

STARS AND STRIPES®

Wednesday, January 9, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Less drastic Afghanistan pullout planned

The Washington Post

The U.S. military is drafting plans to withdraw a few thousand troops from Afghanistan while continuing all major missions in the longest war in American history, U.S. officials said, three weeks after President Donald Trump sought options for a more drastic pullout.

The planning is underway after Trump ordered the Pentagon to prepare the withdrawal of up to half of the about 14,000 U.S. troops deployed in Afghanistan, six officials said. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the discussions.

Trump still wants to remove troops from Afghanistan — and eventually all of them — but the current withdrawal likely will be far fewer than 7,000, two senior White House officials said. Military advisers have convinced him that a smaller, and

slower, withdrawal for now is best — although officials cautioned that a final decision had not been reached and that the president could order a full pullout at any moment.

“Trust me, he’s heard every single argument on Afghanistan he could hear,” one administration official said, adding that he continues to complain that many of his advisers want him to stay in “all these wars forever.”

Several officials who described the plan were hesitant to name a specific number, citing the evolving nature of the discussions. Some said it could be about half of what Trump was initially seeking.

That would mark nearly a full rollback of the 3,900-troop increase Trump authorized in August 2017, after months of internal debate and strong advocacy from former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who resigned last month.

It also would stand as a symbol that Trump is serious about getting out of the war, even if he is convinced for now that it is not possible.

“The president is very frustrated about our progress in Afghanistan,” said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R.-S.C., a Trump confidant. “But an immediate withdrawal would be an unmitigated disaster because Afghanistan is the center of gravity in the war on terror.”

The discussions about Afghanistan come as Trump and his advisers more publicly discuss a military withdrawal in Syria, which was ordered the same week Trump asked for withdrawal plans for Afghanistan. Mattis resigned afterward, citing differences of opinion with the president. Trump initially said he wanted all 2,000 troops out of Syria within 30 days but has since said the exit will be done in an orderly fashion.

But the war in Afghanistan — far costlier, and with more troops involved — has mostly stayed out of the spotlight.

The Pentagon has been virtually silent about the situation since as it attempts to walk a fine line between reassuring U.S. allies and Afghan partners and not getting out front of the president.

Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford Jr., the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Army Gen. Scott Miller, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, said last month that they have received no new orders for the war, and three U.S. officials said Monday that that remains the case.

Miller, speaking in a meeting last month broadcast by the Afghan television station Tolo, sought to reassure Afghans that even if there is a partial withdrawal coming, U.S. troops will remain alongside their Afghan counterparts.

Pentagon: No US personnel witnessed abuses in Yemen

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has denied in a report to Congress that U.S. personnel in Yemen who interrogated Yemeni detainees for information about potential terrorist threats had witnessed or were complicit in torture or mistreatment of any detainee.

The report, which has not been publicly released, was required by Congress in the 2019 defense bill following a series of reports by The Associated Press and human rights groups of sexual abuse and other mistreatment of Yemenis in prisons overseen by the United Arab Emirates — a key U.S. ally in the Middle East — and militias backed by the UAE.

The Trump administration has come under pressure in Congress to end its support for the Arab coalition fighting Houthi rebels in Yemen. In addition to concern by some in Congress over allegations of abuse in prisons run by the Emiratis and their militia partners, critics argue the U.S. should stop supplying weapons for the Saudi-led bombing campaign.

The civil war in Yemen has killed more than 10,000 people, displaced 2 million and driven the Arab world’s poorest country to the brink of famine. The conflict pits the U.S.-supported Saudi-UAE coalition and the internationally recognized Yemeni government against Shiite rebels known as Houthis, who are allied with Iran.

The AP over the past two years has chronicled multiple allegations of torture and sexual abuse of Yemeni detainees in a network of secret prisons run by the UAE and affiliated forces, and that during later interrogations American personnel may have witnessed evidence of the abuse. The Emirati government has denied the allegations.

“Based on information gathered at this time,” an unclassified version of the Pentagon report said, the Pentagon “has determined that [Defense Department] personnel have neither observed nor been complicit in any cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of detainees in Yemen.”

It added that U.S. officials have “not developed any inde-

pendent, credible information” that U.S. allies or partners have abused detainees in Yemen.

Andrea Prasow, deputy Washington director at the Human Rights Watch, said she was troubled by the Pentagon’s denial.

“It could be true that they actually don’t have their own independent information ... based on eye-witness accounts,” she said. “Even if that’s true, though, there is so much compelling information that many, many detainees have been and are being abused by U.S. partner forces in Yemen that it’s utterly incredible that DOD would not be able to confirm at least some of that.”

The report said U.S. forces do not hold detainees in Yemen.

Navy testing mobile app to access records

BY CHRISTIAN LOPEZ
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Sailors can now view parts of their training records on a mobile device without having to plug electronic ID cards into government computers.

The MyRecord Mobile app, beta version, allows sailors read-only access to their Electronic Training Jackets through the MyNavy Portal, the Navy's online, self-service career management website.

The app, which was released Tuesday, is the Navy's first step toward allowing sailors and their families wider access to records and services without having to use their Common Access Cards as a security measure, according to a statement from Vice Adm. Robert Burke, chief of naval personnel.

