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Marine Corps toughens fitness test

By MARTIN EGNASH

Stars and Stripes

Marines will need to start preparing for more challenging fitness tests after the Corps announced changes to its physical fitness and combat fitness tests beginning this month.

Late last year, a Marine Corps administrative message outlined several major changes to the fitness tests that Marines are required to complete annually and which partly determine their promotions. Some may find the new tests harder to ace, while others may struggle to just pass.

“We’ve increased the standards,” Col. Stephen Armes, director of the Corps’ Force Fitness Division, said in a statement. “Although scores may dip a little, Marines will respond to the challenge to get their numbers back up.”

Among the changes are higher minimum scores, less rest time and, for women, higher minimum and maximum pullups.

“This announcement is part of a larger, ongoing institutional effort to modernize the force and help Marines become more

combat credible in lethality and readiness,” Marine spokeswoman Jessica Hanley said in an email.

The changes take effect with this year’s physical fitness test, or PFT, which Marines will begin taking as early as this month. They will affect the combat fitness test, or CFT, this summer, when Marines begin taking that assessment.

Events for the annual PFT are running, crunches and pullups, while events for the CFT are sprinting, lifting ammunition cans and maneuvering through an obstacle course. Getting a minimum score in each event will no longer be enough to pass either test. Marines age 17-26 — the vast majority in service — will need to exceed the minimum score in at least one event to get the required 150 minimum points to pass, up from 135.

They also will have to make do with less rest time between events in the CFT. They’ll get three minutes between events instead of five, a change Marine Corps officials say is meant to cut the time it takes to complete the test and make it more challenging.

Female Marines in most age groups will also see increases in the minimum and maximum pullup repetitions needed either to pass or ace the PFT.

For women 21 and older, one, two or three more pullups will be required to meet the new minimums, depending on age, while the number needed to achieve a maximum score will go up by two for most age brackets.

“The data has been evaluated over the last two years, and females continue to increase in their pull up propensity and average number of pull up repetitions,” the Marine Corps said in a statement.

The biggest increase will be for women age 26 to 30 who will have to do a total of four pullups to meet the new minimum and 12 to max out.

The service will also be training more force fitness instructors — Marines who specialize in physical training — and sending them around the fleet.

They will assist commanders in increasing their unit fitness levels and helping prepare Marines for the PFT and CFT changes.

Ex-Gitmo commander charged in death probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A former commander of the U.S. Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, was arrested Wednesday on charges that he interfered with the investigation into the death of a civilian with whom he fought after an argument over whether the officer had had an affair with the man’s wife.

Navy Capt. John R. Nettleton remains on active duty, but he was removed from command shortly after civilian Christopher Tur was found floating in January 2015 in the waters off the base on Cuba’s southeastern coast.

Nettleton was accused in a federal indictment of obstruction of justice and concealing material facts, including that he and Tur had brawled after Tur accused the commander of having the affair. Nettleton denied to his superior officer and others that he had the affair, but investigators later determined it

had happened, according to an indictment issued in Jacksonville, Fla., where Nettleton has been on temporary duty.

Nettleton was commander of the base since June 2012 but not the detention center where suspected terrorists are held.

An autopsy found that Tur, 42, died from drowning but that he had broken ribs suffered before he went into the water and a cut to his head. The investigation also turned up blood from Tur inside the entryway of Nettleton’s residence on the base and from a paper towel in the backyard.

Tur came to Guantanamo in 2011 with his wife, Lara, and two children and worked as the loss prevention safety manager at the Navy Exchange. On the night of his disappearance, Tur confronted the commander and Tur’s wife in front of witnesses at an on-base nightclub. Each had “consumed several alcoholic drinks,” according to the indictment.

Tur later that night went to Nettleton’s residence, where the two men fought. Nettleton’s daughter heard the commotion and came down to see her father on the ground and Tur standing over him with a telephone shortly before he left the area.

Around that time, a friend of Tur’s reported getting a call from him in which Tur said he was at Nettleton’s house and had “just knocked the skipper out.”

The indictment said Nettleton repeatedly misled officials during the search for Tur and later encouraged Lara Tur to deny their affair to investigators. The document doesn’t say how authorities later confirmed the affair.

Nettleton, 53, was arraigned Wednesday in Jacksonville on charges of obstruction of justice, concealment, falsifying records and making false statements to investigators. A plea of not guilty was entered on his behalf and he was released on bond.

Trump threatens emergency declaration

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump threatened on Thursday to declare a national emergency to circumvent Congress if he can't reach a deal with Democrats to fund his promised border wall. He headed to the U.S.-Mexico border to draw further attention to his case after negotiations with lawmakers blew up.

The partial government shutdown dragged into a 20th day with hundreds of thousands of federal workers off the job or working without pay as the wall fight persisted.

Asked about a national emergency declaration, Trump said as he left the White House for Texas, "I'm not prepared to do that yet, but if I have to I will." He contends such a declaration would allow him to direct the military to begin wall construction.

"So we're either going to have a win, make a compromise — because I think a compromise is a win for everybody — or I will declare a national emergency," he said.

It's not clear what a compromise might entail. Trump says he won't reopen the government without money for the wall. Democrats say they favor measures to bolster border security but oppose the long, impregnable walling that Trump envisions. He is asking for \$5.7 billion for wall construction.

