

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

Saturday, January 12, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Navy officer to visit China amid tension

Associated Press

BEIJING — The U.S. Navy's top officer will visit China starting Sunday amid increasing frictions in the South China Sea and other tensions underscoring their rivalry for dominance in Asia.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson will meet with his counterpart, Vice Adm. Shen Jinlong, and leaders of China's Central Military Commission during his visit to Beijing and the eastern city of Nanjing lasting through Wednesday, the Navy said.

The goal of the visit, Richardson's second as head of operations, is to "continue a results-oriented, risk-reduction-focused dialogue" between the two militaries, the Navy said.

"A routine exchange of views is essential, especially in times of friction, in order to reduce risk and avoid miscalculation," the release quoted Richardson as saying. "Honest and frank dialogue can improve the relationship in constructive ways, help explore areas where we share common interests and reduce risk while we work through our differences."

Richardson and Shen met previously at the 2018 International Seapower Symposium in the U.S. and have held three discussions via video teleconference, the most recent in December, the release said.

China has long chafed at the robust U.S. naval presence in its region, seeing that as a key component of a strategy to contain its development.

In recent years, the South China Sea has become the main area of contention, home to islands, rich fishing grounds, undersea mineral deposits and shipping lanes through which pass an estimated \$5 trillion in goods annually. China claims virtually the entire waterway on historical grounds and has strengthened its hold through the fortification of its island holdings and the construction of man-made outposts by piling sand and concrete atop coral reefs.

Five other governments also exercise overlapping claims in the area, and while the U.S. takes no formal position on sovereignty, it insists on the right to navigation and overflight, including in air and waters within the territorial limits surround-

ing China's holdings.

Freedom of navigation operations intended to assert such rights have enraged China, which has vowed to take measures to thwart them.

While those usually involve the dispatch of ships and aircraft to warn off U.S. vessels, in late September, a Chinese destroyer came perilously close to the USS Decatur in the South China Sea in what the U.S. Navy called an "unsafe and unprofessional maneuver." Navy officers downplayed the incident, calling it unfortunate, rare and something they'd like to avoid.

Richardson has said such patrols highlight the U.S. position against "illegitimate maritime claims."

Sailors aboard USS Stennis stay on mission to fight ISIS

BY JOSHUA KARSTEN

Stars and Stripes

ABOARD USS JOHN C. STENNIS — U.S. warplanes thundered off the runway as the USS John C. Stennis maneuvered through the Persian Gulf during an intense 24 hours that sent scores of bomb-carrying fighters into Iraq and Syria, where American air power remains on display despite talk of a troop drawdown.

For now, the mission in the region hasn't changed, carrier group commander Rear Adm. Mike Wettlaufer told Stars and Stripes on Tuesday aboard Stennis.

"We are given missions to do and we fulfill those missions whether it's delivering ordnance where the ground commander may need it or providing overwatch for folks on the ground," Wettlaufer

said. "Our presence is part of the overall joint coalition force presence here."

The presence is a signal of the U.S. commitment to ongoing operations in the Middle East, sailors said, and even some deploying for the first time said they are ready for whatever may come.

USS Stennis arrived in the Persian Gulf last month — the first carrier visit to the region since April — at a time of heightened tensions.

Iran has threatened to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz, where much of the world's oil transits. The Yemeni civil war is ongoing and key U.S. allies Saudi Arabia and Qatar remain at odds.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump's decision last month to pull U.S. troops out of Syria has created confusion over what could come next in the battle

against Islamic State fighters in Syria. But in recent days, the Trump administration has sent mixed messages about its withdrawal plans. National Security Adviser John Bolton indicated earlier this week that a pullout could take months.

For the sailors aboard Stennis, the direction of Syria policy in Washington has little bearing on the day-to-day mission in the Gulf. On Tuesday, about 70 fighter jets launched and returned from flights, many in support of ground forces in Syria and Iraq.

Any carrier mission in the Persian Gulf means a nearby Iranian presence. The Stennis transited the Strait of Hormuz last month shadowed by Iranian warships. Local Navy officials said that while they have recorded some interactions with Iran that they deemed unprofessional recently, none

were considered unsafe.

Stennis skipper Capt. Randy Peck joked that Iran was "escorting us through the Strait."

"It doesn't deter us from being able to do our job to gain access and entry into the Gulf," he said. "It's an international strait, we're exercising our right to be there and despite the show of force, it didn't deter us from our ability to do that."

Combat flights are just one part of the job for the 4.5-acre, 1,092-foot-long, 24-story behemoth. The ship's executive officer, Capt. Patrick Thompson, manages 5,100 sailors, many of whom are 18-23 years old.

Thompson said that all the roles on board — ranging from logistics to repair, food preparation to administration — are "behind that one possible pilot to get him or her airborne and to get their ordnance heading up toward Syria."