The CAC is the standard Defense Department ID card but is also used to access

military computer networks.

The Navy aims to eventually allow sailors and their families the same kind of secure online access that they expect from their banks, Burke said. "In time, sailors will be able to conduct all personnel transactions using their mobile device," he said.

For now, only limited functions are available through MyRecord, such as accessing parts of personnel and training information and viewing a portion of the training jacket in read-only mode. The jackets hold a variety of information, including military training the sailor has completed, as well as college courses, language skills and other information.

The app also allows sailors to provide instant feedback, David Driegert, program manager for the service's Sea Warrior Program, said in the Navy statement.

"Our sailors are tech savvy, and when we include them in the process the end re-

sult is always a better application," he said. "We want their candid feedback, what they like and dislike about the app and what future capabilities they desire."

To use the app, sailors must first enable a CAC-free setup in MyNavy Portal, then download Okta Verify, a Navy-approved third-party application, and the MyRecord app. Okta Verify lets sailors create a secure multi-factor authentication account for the MyRecord app.

Both mobile applications are available for free from the Navy App Locker, Apple App Store and Google Play.

Burke said updates to the app will appear over time.

"Sailors can expect continuous updates to the app that will offer more tools right at their fingertips and allow them and their spouses to accomplish things that used to require a trip to a Personnel Support Detachment," he said in the statement.

Quantico-based sailor faces murder charge in stabbing death of DC man

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
AND ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A Quantico, Va.-based Navy sailor faces a second-degree murder charge in the stabbing death of a Washington man, according to local police and court officials.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Collin J. Potter, 26, was accused in the early Sunday morning death of Vongell Lugo, 36, who was found dead in the hallway of an apartment building after suffering multiple stab wounds, according to Washington's Metropolitan Police Department. Lugo was pronounced dead on the scene at The Garfield House apartment building in the 2800 block of Wisconsin Avenue in the city's northwest quadrant after police were called there just after 4 a.m. Sunday.

Potter was arrested at the scene after police developed "probable cause" to charge him, according to a two-paragraph description of the incident in a police report. The report did not indicate whether police had determined a motive in the attack.

Metro Police Chief Peter Newsham described the incident as a "domestic homicide" to reporters during a news conference Monday, suggesting the two knew

each other.

The chief did not elaborate on his description, and a police spokeswoman said Tuesday that the department had no further information about the incident and considered the case closed.

Potter is assigned to the Basic Training School Command at Marine Corps Base Quantico, about 30 miles south of Washington, where he has been stationed since January 2018, according to his Navy personnel records.

He enlisted in the Navy in September 2010 in Idaho, and attained his current rank of E-4 in December 2014. He previously served at Naval Hospital Yokosuka in Japan, according to those records.

Potter remains jailed at the D.C. Central Detention Facility without bond and is awaiting a Jan. 18 arraignment, according to D.C. Superior Court records.

Police initially charged him Sunday with first-degree murder while armed. That charge was downgraded to second-degree murder while armed during his initial appearance before a judge Monday, court records show. An attorney assigned to represent him could not be reached Tuesday.

Sexual assault charges dropped against Marine

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Marine prosecutors on Monday dropped sexual assault charges against a sergeant accused in April of having sex with a female Marine reportedly too intoxicated to consent.

Sgt. Morgan Bergdahl, of Combat Logistics Battalion 31, 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, was scheduled to appear Monday for the start of court-martial proceedings on four counts of sexual assault and four counts of abusive sexual contact.

"The charges against Sgt. Bergdahl have been dismissed without prejudice," III Marine Expeditionary Force spokesman 1st Lt. David Mancilla wrote in an email to Stars and Stripes. Mancilla did not explain specifically why the charges were dropped. He referred to the Manual for Courts-Martial, including a section that requires authorities to take the victim's views into consideration before dismissing charges.

A dismissal without prejudice means the charges against Bergdahl could be refiled.

Bergdahl had been held in pretrial confinement on Okinawa since April 25.

House to try again on 'Blue Water' bill

BY NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Just days into the new congressional session, some House lawmakers are trying again to secure benefits for thousands of veterans who served on ships off the coast during the Vietnam War — an effort that failed by the time the 115th Congress ended last month.

Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., and Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn., introduced bills at the start of the 116th Congress to extend benefits to "Blue Water" Navy veterans. Last year, identical legislation unanimously passed the House but stalled in the Senate because of cost concerns.

"The 116th Congress has officially been sworn in, and thousands of veterans are still waiting for their government to deliver on its promise and grant them the benefits they have earned," said Takano, the new chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

In his first act as chairman, Takano issued a letter Tuesday to House members,

looking for more sponsors to sign onto the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019.

The bill is the same as the one passed by the House in 2018. It would extend Department of Veterans Affairs health care and disability compensation to an estimated 90,000 veterans who aren't eligible.

Blue Water Navy veterans have been fighting for years to prove they were exposed to Agent Orange, a dioxin-laden herbicide that's been found to cause respiratory cancers, Parkinson's disease, heart disease and other conditions.

Ground troops and others who served in inland waterways during the Vietnam War are already presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange and granted easier access to benefits.