Trump's comments came a day after he walked out of a negotiating meeting with congressional leaders — "I said bye-bye," he tweeted soon after — as efforts to end the partial government shutdown fell into deeper disarray. Affected federal workers face lost paychecks on Friday, and more people are touched every day by the rollback of government

services.

Putting the standoff in personal terms, the president tweeted before leaving for Texas, "The Opposition Party & the Dems know we must have Strong Border Security, but don't want to give 'Trump' another one of many wins!"

In McAllen, Texas, Trump was to visit a border patrol station for a roundtable discussion on immigration and border security and get a briefing. But he has expressed his own doubts that his appearance and remarks will change any minds as he seeks money for the wall that has been his signature promise since his presidential campaign.

McAllen is located in the Rio Grande Valley, the busiest part of the border for illegal border crossings.

The White House meeting in the Situation Room ended after just 14 minutes. Democrats said

they asked Trump to reopen the government but he told them if he did they wouldn't give him money for the wall. Republicans said Trump posed a direct question to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi: If he opened the government, would she fund the wall? She said no.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said Trump slammed his hand on the table. But Trump, who handed out candy at the start of the meeting, disputed that characterization. He said he "didn't smash the table" but "should have."

One result was certain: The shutdown plunged into new territory with no endgame in sight. The Democrats see the idea of the long wall as ineffective and even immoral. Trump sees it as an absolute necessity to stop what he calls a crisis of illegal immigration, drug-smuggling and human trafficking at the border.

Unpaid Pacific Coast Guard focuses on essential missions

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Coast Guard's 14th District area of responsibility is a vast 12.2 million square miles in the Pacific Ocean.

It takes in most of the South Pacific, with crews and vessels for sea and air stationed in Guam and Hawaii. Other personnel are stationed in detachments in Japan, Singapore and American Samoa.

As of the beginning of the year, however, the district's 835 active-duty members — "blue-suiters," as the service calls them — and some essential civilian employees have been carrying out those missions without pay due to the partial government shutdown.

In an average year, the 14th District handles 800 to 900 cases of search-and-rescue, marine environmental protection, marine safety and coastal law enforcement. They often work closely with the U.S. Navy and America's allies and part-

ner nations in Asia.

"We have been approved to continue essential operations for missions such as search-and-rescue, homeland safety, port security and law enforcement and environmental response — that's where our effort is," said Chief Sara Muir, a Honolulu-based spokeswoman for the 14th District.

"The plan is to continue doing those essential missions as long as necessary to do so," she said. "The Coast Guard is dedicated to ensuring the safety of life at sea and protecting people operating in this area."

Meanwhile, vendors who provide the Coast Guard with fuel, repair parts, maintenance or any other services needed to carry out missions providing for national security, search-and-rescue and environmental protection will not be paid until the shutdown ends.

The shutdown began Dec. 22 after President Donald Trump and lawmakers failed to come to an agreement on allocating money to build a wall along

the U.S. border with Mexico. Trump insisted that \$5.7 billion in wall funding be added to federal spending legislation needed to keep the government operating.

Democrats, who assumed control of the House with the new year, and a handful of Republicans oppose the funding.

The shutdown has affected about 800,000 federal workers, including those working for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, under which the Coast Guard operates.

Coast Guard personnel received paychecks at the end of 2018 after the service was able to pull together funds for that pay period. Essential personnel are now working without pay, while nonessential employees have been furloughed.

The Coast Guard is the only military service working without pay during the shutdown. The Department of Defense is funded to the end of the fiscal year in September.

The 14th District has managed 46 cases in its region be-

tween Dec. 22 and Monday, some lasting a few hours, others for days, Muir said. Two have been major incidents.

The 14th District is, however, curtailing other routine duties during the shutdown.

Among the activities curbed or delayed are boarding recreational vessels for safety checks, issuance or renewals of merchant documentation and licensing, administrative functions and training, Muir said.

Maintenance is also curtailed on the district's surface and aviation fleets, which include four C-130s, three MH-65 helicopters, six patrol boats and two buoy tenders, she said.

The Coast Guard is also cutting back on fisheries enforcement patrols in Hawaiian waters, which are done to stop unregulated and illegal fishing.

"The longer the shutdown lasts, the more difficult it will become for the Coast Guard to maintain mission readiness," she said.

Report: Japan to buy island for Navy landing practice

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Japanese government is planning to buy an island in its Kagoshima prefecture for U.S. aircraft-carrier landing practice as soon as March, according to a Thursday report by the Jiji Press.

For decades, Navy pilots have practiced their carrier-landing skills on Japan's Iwo Jima. The island is known as the site of a fierce World War II battle that killed more than 25,000 Japanese and American troops. A photo taken during that battle inspired the iconic Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington, Va.

Over the past several years, Japanese defense officials have pressed to move that practice from Iwo Jima (known in Japan as Iwo To) to Mageshima, an island closer to Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, where Carrier Air Wing 5 is based.

Originally, Iwo Jima was intended only as a temporary site for carrier-landing practice. In an interview Thursday with *Stars and Stripes*, a Defense Ministry spokesman emphasized the importance of finding a permanent location for landing practice.

Navy pilots practice on the island at least once a year to help them qualify for carrier landings prior to deployments. Carrier Air Wing 5 practiced

there in May before the USS Ronald Reagan's first 2018 deployment.