Shutdown becomes longest in US history

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The partial government shutdown became the longest closure in U.S. history when the clock ticked past midnight into early Saturday as President Donald Trump and nervous Republicans scrambled to find a way out of the mess.

A solution couldn't come soon enough for federal workers who got pay statements Friday but no pay.

The House and Senate voted to give federal workers back pay whenever the federal government reopens and then left town for the weekend, leaving the shutdown on track to become one for the record books once the clock struck midnight and the closure entered its 22nd day. And while Trump privately considered one dramatic escape route — declaring a national emergency to build the wall without a new stream of cash from Congress — members of his own party were fiercely debating that idea, and

the president urged Congress to come up with another solution.

“What we're not looking to do right now is national emergency,” Trump said. He insisted that he had the authority to do that, adding that he's “not going to do it so fast” because he'd still prefer to work a deal with Congress.

About 800,000 workers missed paychecks Friday, many receiving blank pay statements. Some posted photos of their empty earnings statements on social media as a rallying cry to end the shutdown, a jarring image that many in the White House feared could turn more voters against the president as he holds out for billions in new wall funding.

With polls showing Trump getting most of the blame for the shutdown, the administration accelerated planning for a possible emergency declaration to try to get around Congress and fund the wall from

existing sources of federal revenue. The White House explored diverting money for wall construction from a range of other accounts. One idea being considered was diverting some of the \$13.9 billion allocated to the Army Corps of Engineers after last year's deadly hurricanes and floods.

That option triggered an outcry from officials in Puerto Rico and some states recovering from natural disasters, and appeared to lose steam on Friday.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom called it an “unconscionable” idea to look at using disaster assistance “to pay for an immoral wall that America doesn't need or want.”

Republican Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas told reporters after discussions with the White House: “I feel confident disaster relief dollars will not be tapped.” Brady said the administration was looking at the “breadth” of unspent dollars in other government accounts.

Administration seeks to soften blow of shutdown

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The government shutdown is wreaking havoc on many Americans: Hundreds of thousands of federal employees don't know when they'll see their next paycheck, and low-income people who rely on the federal safety net worry about whether they'll make ends meet should the stalemate in Washington carry on another month.

But if you're a sportsman looking to hunt game, a gas company planning to drill offshore or a taxpayer awaiting your refund, you're in luck: This shutdown won't affect your plans.

All administrations get some leeway to choose which services to freeze and which to maintain when a budget standoff in Washington forces some agencies to shutter. But in the selective reopening of offices, experts say they see a willingness to cut corners, scrap prior plans and wade into legally dubious territory to mitigate the pain. Some noted the choices seem targeted at shielding the Republican-leaning voters whom President Donald Trump and his party need to stick with them.

The cumulative effect is a government shutdown — now officially the longest in U.S. history — that some Americans may find financially destabilizing and others may hardly notice.

Russell T. Vought, deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget, said the overarching message from Trump has been “to make this shutdown as painless as

possible, consistent with the law.”

“We have built on past efforts within this administration not to have the shutdown be used to be weaponized against the American people,” he said.

Others say such a strategy suggests a lack of urgency and a willingness to let the political impasse in Washington drag on indefinitely.

“The strategy seems to be to keep the shutdown in place, not worry about the effect on employees and furloughed people and contractors, but where the public might be annoyed, give a little,” said Alice Rivlin, who led OMB during the 21-day shutdown in 1996, the previous record holder for the longest in history.

That's a clear difference between then and now, Rivlin said.

“We weren't trying to make it better. We were trying to emphasize the pain so it would be over,” she said. “We wanted it to end. I'm not convinced the Trump administration does.”

The Trump administration earlier this week announced that the IRS will issue tax refunds during the shutdown, circumventing a 2011 decision barring the agency from distributing refunds until the Treasury Department is funded. The National Treasury Employees Union filed a lawsuit, arguing its workers are being unconstitutionally forced to return to work without pay.

Some agencies are finding creative ways to fund services they want to restore.

The administration has emphasized continued use of public lands in general, and

particularly for hunters and oil and gas developers, angering environmental groups. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, using funds leftover from 2018, this week announced it will direct dozens of wildlife refuges to return staffers to work, ensuring planned activities on those lands, including organized hunts, continue.

Barbara Wainman, a spokeswoman for the agency, said most refuges have remained accessible to hunters throughout the shutdown, and the decision to staff them was made based on three criteria: resource management, high visitation and previously scheduled programming, which includes organized hunts and school field trips. Wainman said 17 of the 38 refuges have scheduled hunts that would have been canceled without the restaffing effort.