The Blue Water bill stalled in the Senate last year after VA Secretary Robert Wilkie and several former VA secretaries came out against it despite widespread support among veterans organizations. Wilkie cited high costs and insufficient scientific evidence that the veterans were exposed to

Agent Orange.

As the end of the session neared in December, Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., and Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., leaders of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, continued to plead with senators to pass the bill.

There were multiple efforts last month to pass the bill on unanimous consent, which expedites approval but can be stopped if one senator objects.

Two holdouts objected: Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., and Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah. Both senators wanted to wait for a scientific study about Agent Orange and Blue Water Navy veterans that's expected to be published sometime this year.

John Wells, an attorney and director of the group Military-Veterans Advocacy, has been fighting on behalf of Blue Water Navy veterans since 2008. He wants Congress to take up the issue again this year but worries Takano and Roe acted prematurely.

"We need to address lessons learned from the 115th Congress to ensure the bill will pass," Wells said.

Senior NCO acquitted of charges

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY

Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — A senior noncommissioned officer accused of pointing a pistol at one soldier, calling another fat and improperly touching a third's hair was acquitted of all related charges at her court-martial Wednesday.

Sgt. 1st Class Jessica Barboza was found not guilty of dereliction of duty, maltreatment and disrespecting an NCO by a panel of nine male officers and senior NCOs. At least six of them had to agree to acquit.

"I'm relieved," said Barboza, 35, of the 2nd NATO Signal Battalion in Naples. "I'm just grateful to the jury members."

Criminal charges were brought against Barboza after she declined to accept nonjudicial punishment following a command investigation into complaints about her more than a year ago.

"You won't see these crimes on 'Law & Order,'" prosecutor Capt. Mike Gerrity conceded in his closing argument. "But

this is the military. Sergeant 1st Class Barboza failed to put her soldiers' needs above her own."

Testimony against her included that of two soldiers who said she'd pointed a 9 mm pistol at one of them during weapons training, which Barboza said wasn't true. Another soldier said Barboza humiliated her by repeatedly calling her fat, while a black staff sergeant said Barboza had touched her hair without permission and then called it "nasty" when rebuked.

Prosecutors also said that Barboza had referred to female black soldiers as "negritas," suggesting that Barboza's comments and actions were racially motivated. Barboza testified that she did use the word negrita but that it was a neutral or even affectionate word meaning "little black girl" in her native Mexican-American, southern California culture.

She did touch the staff sergeant's hair, she testified, but only because "I honestly thought there was a piece of paper in her hair."

And she did call the soldier,

a specialist who had difficulties with her weight, fat, she said. "My intention was to motivate her and also let her know I was concerned," she said.

The most serious charge was dereliction of duty for failing to maintain weapon safety by pointing her pistol at a staff sergeant during weapons training.

Barboza testified that she had pointed the weapon at a poster on the wall.

Asked by her lawyer why the staff sergeant had testified she aimed at his face, she replied that it was "mostly out of spite."

She said he was angry that she'd let other soldiers go on temporary duty assignments instead of him.

"Do you have any misgivings? Do you have any concerns?" Davis Younts, one of Barboza's lawyers said to the jury in his closing argument. "She's a soldier who has dedicated her life to the Army. I submit to you gentlemen, you have enough information to conclude she has outstanding military character, and that alone is enough to find her not guilty."

Family says Navy vet is held in Iran

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — A U.S. Navy veteran has been held in an Iranian prison since July after visiting his girlfriend there, according to his family.

The New York Times reported Monday that Michael R. White's mother learned three weeks ago that her son is alive and being held at an Iranian prison. His arrest was first reported by an online news service by Iranian expatriates who interviewed a former Iranian prisoner who said he met White at Vakilabad Prison in October.

His mother, Joanne White, told the newspaper the 46-year-old veteran went to Iran to see his girlfriend and had booked a July 27 flight back home to San Diego via the United Arab Emirates. She filed a missing person report with the State Department after he did not board the flight.

The State Department confirmed an American was detained but provided no details.

Leaders oppose use of defense funds for wall

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, in his first news briefing as the ranking minority member of the House Armed Services Committee, said Tuesday that he's opposed to the use of military funds for nondefense matters, such as the construction of a U.S.-Mexico border wall.

The comments signal solidarity between both parties in the top ranks of the panel since Thornberry's objections mirror ones made by the committee's new chairman, Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash.

Smith and Thornberry have said that while the president has authority to declare a national emergency related to the border wall, they are opposed to a move that could trigger the use of military construction funds to build it.

"I am opposed to using defense dollars

for nondefense purposes," Thornberry said. "To take some of that money and use it for something other than [military construction purposes] will obviously be damaging and I'm not for that. Seems to me that we need to fund border security needs on their own and not be taking it from other accounts."

Thornberry also said possible legislation could thwart such a move and override an effort by President Donald Trump to trigger the reallocation of such funds. On Sunday, Smith told ABC's "This Week" that Trump does have the authority to declare an emergency, but argued he wouldn't get far with it.

"Unfortunately, the short answer is yes," Smith said of Trump's authority to make the declaration. However, "in this case, I think the president would be wide open to a court challenge saying 'where's the emergency?'... this would be a terrible use

of Department of Defense dollars."