Since 2011, Japan's Ministry of Defense has contemplated building a Japan Self-Defense Forces facility on Mageshima, where U.S. field-carrier landing practice could also be held.

In 2014, Japan allotted \$1 million for an environmental survey of Mageshima to analyze its potential.

Talk of the move has sparked anxiety over potential noise issues for some residents of nearby islands. Tanegashima, 8 miles from Mageshima, is home to about 33,000 people, according to the 2010 census by Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

In contrast, remote Iwo Jima is 760 miles south of Tokyo. Civilian access is restricted, and the island is uninhabited aside from military personnel.

Most of Mageshima is owned by the defunct Taston Airport land development company. Tokyo District Court in June ordered the company's assets be seized after creditors filed a bankruptcy claim against it, *Jiji Press* and *Kyoto News* reported on June 28. Taston had liabilities of about \$260 million.

If the reported plans go through, Japan would pay about \$150 million for Mageshima, *Jiji Press* reported Thursday.

Stars and Stripes correspondent Hana Kusumoto contributed to this report.

Room rates rising for base lodging

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Lodging at many U.S. military bases worldwide is getting pricier due to a Pentagon requirement that such facilities become self-sustaining.

Rates could go up as much as \$75 a night, with variations by service, location and room type, according to military officials.

The change comes as the Pentagon looks to make business operations more efficient and free up funds, as spelled out in Defense Department guidance issued to the services late last year.

Beginning in October, military lodging programs won't be supported by taxpayer dollars. Base lodges will have to use income generated from nightly room fees for all operations.

Appropriated funds may be authorized in limited cases, such as to restore a facility "destroyed by acts of God, fire or terrorism," or to accommodate a mission change or influx of new units.

Services may no longer assign military personnel to work at lodging, as all employees must be paid through nonappropriated funds. The Air

Force says the service is in the process of reassigning airmen working in its lodging.

Exceptions to the new guidance include Morale, Welfare and Recreation recreational lodging; military treatment facility lodging, including Fisher Houses; and privatized lodging facilities.

Air Force base lodging rates went up Jan. 1, service officials announced this week. They said to expect more increases.

The smallest increase is to large distinguished visiting quarters, a jump from \$75 to \$83 a day. Other rate increases include airman quarters (\$44 to \$55), officer quarters (\$60 to \$70), temporary lodging facilities (\$63 to \$77) and distinguished visiting quarters (\$69 to \$79).

At Navy Gateway Inns and Suites, rates went up Oct. 1 and adjustments vary based on location, officials said.

In the Europe, Africa and Southwest Asia regions, rates increased \$11 to \$31 per night, depending on room type, according to a Navy statement.

The rate at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii increased an average of \$45 a night, Debra Couch, a Navy region lodging director, said in a statement.

Fox, Eads visit GIs while making a war movie in Seoul

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

YONGSAN GARRISON, South Korea — Actors Megan Fox and George Eads visited with real warriors during a meet-and-greet on this Army garrison in the heart of Seoul, where they're filming a Korean War movie.

The stars took a break from filming "Jangsari 9.15" to answer questions and pose for photos for a packed audience Wednesday at the Yongsan movie theater.

"It's the least that we can do to show appreciation for what you do every day," Fox told the soldiers and civilian employ-

ees after they got to view an exclusive clip pulled together from rough cuts.

Fox, of "Transformers" and "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" fame, smiled as several soldiers professed their love from the crowd.

Eads, a longtime star of "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation" and, more recently, "MacGyver," drew whoops when he said he's from a military family and grew up in Texas near Fort Hood.

"It's always been a dream of mine to be in a war movie," he said.

The South Korean-produced movie will tell the story of the 1950 Jangsa Marine landing operation that was part of the Bat-

tle of Incheon, a turning point for U.S.-led forces battling communist troops in the three-year war.

Fox plays Marguerite Higgins, a war correspondent who became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for international reporting.

Eads plays Colonel Steven, a leader of the landing operation that included so-called student soldiers, young men who volunteered or were forced to fight in the war.

The film is directed by Kwak Kyung-taek and also features South Korean stars Kim Myung-min and Choi Min-ho.

USAF accepts KC-46A jet tanker after delay

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Air Force on Thursday accepted the first KC-46A Pegasus jet tanker from Boeing following years of delays to the modernized air-refueling plane program due to technical issues and allegations of corruption.

The first of 52 KC-46 aircraft that Boeing is contracted to build is expected to arrive later this month at McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas, where the service will begin testing and training for pilots and airmen who operate the refueling booms, Air Force Capt. Hope Cronin, a service spokeswoman, said in a statement. Boeing, in a separate statement, said it anticipated delivering at least nine more aircraft to the Air Force soon, and it expects to build 179 by 2027. The company is also under contract to build a single KC-46 for Japan.

But the aircraft, which was slated for delivery by 2016 and designed to replace the more than 50-year-old KC-135 Stratotanker, comes with lingering problems, according to the Air Force.

Those issues primarily rest with the aircraft's advanced

cockpit vision system that allows boom operators to control refueling remotely from the plane's front via video and other sensors, instead of manually from the rear of the plane as they have done in legacy tankers.

