 seconds left and finished with 16 points to help Chicago win its second straight.

Mavericks 98, Timberwolves 87: Wesley Matthews scored 19 points and Dirk Nowitzki added 17 to help host Dallas beat Minnesota.