The House Armed Services Committee and its Senate counterpart help shape policy and spending at the Pentagon, such as its annual defense budget.

Thornberry and Smith have said the committee works in a highly bipartisan matter and expect that to continue in the new Congress.

"If you are stationed on a ship out the middle of some ocean or if you're in the desert or on a hill somewhere, you don't really care which party is in control of what," Thornberry said. "You want to know that somebody in Washington has your back and that's really our job."

Thornberry said Tuesday that he hopes to see a number of issues addressed before the panel, such as Trump's decision to withdraw troops from Syria.

I'm "very concerned about ...what the president initially decided," he said.

Source: Rosenstein will leave Justice soon

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who appointed special counsel Robert Mueller and remains his most visible Justice Department protector, is expected to leave his position soon after William Barr is confirmed as attorney general, a person familiar with the plans said Wednesday.

Barr, who served in the position in the early 1990s and is President Donald Trump's pick to do the job again, has a confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee next week and could be in place at the Justice Department as soon as February.

Rosenstein plans to leave at some point after that, though no date has been set and there is no formal plan for the departure, according to the person, who was not authorized to discuss internal conversations publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Rosenstein, a former United States attorney in Maryland, will have served as deputy for roughly two years by the time

he leaves.

Mueller is investigating Russia's meddling in the 2016 election and contacts with the Trump campaign.

Rosenstein and his chief deputy have continued to maintain day-to-day oversight over the probe, a senior Justice Department official told reporters last month.

Barr would take over control of the investigation, assuming the same final say over major investigative steps that acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker has had since former Attorney General Jeff Sessions was ousted in November.

The White House cast Rosenstein's departure as his choice. Spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Wednesday that Rosenstein had always planned to stay around two years and wants to help with the transition to a new attorney general.

"I don't think there's any willingness by the president or the White House to push him out," Sanders told Fox News. "My guess is he is making room for the new attorney general to build a team that he wants around him."

Iranian leader calls US officials 'first-class idiots'

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's supreme leader on Wednesday called U.S. officials "first-class idiots," mocking American leaders as U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo toured the Mideast to promote the White House's tough stance on Iran.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's comments were unusually harsh, reflecting the broader tension between Iran and the United States after President Donald Trump withdrew America from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers.

Khamenei, speaking to a group from Iran's religious capital of Qom, made the remark while recounting a story about a U.S. official once predicting he'd celebrate Christmas in Iran.

"Some U.S. officials pretend that they are mad," Khamenei said. "Of course I don't agree with that, but they are first-class idiots."

The supreme leader did not name the official. However, U.S. national security adviser John Bolton told a meeting of the Iranian exile group Mu-

jahedeen-e-Khalq last March that "before 2019, we here ... will celebrate in Iran."

Trump's personal lawyer, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, has made similar comments before the MEK over the years.

Iran's supreme leader, viewed by Shiite hard-liners as second only to God, typically doesn't make such forceful remarks. However, Trump's decision last year to withdraw from the nuclear deal has seen the 79-year-old cleric grow increasingly critical.

In 2017, Khamenei dismissed remarks by Trump calling Iran a "terrorist" nation as "idiotic." Last May, after Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal which saw Iran limit its uranium enrichment in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions, Khamenei told Trump in a speech: "You cannot do a damn thing!"

"The body of this man, Trump, will turn to ashes and become the food of the worms and ants, while the Islamic Republic continues to stand," Khamenei said at the time.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Suspected burglar faces 125 charges

ME THOMASTON — Police said a man accused of stealing enough items to fill two trucks is now in jail and faces 125 criminal charges.

Investigators said Joshua Vandine, 38, of Thomaston, is accused of burglarizing dozens of locations over three years.

Police said they were able to fill two U-Haul trucks with allegedly stolen items found in Vandine's home.

Among the items were antiques, chain saws, tools, coins, toys, clothing, firearms and hunting equipment.

Vandine was in court Friday to ask a judge to allow him to attend a substance-abuse program.

The judge rejected the proposal, and Vandine remained jailed on \$50,000 cash bail.

Long-lost wedding ring turns up in car engine

IA PETERSBURG — An eastern Iowa man's wedding ring missing since 1974 has been returned after turning up in an old car engine.

Dubuque resident Will Frye told station KCRG that he bought the 1972 Oldsmobile for its engine because the one in his '69 Olds had died. He said the diamond-studded ring fell into a pile of grease under the 1972 engine as he worked on it Dec. 30.

He called the family he'd bought the old junker from, and the former owner's daughter confirmed it was her dad's.

Petersburg resident Ray Schmuecker said he thought he lost the ring in 1974 while helping a friend who was having car trouble.

Cat lost for 2 months found in another state

MI DETROIT — A cat from suburban Detroit decided to take a break from the winter cold and he turned up in sunny Florida.

The Detroit Free Press reported that Dearborn resident Judy Sanborn was shocked when she received a call in December from a pet hospital more than 1,000 miles away in Tampa.

Staff told her they had her 2-year-old tabby named Bandit. The cat had been missing for more than two months.

Staff told Sanborn that a local resident had found the cat, who'd been identified through his microchip.