"We have identified, and Boeing has agreed to fix at its expense, deficiencies discovered in developmental testing of the remote vision system," Cronin said. "The Air Force has mechanisms in place to ensure Boeing meets its contractual obligations while we continue with initial operational testing and evaluation."

The first 18 KC-46s cost \$4.9 billion, according to a fixed-price contract signed in 2011. To date, the program is worth about \$44 billion. However, Boeing has forfeited some \$3.5 billion so far due to problems in the program, according to the Air Force.

The KC-46A is a 165-foot tanker plane built on Boeing's 767 platform that can carry some 210,000 pounds of fuel and is capable of refueling every aircraft in the Pentagon's inventory able to do so, according to company. It is capable of flying about 650 mph and carrying 15 crew members.

Pompeo seeks to reassure Arab allies, bashes Iran

Associated Press

CAIRO — U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo held talks with Egyptian leaders in Cairo on Thursday as he continued a nine-nation Mideast tour aimed at reassuring America's Arab partners that the Trump administration is not walking away from the region and will maintain pressure on Iran.

Amid confusion and concern over plans to withdraw U.S. forces from Syria, Pompeo met with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi and Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry to discuss security and economic cooperation. He was later to deliver a speech on the administration's broader Mideast objectives focused on combating threats from Iran.

Pompeo said on Twitter that his meeting with el-Sissi had been "productive." He added that "the U.S. stands firmly with Egypt in its commitments to protecting religious freedom and in the fight against terrorism that threatens all of our friends in the Middle East."

At a brief news conference with Shoukry, Pompeo said "the United States will remain a steadfast partner in the region for Egypt and others" while also urging the countries of the region to recognize and fight back against Iranian aggression. He termed Iran the

"greatest threat of all in the Middle East."

Pompeo said he discussed human rights with el-Sissi and Shoukry and reminded them that "open and honest public debates are a hallmark of a thriving society." He said he discussed a "panoply" of rights concerns, including the detention of political prisoners, but gave no specifics.

Shortly before Pompeo arrived, the State Department noted improvements in the country's human rights record. In a two-page fact sheet it said Washington welcomed the recent acquittal of employees of American civil society groups who had been "wrongly convicted of improperly operating in Egypt" and said the U.S. supports el-Sissi's pledges "to amend Egyptian law to prevent future miscarriages of justice."

On Wednesday, however, an Egyptian court sentenced a leading activist behind the country's 2011 uprising to 15 years in prison after convicting him of taking part in clashes between protesters and security forces later that year.

The statement went on to laud Egypt for its "vital role" in regional security and stability and praised el-Sissi for being "a steadfast partner in the anti-terror fight and a courageous voice in denouncing the radical Islamist ideology that fuels it."

Association issues warning against 'masculinity ideology'

New York Daily News

The American Psychological Association has issued its first official warning against toxic masculinity.

The new "Guidelines for the Psychological Practice with Boys and Men," marks the first-ever report published by the association aimed at helping practitioners care for their male patients "despite social forces that can harm mental health."

Citing more than 40 years of research, the APA warns against the "masculinity ide-

ology," which it defines as "a particular constellation of standards that have held sway over large segments of the population, including anti-femininity, achievement, eschewal of the appearance of weakness, and adventure risk and violence."

"Traditional masculinity ideology has been shown to limit males' psychological development, constrain their behavior, result in gender role strain and gender role conflict and negatively influence mental health and physical health," according to the 36-page report, featured in January's issue of *Monitor*

on Psychology.

Conforming to the norms of the "masculinity ideology" can result in suppressing emotions and masking distress in young boys as well more risk-taking and aggressive behavior and a lack of willingness to seek out help. The report additionally contends that can lead to traits like homophobia and pave the way for sexual harassment, bullying and violence against others and themselves.

The APA also invoked a series of sobering statistics to emphasize that "traditional masculinity — marked by sto-

icism, competitiveness, dominance and aggression — is, on the whole, harmful."

Despite its warnings, the APA also encouraged men to embrace the positive aspects of traditional masculinity, like leadership and courage.

"Guidelines for the Psychological Practice with Boys and Men" additionally calls on those treating male patients to recognize their own bias and urges them to address how "power privilege and sexism work, both by conferring benefits to men and by trapping them in their narrow roles."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Prowler seen licking intercom button

CA LOS ANGELES — Police on Monday tracked down a man they said spent hours licking the button on an intercom speaker at a home in Salinas.

Roberto Daniel Arroyo, 33, was caught on video early Saturday at a residence in the 400 block of Hyde Street, said Miguel Cabrera, a spokesman for the Salinas Police Department.

Surveillance footage recorded Arroyo, who police said is homeless, and a patrol officer spotted him the following day. He was questioned and then released, though he still faces a possible charge of petty theft.

Arroyo also disconnected an extension cord that powered the home's Christmas lights and walked off with it, Cabrera said.

Ammunition stockpile explodes in barn fire

VT SHELBURNE — Fire officials said a large stockpile of ammunition exploded in a barn fire in Vermont, posing a threat to firefighters at the scene.

The fire broke out at a home and barn in Shelburne on Tuesday afternoon.

Deputy Fire Chief John Go odrich said multiple fire departments responded to the blaze, and they heard the sound of ammunition popping at the scene. He said some shell casings flew 30-40 feet from the building.