The IRS is using user fees to restore the income verification program, used by mortgage lenders to confirm the income of a borrower and considered a critical tool for the banking industry. After national parks were left open but unstaffed, causing damage to delicate ecosystems, the National Park Service announced it would take “an extraordinary step” and use visitation fees to staff some of the major parks. And despite the shutdown, the Bureau of Land Management is continuing work related to drilling efforts in Alaska.

As time goes on, more and more programs will become vital, said Linda Bilmes, a public policy professor at the Harvard Kennedy School, and the meaning of what's essential will shift.

Pompeo confident on US-Turkey Kurd deal

Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates — Despite Turkey's vows to the contrary, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Saturday he was confident the two nations can agree on a way to protect U.S.-allied Kurdish rebels in Syria after American troops withdraw from the country.

After speaking to Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, Pompeo said an agreement was a work in progress but can be achieved in a way that allows the Turks to defend their country while leaving alone Kurds who do not pose a threat.

The top U.S. diplomat said he was "optimistic" that Kurds who fought alongside U.S. forces against the Islamic State in Syria are not threatened by pledges from Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

'We had this conversation, many details still to be worked out, but I am optimistic we can achieve a good outcome.'

Mike Pompeo
secretary of state

to launch military operations against what he terms Kurdish "terrorists."

"We recognize the Turkish people's right and President Erdogan's right to defend their country from terrorists and we also know that those who aren't terrorists, those who were fighting alongside us all this time, deserve to be protected and we are confident that we can achieve an outcome that achieves both of those: protect the Turks from legitimate terror threats and prevent any substantial risks

to folks who don't present terror risks to Turkey," Pompeo told reporters.

"We had this conversation, many details still to be worked out, but I am optimistic we can achieve a good outcome," Pompeo said of his call with Cavusoglu from Abu Dhabi, where he was on the fourth leg of a nine-nation Mideast trip.

He offered no details but said the U.S. special envoy for Syria and the anti-ISIS coalition, Jim Jeffrey, had traveled to northern Syria earlier this past week to work on the

matter and would be returning to Turkey to continue the discussions.

Turkey considers many of Syria's Kurdish groups to be terrorists and has pledged to attack them. The threats have intensified in recent days as the U.S. begins the withdrawal process from Syria on President Donald Trump's orders.

On a visit Friday to Turkish troops stationed near the Syrian border, Turkey's defense minister, Hulusi Akar, said his country was "determined" to fight Kurdish militias it considers terrorists. He said military preparations were ongoing.

Pompeo and U.S. national security adviser John Bolton have made similar assurances to the Kurds, which have been denounced by Erdogan and other Turkish officials.

Navy names new Naval Academy commandant

The Capital (Annapolis, Md.)

The Navy has named a career submariner currently working for the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the next commandant of midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy.

Capt. Thomas R. "TR" Buchanan is a 1992 graduate of the academy. He will replace Capt. Robert Chadwick, who has served since July 2017.

When Buchanan arrives on the yard this summer, it will be part of a complete turnover of top academy leadership. Vice Admiral Walter E. "Ted" Carter Jr., currently the academy superintendent, is set to end his tour this summer. A new superintendent has not been named.

The commandant is similar to the dean of students at a civilian university and is re-

sponsible for the day-to-day conduct, military training and professional development of more than 4,400 midshipmen.

Often dubbed the "dant," the commandant is the second in command at the academy and serves under the superintendent.

Unlike the superintendent, whose appointment must be confirmed by the Senate, the

commandant is strictly a Navy choice.

Buchanan currently serves as the executive assistant to the director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marine Lt. Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. The director assists the joint chiefs, which serve as advisers to the president on military matters. Buchanan has served in attack and ballistic missile submarines during his career.

Democratic lawmaker Gabbard announces candidacy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democratic Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii has announced that she is running for president in 2020.

Gabbard said in a CNN interview slated to air Saturday night that she will be formally announcing her candidacy within the next week.

The 37-year-old Iraq War veteran is the first Hindu elected to Congress and the first member born in the U.S. territory of American Samoa.

She has visited early primary and caucus states New Hampshire and Iowa in recent months and has written a memoir that's due to be published in May.

Gabbard's run would not be

without controversy. In 2016, she alarmed fellow Democrats when she met with Donald Trump during his transition to president and later when she took a secret trip to Syria and met with President Bashar Assad, who has been accused of war crimes and genocide.

She questioned whether he was responsible for a chemical attack on civilians that killed

dozens and led the U.S. to attack a Syrian air base.

She said she doesn't regret the trip and considers it important to meet with adversaries if "you are serious about pursuing peace." She also noted that the 2003 invasion of Iraq was based on faulty intelligence and said that she wanted to understand the evidence of the Syria attack.

Trump probed as potential threat to US

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Law enforcement officials became so concerned by President Donald Trump's behavior in the days after he fired FBI Director James Comey that they began investigating whether he had been working for Russia against U.S. interests, The New York Times reported.