Angry driver attacks vehicle with hatchet

NY JAMESTOWN — Police in western New York said a man attacked a car with a hatchet after becoming enraged at the other driver.

Police said Jacob Slade, 19, became angry after a driver turned in front of him Monday morning in Jamestown. Investigators alleged that Slade chased after the vehicle, cut him off and then got out of his car and attacked the other vehicle with a hatchet.

Slade faces charges of felony criminal mischief and menacing. WKBW-TV reported that damage to the victim's vehicle is estimated at \$1,500.

Woman accidentally shoots self in vehicle

KS WICHITA — Authorities said a woman accidentally shot herself while driving in Wichita.

The Wichita Eagle reported that police Sgt. Ed Brower said

the gun went off Monday as the woman, 39, was attempting to holster it.

A dispatch supervisor said she was taken to the hospital in critical condition.

Police said she is stable and that no one else was hurt.

Man carjacked as he chases wallet thief

LA NEW ORLEANS — New Orleans police said a man's car was stolen after he exited to chase a woman who had taken his wallet.

NOLA.com/The Times-Picayune cited a police report as saying the man was carjacked early Monday in Mid-City.

The police report says the man's car was stopped at an intersection when another man approached his door and grabbed the steering wheel. Police said that at about the same time, the woman got into the passenger seat and grabbed the man's wallet.

The driver accelerated and left the other man behind. The woman then jumped out with his wallet. Police said the man got out to go get his wallet back but returned to discover his car was missing.

Kidnapped woman escapes from trunk

PA DRY TAVERN — Police said two men kidnapped a woman from her Pennsylvania apartment, hog-tied her with electrical tape and threw her into the trunk of a car, but she managed to pop the trunk and run to a nearby home.

State police told the Observer-Reporter that Demetrius Davis, 40, and Joseph Dean II, 30, are accused of attacking the woman Friday over a call she made to a Greene County child protection agency.

Police said she was dragged

to the car and thrown in. However, she found the trunk release lever and ran to a home while the two men chased her.

They are charged with aggravated assault, kidnapping and terroristic threats.

Moose wanders into hospital building

AK ANCHORAGE — A moose wandered into a hospital building in Alaska's largest city and chowed down on some plants in the lobby as workers watched the massive animal in awe.

When a patient mentioned that security staffers were monitoring a moose that got inside the Anchorage building Monday, Stephanie Hupton dashed out and started recording.

The footage by Hupton, who works at a physical therapy office inside a building attached to Alaska Regional Hospital, shows the moose browsing around some greenery near an entrance before it stands gazing at the camera's direction. It briefly lingers before sauntering out an open door.

Swastika painted on door of cathedral

CT BRIDGEPORT — Police in Connecticut said someone painted a swastika on the door of the Cathedral of St. Augustine, the mother church of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport.

Bridgeport police said they discovered the vandalism Friday. No suspects have been identified.

Bishop Frank Caggiano said in a Facebook post that he is "appalled and outraged," and said whoever defaced the cathedral with a "clearly anti-Semitic symbol is participating in an unspeakable evil."

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

On a mission to provide credible reporting and daily news to America's military, wherever they serve.

Mobile apps available: www.stripes.com/apps.

Gregory, Smith worth wait for Cowboys

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Day after day a little more than two years ago, Randy Gregory and Jaylon Smith worked behind the scenes while the Dallas Cowboys practiced, the defensive end and linebacker hoping to prove their worth.

Both were considered second-round gambles for vastly different reasons — Gregory because of a battle with substance abuse that eventually led to three suspensions, Smith because of a devastating left knee injury in his final college game.

With the Cowboys (11-6) headed to a divisional playoff game Saturday night at the Los Angeles Rams (13-3) on a team with a defense-first identity, Gregory and Smith are looking more like second-round payoffs.

“Y’all will never understand the hard work, the lonely nights ... the dark days that those guys had to face through their trials and tribulations,” defensive end DeMarcus Lawrence said. “That’s why it’s so much passion in this locker room, mostly on the field when we play together. We feel like we all had our dark days.”

For Gregory, the darkest days were in the months after his third suspension, a yearlong ban that also meant he couldn’t be around the team. The first

two times he was suspended — for the first 14 games of the 2016 season — he could still work out with the Cowboys. That’s when the bond with Smith developed.

For Smith, it wouldn’t be quite as accurate to say the days were dark because his bright outlook was one of the things that attracted the Cowboys to him during the draft process. The former Notre Dame standout couldn’t run or jump at the combine, but he could flash a mesmerizing smile and talk hopefully about his future.

While Gregory missed the 2017 season, Smith finally got on the field — but with mixed results as he continued playing with a brace designed to compensate for nerve damage in his left foot.

This season, Gregory’s suspension was lifted. And Smith’s brace came off. Gregory, having missed 30 of 32 games over the previous two seasons, had six sacks after coming in with just one for his career. Smith took over as the play-calling leader in the middle of a top-10 defense.

“It’s what makes us who we are,” Smith said. “Everyone has been through something in their life. Everyone has that edge and drive. Once you identify it and find it, you have to use it as fuel.”

Gregory, who has turned

down most interview requests this season, was drafted late in the second round in 2015 out of Nebraska, sliding out of a projected spot high in the first round because of off-field concerns. He tested positive for marijuana at the combine.