No injuries were reported. Both buildings were destroyed.

Police say man kept snakes in his closet

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — An 18-year-old man is accused of illegally keeping venomous snakes in a bedroom

closet at his Fort Lauderdale home.

The Sun Sentinel reported that a state Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission report said officials confiscated several snakes found alive, including one copperhead, two canebrakes and seven Carolina pygmies. The report said two other snakes were found dead in a plastic container that housed a maggot-filled water bowl and a live snake.

The man, who was not identified, was charged with several offenses, including not keeping the snakes in an escape-proof room. He agreed to complete a misdemeanor diversion program and was fined \$25 and ordered to complete 25 hours of community service.

Thermal camera helps stop wrong-way driver

AZ PHOENIX — The state Department of Transportation is crediting its thermal camera-based wrong-way vehicle detection system with preventing an accident on a Phoenix freeway.

They said the detection system alerted authorities and other motorists about 3 a.m. Monday about a pickup truck being driven the wrong way on Interstate 17.

Arizona state troopers took the driver into custody and nobody was injured.

The \$4 million system involves 90 thermal cameras along 15 miles of I-17. ADOT officials said the system has been operational for a year and has recorded detections of more than 45 wrong-way vehicles so far.

Brawl in grocery store captured on video

MS JACKSON — Police said they are investigating a fight involving several

women in a grocery store.

The brawl was recorded Saturday night at a Food Depot store in Jackson and video was posted on social media.

Footage shows merchandise being knocked over as a security guard tries to break up several different scuffles.

Jackson police told media outlets that officers are investigating and reviewing the case to see if any charges should be filed.

Plague confirmed in third cat in state

WY GILLETTE — Health officials said a cat in northern Wyoming has been infected with plague.

The Gillette News Record reported the cat from the Kaycee area in Johnson County is the third plague-infected feline identified in northern Wyoming in the last six months. No human cases have been reported.

Plague is a serious bacterial infection that can kill pets and people if it's not treated with antibiotics. The disease can be transmitted to humans from sick animals and by fleas coming from infected animals.

Lead kills 1 eagle; trap hurts another

DE WILMINGTON — A Delaware animal rescue official said a bald eagle died of reported lead poisoning and another eagle is being treated for injuries sustained in a snare trap.

The Delaware News Journal reported Tuesday that the executive director of Tri-State Bird Rescue & Research Inc., Lisa Smith, said these types of injuries and deaths are preventable.

She said the poisoned eagle was found severely emaciated in Sussex County and was likely poisoned by eating a carcass

tainted by lead ammunition or fragments. Smith said lead poisoning accounts for about a dozen bird rescues each year, but many more fall sick and die in the wild.

Truck damages covered bridge

IN BLOOMFIELD — Authorities said a box truck damaged a 135-year-old covered bridge in southwestern Indiana.

The Greene County Sheriff's Office said in a news release Monday that the 52-year-old truck driver went through the Richland-Plummer Creek Bridge on Jan. 4 and knew that the bridge had been damaged. The Tribune-Star reported the Bedford man kept driving and deputies caught up with him while responding to an unrelated crash.

The sheriff's office has recommended a misdemeanor charge of failure to stop after an accident, but records didn't immediately confirm whether a charge was issued.

Warning issued to avoid spilled chicken

AL CENTRE — An Alabama sheriff's office is warning people against eating chicken that tumbled onto a rural highway after a truck wreck.

An 18-wheeler crashed on Alabama 35 on Jan. 6, spilling boxes of chicken tenders in Cherokee County near the Georgia line. Motorists began stopping to pick up the food, which authorities say created a traffic hazard.

The Cherokee County Emergency Management Agency posted a notice on its Facebook page asking people to quit picking up the chicken. The notice says the food isn't safe to eat.

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NFL's top RBs get to showcase skills

Associated Press

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. — Todd Gurley roots for running backs when he watches football. A playoff duel between arguably the two best ball carriers in the NFL would be irresistible to him as a fan.

Gurley won't be watching the Los Angeles Rams' playoff game against the Dallas Cowboys from his couch, however. He'll be in the Coliseum on Saturday night to go up against Ezekiel Elliott in a tantalizing matchup that should play a large role in deciding which team moves on to the NFC championship game.

"It's not really about us," Gurley said Wednesday night. "It's a team game. Obviously, we've got to hype it up, Zeke versus Gurley, but it'll be a good game. He's a great back, and I guess I'm not too bad myself."

The good feelings are mutual between these elite running backs when the Cowboys (11-6) visit the Rams (13-3). Gurley and Elliott are friends who realize they have a remarkably similar style of play, adding an extra bit of intrigue to an al-

ready compelling matchup.

"He's a big, fast back," Elliott said about Gurley. "He can run inside. He can run outside. He can run through you, jump over you, around you, make you miss. He's a great asset out of the backfield. Just a guy who has a well-rounded game and really doesn't have any weaknesses."

Indeed, no backs in the league exemplify the current ideal combination of power, speed and versatility better than Gurley or Elliott, who have established themselves as destroyers of defenses behind two of the league's best offensive lines.

Gurley and Elliott are dangerous as ball-carriers and as pass-catchers. They're the centerpieces of their respective offenses, with Elliott's 381 touches leading the NFL and Gurley ranking fourth with 315 touches after sitting out the Rams' past two games with a knee injury that appears to be healing well.