After saying he wanted to make good on a promise to owner and general manager Jerry Jones to stay clean, Gregory made it through his rookie year without a suspension. He missed four games with an ankle injury and didn’t have a sack.

Gregory’s first sack came in the 2016 regular-season finale, just before the yearlong suspension was announced. He waited an extra six months to apply for reinstatement to improve his chances. Letters from teammates, including safety Jeff Heath, were part of the application.

Gregory, 26, occasionally misses practice in the middle of the week for trips to NFL-mandated checkups, along with frequent drug testing.

“It’s not one of those things where he got reinstated so now he could relax,” Heath said. “He still has to work his butt off to be able to help us out on game days. Everybody loves him. That’s one of the reasons why it was so easy to write that letter because it was just the truth.”

Smith went early in the second round a year after Gregory, with the Cowboys all but certain he wouldn’t play as a rookie because of the injury sustained in the Fiesta Bowl against Ohio State.

While there were concerns whether Smith would even play in the NFL, Dallas was confident because team physician Dr. Dan Cooper performed the surgery. And the Cowboys trusted their training staff to stick with the painstaking rehab.

Smith’s return was celebrated as a major milestone, but his struggles left lingering doubts while the Cowboys missed the playoffs a year after an NFC-best 13 wins.

The 23-year-old’s playmaking in his second season on the field has erased many of those doubts. Case in point: Smith’s 69-yard fumble return for a touchdown in a win over Tampa Bay that clinched the NFC East for Dallas. By the way, Gregory caused the fumble with that sixth sack.

“Ultimately where those guys have come from and where they are now has everything to do with them, the drive, the determination they’ve had to have great careers,” coach Jason Garrett said. “Both have different stories, but I think that’s the underlying theme.”

Chargers might use 7 DBs against Patriots

Associated Press

COSTA MESA, Calif. — Gus Bradley was successful in coming up with a game plan to thwart an athletic rookie quarterback making his first postseason start.

The Chargers defensive coordinator’s challenge this week, though, could not be more diametrically different.

A day after Los Angeles advanced with a 23-17 victory over the Baltimore Ravens in an AFC wild-card game, Bradley and the rest of the Chargers were beginning to prepare to face the most experienced post-season quarterback in NFL history in Tom Brady, who will make his 38th playoff start for New England on Sunday.

“It’s night and day, there’s no doubt about it but we’ve faced more Brady types than Lamar (Jackson) types,” Chargers coach Anthony Lynn said. “It is still about

us playing fast and making plays.”

Bradley’s game plan to contain Jackson remained a big topic of conversation on Monday. The Chargers went with seven defensive backs on all but one of Baltimore’s 59 defensive plays as they held Jackson to 54 rushing yards. Jackson was 14-for-29 for 194 yards and two touchdowns, but he had completed only three passes for 26 yards the first three quarters.

According to Sportradar, the 58 snaps are the most any team has gone with quarter personnel (seven defensive backs) in any game since the NFL’s Next Gen Stats came online in 2014. The previous high was 31 by Buffalo against Arizona in 2016.

Los Angeles had previously used seven defensive backs on 15 or more snaps twice this season. They employed it 18 times in a Week 7 win at Cleveland and on 15 plays in

the regular-season finale at Denver.

“It was a matter of putting our seven best, healthy athletes out there. The coaches did a great job getting us prepared this week,” defensive end Isaac Rochell said.

With the Chargers down to one healthy starting linebacker after Jatavis Brown was placed on injured reserve on Monday, it could be another week where the same strategy could again be used. They used two linebackers on only one play and had one linebacker on 15 snaps.

The Chargers’ base alignment against the Ravens was four defensive linemen and seven defensive backs. Los Angeles was able to make it work because safeties Derwin James, Jahleel Addae and Adrian Phillips are comfortable playing in the box. There were even some snaps where James lined up as a rush end.

Buccaneers hire Arians as head coach

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Bruce Arians is the latest coach entrusted to transform the struggling Tampa Bay Buccaneers into winners.

The 66-year-old came out of a one-year retirement Tuesday to fill the team's fifth coaching vacancy in a decade.

Arians replaces Dirk Koetter, who was dismissed Dec. 30 after leading the Bucs to 19 wins and no playoffs berths in the past three seasons.

Arians coached the Arizona Cardinals for five years, stepping down after the 2017 season with a 50-32-1 record that included one division title, two playoff berths, three seasons with double-digit wins and one NFC championship game appearance.

"Bruce Arians is one of the NFL's most well-respected coaches over the past two decades and we are excited to have him leading our team," Bucs owner/co-chairman Bryan Glazer said in a statement.

"Throughout this process, we focused on finding the right coach with a proven ability to

elevate our players and lead our team forward," Glazer added. "Bruce has played a large role in the development and career success of some of our league's best players and we look forward to seeing him continue that work here with our franchise."

The Bucs, who've finished last in the NFC South seven of the past eight seasons, haven't made the playoffs since 2007 — the second-longest drought in the league. They haven't won a postseason game since their 2002 Super Bowl run under Jon Gruden.

Gruden was fired 10 years ago this month.

Arians is the latest in a line of successors that includes Raheem Morris, Greg Schiano, Lovie Smith and Koetter, who landed the job in 2016 primarily because ownership felt his offensive expertise would accelerate the growth of young quarterback Jameis Winston.

General manager Jason Licht also interviewed Kansas City Chiefs offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy, Vikings defensive coordinator George

Edwards and Dallas Cowboys defensive backs coach and defensive passing game coordinator Kris Richard. None of them have previous head coaching experience.

Arians was believed to be the front-runner all along because of his familiarity with Licht, who was vice president of player personnel for two seasons in Arizona before moving to Tampa Bay as GM in 2014.

The Bucs fired Koetter after consecutive 5-11 finishes that dropped his three-year record to 19-29.

Cards get Kingsbury to help tutor Rosen

PHOENIX — The Arizona Cardinals have hired former Texas Tech coach Kliff Kingsbury as their head coach, a move aimed at providing guidance for young quarterback Josh Rosen and resuscitating the worst offense in the NFL.

The Cardinals announced the hiring Tuesday after a long interview earlier in the day, saying Kingsbury had agreed to terms on a four-year contract

with a team option for a fifth. He was to be introduced at a news conference at the team's training facility in Tempe on Wednesday.

Kingsbury was fired after going 35-40 in six seasons at Texas Tech, but his teams were known for their high-scoring performances. His prized pupil in those days was current Kansas City Chiefs All-Pro quarterback Patrick Mahomes. Tuesday's hiring came barely a month after Kingsbury was hired as offensive coordinator at USC.

Kingsbury, also a former offensive coordinator at Texas A&M where he worked with Johnny Manziel, replaces Steve Wilks, who was fired after going an NFL-worst 3-13 in his one season in Arizona.

That means Kingsbury will take over a team with the No. 1 overall draft pick, along with a bevy of other picks and lots of salary cap space.

After a one-year experiment with a defense-oriented coach in Wilks, Cardinals president Michael Bidwill acknowledged he got that hire wrong and vowed to get this one right.

Vasilevskiy, Point help Lightning blank Blue Jackets

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Andrei Vasilevskiy made 31 saves, Brayden Point had two goals and an assist, and the NHL-leading Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Columbus Blue Jackets 4-0 on Tuesday night.

NHL points leader Nikita Kucherov had a goal and an assist, and Mathieu Joseph also scored.

Tampa Bay (33-8-2, 68 points) is two points off the pace of the 1976-77 Montreal Canadiens, who set the NHL record for points in a season with 132. The Lightning had a 16-game point streak (15-0-1) that ended with a 5-2 loss at San Jose on Saturday.

Sergei Bobrovsky was pulled in the third after allowing four goals on 19 shots for the Blue

Jackets, who are 8-3-1 over the last 12 games. Left wing Markus Hannikainen (upper body) and center Brandon Dubinsky (lower body) left with injuries.

Vasilevskiy turned aside 17 shots, including three good scoring chances by Artemi Panarin, during the second en route to his second shutout this season and 14th overall. The Vezina Trophy finalist last season was named before the game to replace Montreal's Carey Price in the All-Star Game.

Golden Knights 4, Rangers 2: Marc-Andre Fleury made 27 saves and host Vegas beat New York for its seventh straight victory.

Sharks 7, Oilers 2: Evander Kane and Joonas Donskoi each scored two goals, Erik Karlsson had three assists for the second

consecutive game and host San Jose routed Edmonton.

Capitals 5, Flyers 3: Jakub Vrana scored twice to set a career high in goals and added an assist to help host Washington hand Philadelphia its eighth consecutive loss.

Jets 7, Avalanche 4: Blake Wheeler had a goal and three assists, Mark Scheifele got his 23rd goal and host Winnipeg beat Colorado.

Hurricanes 4, Islanders 3: Justin Williams scored late in the third period and visiting Carolina snapped New York's six-game winning streak.

Penguins 5, Panthers 1: Matt Murray stopped 36 shots to remain unbeaten since his return from a lower-body injury, Riley Sheahan and Bryan Rust scored short-handed goals in the second period and host

Pittsburgh stopped Florida.

Bruins 4, Wild 0: Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand each had a goal and two assists, Tuukka Rask stopped 24 shots for his first shutout this season and host Boston beat Minnesota.

Stars 3, Blues 1: Tyler Seguin scored twice, Ben Bishop made several key saves and visiting Dallas beat St. Louis.

Canadiens 3, Red Wings 2: Brendan Gallagher and Joel Armia scored 66 seconds apart early in the second period, and visiting Montreal edged Detroit.

Sabres 5, Devils 1: Jeff Skinner got his 29th goal of the season and host Buffalo scored five times in the second period to beat New Jersey.

NBA roundup

Jokic's triple-double powers Nuggets

Associated Press

MIAMI — Nikola Jokic's numbers were big, as usual.

And his shooting touch at the end was perfectly soft.

Jokic had his fourth triple-double of the season — 29 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists — and his high-arching shot in the lane with 2.4 seconds left lifted the Western Conference-leading Denver Nuggets to a 103-99 win over the Miami Heat on Tuesday night.