Although they've played only seven combined NFL seasons, they've already compiled individual accolades to back up

their stature. Elliott won the NFL rushing title last month for the second time, while Gurley led the league in touchdowns and finished third in the rushing race this season after winning the NFL's Offensive Player of the Year award last season.

"He has everything you want in a running back," Cowboys coach Jason Garrett said of Gurley. "He's quick, he's fast, he's explosive, he's strong, has great instincts for the game, great feel for the game, outstanding vision. He can beat you with speed. He can beat you with power. He can beat you cutting back. He can beat you when they hand him the ball. He can beat you when they throw him the ball. He's great running after the catch. He plays with a competitive spirit. He's just a fantastic player."

Garrett then realized he knows another back with very similar qualities.

"In some ways, I probably did describe Ezekiel Elliott," he said. "Both big-time players who can do everything you want them to do on the field and embrace carrying the burden

for their team."

Their skills aren't limited to taking handoffs, either.

Elliott was also the Cowboys' leading receiver this season with 77 catches for 567 yards. He has touched the ball at least 20 times in each of his past nine games.

Gurley made 59 catches for 580 yards this season, his numbers declining only slightly after Sean McVay turned him into a huge target in the Rams' passing game last year. Gurley played a role of increased sophistication, lining up in new spots and learning new skills in McVay's innovative schemes.

Elliott and his offensive line are particularly daunting challenges for the Rams' defense, which yielded 5.1 yards per rush this season — worst in the NFL.

"It's a big challenge to stop their running game, especially (Elliott)," Rams defensive coordinator Wade Phillips said. "But all our guys know that, so that's a challenge. We've challenged our guys with, 'Hey, we can't let him run the ball, or certainly run wild on us.'"

Patriots aim to win 'mind game' with Chargers' Rivers

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Patriots defensive end Trey Flowers says thinking about how to defend against the Los Angeles Chargers has kept him up at night.

"Over the bye I had a dream about not setting the edge," Flowers said this week. "I woke up and it was a nightmare."

New England's leader this season with 7½ sacks, it was Flowers who gave opposing offenses fits as part of a defense that's had its struggles but did just enough during the regular season to earn victories against some of the NFL's top quarterbacks including Andrew Luck, Patrick Mahomes and Aaron Rodgers.

The Patriots' next challenge

is Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers, who will arrive in Foxborough on Sunday still looking for his first playoff victory (0-2) against New England and his first win over the Patriots with Tom Brady as the starting quarterback.

Rivers is 1-5 overall in regular-season meetings with New England, with his lone victory coming in 2008 when Brady was sidelined with a knee injury. He has yet to throw a touchdown pass against the Patriots in the postseason.

But Flowers said none of Rivers' past shortcomings are evident when he dissects the 37-year-old quarterback on film.

"He's definitely a veteran that's been very successful over his career," Flowers said.

"I guess the experience just allows him to know that he can take over the offense, he can change things. It's just one of those things where you've got to be aware that he can come in and take over."

Patriots coach Bill Belichick said in that way, the challenge of defending Rivers is not unlike the one Pittsburgh's Ben Roethlisberger presents. Both are big presences in the pocket, giving them the ability to spot open receivers. Their size also makes them difficult to tackle.

"Makes good decisions with the ball, uses everybody — as he always does," Belichick said.

That said, defenses have been able to get to Rivers with the pass rush this season. He was sacked 32 times during the

regular season, up from 18 a year ago.

A perennial 4,000-yard passer, Rivers is among the NFL's best quarterbacks at throwing the deep ball. But according to analysis done by Football Outsiders, the Patriots finished the regular season second only to the Chicago Bears at defending passes that traveled at least 16 yards in the air.

The Patriots also enter Sunday's divisional round having forced eight turnovers in the final three games of the regular season.

Rookie cornerback J.C. Jackson was responsible for one of those turnovers, an interception against Buffalo. One of New England's latest undrafted gems, he finished with three interceptions on the season.

College hoops roundup

Marquette's Howard puts up 53 in OT win

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Markus Howard scored 14 of his career-high 53 points in overtime after Sam Hauser's deep three-pointer at the end of regulation tied the game, and No. 21 Marquette beat Creighton 106-104 Wednesday night.

Howard's dazzling offensive performance set a Marquette record and broke his own record for points in a Big East game. His 53 points were the most by a player in a game matching Division I opponents this season, one behind the 54 Furman's Jordan Lyons had against D-II North Greenville. Howard had 52 points against Providence last season. It was also the highest-scoring performance ever by a Creighton opponent.

"I guess we shouldn't be surprised anymore," Marquette coach Steve Wojciechowski said. "He's done it enough where on certain nights he's capable of being magical. Every night he's really, really good. He certainly delivered at an incredible level tonight, and his teammates came up with some big plays, too."

Marquette never led until Howard scored on his team's first possession of overtime.

Rutgers 64, No. 16 Ohio State 61: Montez Mathis hit two contested layups and Geo Baker nailed a jumper with 10.3 seconds to play as the host Scarlet Knights scored their biggest Big Ten Conference victory under coach Steve Pikiell.

The win was Rutgers' first against a ranked Big Ten team since an upset of No. 4 Wisconsin in January 2015 under then-coach Eddie Jordan.