"That's my kind of shot," said Jokic, who now has 20 career triple-doubles. "I love floaters, all kind of floaters."

Jamal Murray had 18 points, Trey Lyles added 15, Paul Millsap had 12 and Torrey Craig finished with 11 points and 16 rebounds for the Nuggets, who outrebounded Miami 50-38 and had a 23-11 edge in second-chance points.

It came on the second night of a back-to-back that started Monday in Houston, and with-

out Gary Harris — sidelined with left hamstring tightness.

"Hell of a win," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. "I don't know if it's a statement win or not. But it's a win where we had every reason to use an excuse for the loss. And we don't want to be a team that makes excuses. We want to be a team that finds ways when everything is stacked against us."

Dion Waiters returned to the lineup and scored 15 points for Miami, which got 13 apiece from Bam Adebayo and Kelly Olynyk, and 12 each from Hassan Whiteside, Josh Richardson and Justise Winslow.

It was Waiters' first time playing in Miami since December 2017. He missed more than a year after ankle surgery.

"A healthy me, that's all I can ask for," Waiters said. "I can just go out there and play. I don't have to worry about anything."

Timberwolves 119, Thunder 117: Andrew Wiggins had a season-high 40 points and 10 rebounds, and Minnesota beat host Oklahoma City in Ryan Saunders' first game as interim coach.

Thunder reserve center Nerlens Noel was taken off the court on a stretcher in the third quarter after being hit by Wiggins' elbow on a dunk attempt. There was no immediate word on Noel's condition.

Warriors 125, Knicks 95: Klay Thompson scored 43 points with seven three-pointers, Stephen Curry had his first double-double of the season with 14 points and a season-best 14 assists, and host Golden State snapped a rare three-game home losing streak by beating cold-shooting New York.

Raptors 104, Hawks 101: Serge Ibaka scored the winning basket with 17 seconds remaining and Toronto won its

sixth straight home game.

Pacers 123, Cavaliers 115: Thaddeus Young scored 26 points, Bojan Bogdanovic had 23 and Indiana held off a late run to hand host Cleveland its 10th straight loss.

Clippers 128, Hornets 109: Lou Williams had 27 points and 10 assists, and Los Angeles beat Charlotte for the ninth straight time at Staples Center.

76ers 132, Wizards 115: Rookie Landry Shamet made eight three-pointers and scored 29 points, both career highs, and Joel Embiid had 20 points and 10 rebounds to lead host Philadelphia to a rout of Washington.

Suns 115, Kings 111: Kelly Oubre Jr. matched his career high with 26 points, including a one-handed rebound jam with 11.1 seconds to play, and host Phoenix snapped a six-game losing streak by rallying from a 21-point deficit to beat turn-over-prone Sacramento.

College basketball roundup

Williamson's 30 points helps Duke rout Wake Forest

Associated Press

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — Freshman sensation Zion Williamson scored a season-high 30 points with 10 rebounds, and No. 1 Duke won its first road game of the season by beating Wake Forest 87-65 on Tuesday night.

RJ Barrett finished with 21 points and matched a season high with seven assists, and Cameron Reddish added 10 points during his best game in a month, helping the Blue Devils (13-1, 2-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) win their eighth in a row.

The high-flying Williamson was 13-for-16 from the field with three three-pointers — he entered with four all season — in surpassing the 28 points he

scored in his debut against No. 2 Kentucky.

No. 3 Tennessee 87, Missouri 63: Kyle Alexander had 14 points and a career-high 17 rebounds as the third-ranked Volunteers beat the Tigers to post their second straight blow-out in Southeastern Conference play.

No. 6 Michigan State 77, Purdue 59: Cassius Winston shook off a slow start and finished with 23 points to help the visiting Spartans beat the Boilermakers.

No. 8 Texas Tech 66, No. 23 Oklahoma 59: Jarrett Culver had his first double-double of the season and scored seven straight points to break a tie late in the second half, leading the host Red Raiders to a win

over the Sooners.

No. 12 North Carolina 90, No. 15 N.C. State 82: Luke Maye scored 21 points to help the visiting Tar Heels hold off the Wolfpack in the longtime rivals' latest meeting.

South Carolina 87, No. 14 Mississippi State 82 (OT): Freshman A.J. Lawson stole the ball and finished with an emphatic dunk with 13 seconds left in overtime to seal the host Gamecocks' upset of the Bulldogs.

No. 18 Kentucky 85, Texas A&M 74: Tyler Herro had 21 points, Ashton Hagans scored a career-high 18 and the host Wildcats overcame a 10-0 deficit before holding off the Aggies.

No. 19 Buffalo 110, Toledo

80: Jeremy Harris scored a career-best 34 points in leading the Bulls to a rout of the Rockets.

Baylor 73, No. 20 Iowa State 70: Makai Mason scored 25 points, including five free throws in the final 38 seconds as the host Bears held on to beat the Cyclones.

Villanova 76, No. 24 St. John's 71: Phil Booth hit a go-ahead three-pointer late in the game and scored 23 points to help the host Wildcats rally to beat the Red Storm.

Service academies

Colorado State 87, Air Force 64: Nico Carvacho scored 27 points, Kendle Moore added 23 and the host Rams cruised past the Falcons.