The Scarlet Knights (8-6, 1-3) scored the final six points in handing the Buckeyes (12-3, 2-2) their second straight loss.

Mathis finished with 16 points and Baker had 15. Kaleb Wesson scored 16 of his 18 points in the second half for Ohio State.

Chris Lykes scored 17 points and Anthony Lawrence II added 14 for Miami (8-6, 0-3).

Temple 73, No. 17 Houston 69: Quinton Rose scored 22 points and the host Owls handed the Cougars their first loss.

Corey Davis Jr. was called for a charge in the final second of play, wiping out a tying basket for Houston (15-1, 2-1 American Athletic Conference).

Breaon Brady had 19 points to lead the Cougars, who started 15-0 for the first time since the 1967-68 team won its first 31 games.

Shizz Alston Jr. had 12 points, six rebounds and six assists for Temple (12-3, 2-1), which has won five of six. Nate Pierre-Louis added 16 points to help the Owls beat a Top 25 team for the 12th straight season.

No. 4 Virginia 83, Boston College 56: Mamadi Diakite matched his career high with 18 points, De'Andre Hunter also scored 18 and the Cavaliers won on the road to stay unbeaten.

Ty Jerome added 13 points and Kyle Guy had 10 for Virginia (14-0, 2-0 Atlantic Coast Conference).

Nik Popovic had 16 points and Ky Bowman 15 for the Eagles (9-5, 0-2).

No. 7 Kansas 77, No. 25 TCU 68: Detric Lawson had 31 points and 14 rebounds, Lagerald Vick added 12 points and four assists and the host Jayhawks beat the Horned Frogs.

Kansas City native Ochai Agbaji added seven points four rebounds for Kansas (12-2, 2-1 Big 12) after relinquishing his red-shirt eligibility on Tuesday following the season-ending injury to Udoka Azubuike.

The Horned Frogs (12-2, 1-1) continued to have troubles in Allen Fieldhouse, falling to 0-7 all-time there.

No. 9 Virginia Tech 52, Georgia Tech 49: Ahmed Hill scored 15 points, Kerry Blackshear Jr. added 14 points and 10 rebounds, and the Hokies overcame a terrible shooting performance to beat the host Yel-

low Jackets.

Virginia Tech (14-1, 3-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) won its ninth straight game for the school's best start to a season since the 1982-83 team had an identical record.

The Hokies, the nation's second-best three-point shooting team, hit only five threes and finished at 18.5 percent from beyond the arc.

Jose Alvarado scored 20 points and Abdoulaye Gueye had 11 for Georgia Tech (9-6, 1-1).

No. 10 Nevada 92, San Jose State 53: Caleb Martin scored 21 of his 23 points in the second-half and the host Wolf Pack rebounded from their first loss of the season to beat the Spartans.

No. 13 Florida State 68, Miami 62: David Nichols had 13 points and PJ Savoy scored eight of his 10 in the second half as the bench players helped the host Seminoles hold off the Hurricanes.

Phil Cofer and Terance Mann each added seven points and six rebounds for the Seminoles (12-2, 1-1 ACC).

Service academies

Army 86, Boston College 82: Jordan Fox drained 6 of 8 three-pointers to score a season-high 24 points to lead the Black Knights to a road win.

Tommy Funk scored 16 points with six assists a block and a steal for Army (6-9, 1-1 Patriot League) and Matt Wilson scored 12 and grabbed seven boards. The Black Knights were 11-for-26 from behind the arc.

American 71, Navy 63: Sa'eed Nelson scored 25 points and made 11 of 12 free throws and the Eagles won at home.

Mark Gasperini and Larry Motuzis added 12 points apiece for American (8-6, 2-1 Patriot League), which shot 51 percent and made 16 of 19 free throws.

Davis leads Ole Miss in upset of No. 11 Auburn

Associated Press

OXFORD, Miss. — One minute Terence Davis was flying through the air for a vicious dunk, and the next, Devontae Shuler was nailing a clutch three-pointer before running backward down the court and then strumming an air guitar.

As the highlights piled up

and the late lead kept growing, the realization started to sink in: This Mississippi team might be a whole lot better than just about anyone anticipated.

Davis had 27 points and 12 rebounds to lead Ole Miss to an 82-67 upset of No. 11 Auburn on Wednesday night. In the aftermath of the win, the Rebels

were understandably happy, but didn't do too much celebrating.

After losing 20 games last season, the Rebels want to prove they're more than just a feel-good, early season story.

"I don't want to settle for mediocre," Davis said. "I think it's a signature win."

Ole Miss (12-2, 2-0 South-

eastern Conference) continued its run of strong play under first-year coach Kermit Davis after being widely picked to finish at or near the bottom of the league.

Auburn (11-3, 0-1) was led by Bryce Brown, who took 24 shots — 19 from three-point range — to score 23 points.

NBA roundup

Bucks overcome Harden's 42 in win

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Giannis Antetokounmpo wasn't going to join in on the debate about whether he should be an early favorite for MVP after he led the Milwaukee Bucks to a victory over the Houston Rockets and last year's MVP James Harden on Wednesday night.

The rising young star was just happy his team was leaving Houston with a win.

"All I care about is winning," Antetokounmpo said. "I know by winning and doing whatever it takes to help your teammates and leaving everything out on the floor everything will take care of itself, the titles and all that."

Antetokounmpo scored 27 points and grabbed a season-high 21 rebounds to help the Bucks withstand a 42-point performance from Harden in a 116-109 win.

In this matchup of early front-runners for MVP, Harden and his teammates were done in by a shooting slump late in the third quarter that spilled into the fourth and left them down by 15 points.

"We just got stagnant and defensively I think we allowed 38 points in that quarter — way too many — especially at home and so there you go," Harden said. "We couldn't get out in transition. We couldn't get to where we want to go because we couldn't get any stops."

Nets 115, Hawks 100: D'Angelo Russell scored 23 points, Ed Davis grabbed a season-

high 16 rebounds, and host Brooklyn climbed out of an early 19-point hole to beat Atlanta.

Wizards 123, 76ers 106: Bradley Beal scored 14 straight points in the fourth quarter and finished with 34 to help host Washington beat Philadelphia for a split of the home-and-home set.

Celtics 135, Pacers 108: Marcus Morris had 22 points and eight rebounds, Jayson Tatum had 20 points and host Boston routed Indiana.

Pelicans 140, Cavaliers 124: Anthony Davis had 38 points and 13 rebounds and host New Orleans overcame a slow start to pull away from Cleveland for its third straight victory.

Grizzlies 96, Spurs 86: Marc Gasol had 26 points and 14 rebounds and host Memphis snapped a six-game slide.

Mavericks 104, Suns 94: Luka Doncic scored 30 points and host Dallas ended a seven-game losing streak against Phoenix.

Jazz 106, Magic 93: Donovan Mitchell had 33 points and seven assists and host Utah rallied to beat Orlando.

Lakers 113, Pistons 100: Kyle Kuzma scored a career-high 41 points and the host Lakers beat the Pistons to improve to 3-5 without injured LeBron James.

Trail Blazers 124, Bulls 112: CJ McCollum had 24 points and the host Trail Blazers pulled away in the final quarter to send the Bulls to their fifth straight loss.

Briefly

Source: Jets set to hire ex-Dolphins coach Gase

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The New York Jets stayed in the AFC East to find their new head coach.

Former Miami Dolphins coach Adam Gase agreed Wednesday to take the Jets job, a person familiar with the decision told The Associated Press.

The hiring ends a 10-day, wide-open search for New York, which met with seven other coaches about their vacancy, including Mike McCarthy, Kris Richard, Jim Caldwell, Eric Bieniemy, Todd Monken, Matt Rhule and Kliff Kingsbury, who took the Arizona Cardinals job.

Gase was 23-26 in three years with Miami, including a playoff game in the 2016 season, before being fired last week. He replaces Todd Bowles, who was fired after he went 24-40 in four seasons and no playoff appearances.

O's-Yanks, Mets-Nats will open MLB season

NEW YORK — The New York Yankees host Baltimore and Washington is at home against the New York Mets on March 28, the first games of the earliest regular major league opening day.

The previous earliest regular start was March 30 in 2003, 2008 and 2014.

The season opens with a two-game series between Seattle and Oakland in Tokyo on March 20-21, MLB's fifth opener in Japan after 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012. MLB also has opened in Monterrey, Mexico (1999), San Juan, Puerto Rico (2001) and Sydney, Australia (2014).

All 30 teams are scheduled for opening day for the second straight year. Two games were postponed on opening day last season because of poor weather.

NHL roundup

Forsberg lifts Predators in OT

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Filip Forsberg scored a minute into overtime for his second goal of the game, and the Nashville Predators beat the Chicago Blackhawks 4-3 on Wednesday night for their third straight victory.

Colton Sissons and Viktor Arvidsson also scored to help the Predators improve to 3-0-1 on a six-game trip. Ryan Johansen and Mattias Ekholm each had two assists, and Pekka Rinne made 28 saves.

Nashville had a 3-2 lead before Patrick Kane flipped a pass into the middle to Artem Anisimov, who slid a shot under Rinne with 2:21 left in regulation. Anisimov stopped a seven-game drought with his

eighth of the season.

But Forsberg stepped up in overtime, driving to the net and flipping a shot over Collin Delia's left shoulder for his 16th of the season. Forsberg just returned to the Predators' lineup on Monday after missing 17 games with a hand injury.

Chicago lost for the fourth time in five games. Alex DeBrincat and Jonathan Toews also scored for the Blackhawks, and Kane had two assists.

Flames 5, Avalanche 3: Mark Giordano had three assists and Calgary kept on rolling with a victory over visiting Colorado.

Mikael Backlund, Mark Jankowski, Elias Lindholm, Michael Frolik and Matthew Tkachuk, into an empty net,

scored for Calgary (28-13-4), which is 6-1-1 in its last eight games. The Flames have a two-point lead over Vegas atop the Pacific Division.

Johnny Gaudreau added two assists to extend his point streak to six games.

Senators 2, Ducks 1 (OT): Colin White scored at 1:34 of overtime and Ottawa snapped an eight-game losing streak by rallying past reeling host Anaheim.

White took a pass from Mark Stone near the net and slid the puck past John Gibson for his 11th goal of the season. It was a franchise-record ninth straight loss for the Ducks, surpassing an eight-game skid in October 1996.