The report Friday cites unnamed former law enforcement officials and others familiar with the investigation.

The inquiry forced counterintelligence investigators to

evaluate whether Trump was a potential threat to national security, and they also sought to determine whether Trump was deliberately working for Russia or had unintentionally been influenced by Moscow.

The Times reports that FBI agents and some top officials became suspicious of Trump's ties to Russia during the 2016 presidential campaign but didn't launch an investigation at that time because they weren't sure how to approach such a sensitive and important probe, according to the sources. But Trump's behavior in the days

around Comey's May 2017 firing, specifically two instances in which he seemed to tie Comey's ousting to the Russia investigation, helped trigger the counterintelligence part of the investigation, according to the newspaper.

Trump tweeted early Saturday that the report showed that the FBI leadership "opened up an investigation on me, for no reason & with no proof" after he had fired Comey.

Robert Mueller took over the investigation when he was appointed special counsel soon after Comey's firing. The

overall investigation is looking into Russian election interference and whether Trump's campaign coordinated with the Russians. The Times says it's unclear whether Mueller is still pursuing the counterintelligence angle.

Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani told the Times that he had no knowledge of the inquiry but said that since it was opened a year and a half ago and they hadn't heard anything, apparently "they found nothing." Trump has also repeatedly and vociferously denied collusion with the Russians.

Florida sheriff suspended over deadly school shooting

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — New Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis suspended Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel on Friday over his handling of February's massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, saying he "repeatedly failed and has demonstrated a pattern of poor leadership."

The Republican governor flew to Fort Lauderdale three days after taking office to remove the Democratic sheriff, appointing a former police sergeant to serve as acting sheriff. Gregory Tony, 40, worked for Coral Springs police for 12 years before leaving in 2016 to start a company specializing in active-shooter training. He is the first African-American to serve as Broward's sheriff.

DeSantis said during a news conference outside the sheriff's office headquarters that Israel failed to keep families and children safe before and during the Feb. 14 shooting that left 14 students and three staff members dead inside the three-story freshman building.

"The neglect of duty and incompetence that was connected to the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School has been well documented, and

I have no interest in dancing on Scott Israel's political grave," DeSantis said. "Suffice it to say, the massacre might never have happened had Broward had better leadership in the sheriff's department."

During the shooting, then-Broward Deputy Scot Peterson, who was assigned to the school, drew his gun but took cover instead of charging inside. Seven other deputies who arrived within minutes also failed to enter, even as officers from neighboring Coral Springs went into the building.

Israel earlier changed the office's policy from saying deputies "shall" confront active shooters to "may." He said he didn't want deputies to undertake suicide missions. Deputies also received two calls about suspect Nikolas Cruz in the months before the massacre saying he had amassed an arsenal and was a potential school shooter, but took no action.

Minutes after DeSantis' announcement, Israel said he "wholeheartedly" rejected the governor's order and would fight it in court, arguing that DeSantis was making a "power grab" against the will of the county's people who elected him.

Mother: Navy vet detained in Iran needs medical help

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The mother of a U.S. Navy veteran who has been held in Iran since July said Friday that she is worried her son who was undergoing cancer treatment will not survive the detention.

Joanne White issued the statement through a family spokesman, expressing her concern for the health of her son, 46-year-old Michael White.

He went to Iran to visit his girlfriend, whom he had met online, and was arbitrarily detained, family spokesman Jonathan Franks said. Joanne White has been unable to communicate with him.

"She's very worried that she's not going to make it," Franks said.

Franks said his mother "implores" the Iranian government to release him so he can get the "specialized medical care he needs."

Michael White worked as a cook for the Navy and left the service about a decade ago, Franks said. The family wants to make clear that he is not a spy and has never been one. He recently worked as a janitor.

Iran confirmed Wednesday that it is holding White at a prison. He is the first Ameri-

can known to be detained under President Donald Trump's administration. His mother asks the administration to make his case a priority because of his health concerns.

White's detention adds new pressure to the rising tension between Iran and the U.S., which under Trump has pursued a maximalist campaign against Tehran that includes pulling out of its nuclear deal with world powers.

Although the circumstances of White's detention remain unclear, Iran in the past has used its detention of Westerners and dual nationals as leverage in negotiations.

The semi-official Tasnim news agency, believed to be close to the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, reported the confirmation Wednesday, citing Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi.

"An American citizen was arrested in the city of Mashhad some time ago and his case was conveyed to the U.S. administration on the first days" of his incarceration, Ghasemi was quoted as saying.

There are four other known American citizens being held in Iran.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Makeshift mannequins part of prison escape

MI NEW HAVEN — Two prisoners at a Michigan correctional facility could face attempted escape charges after officers found makeshift mannequins in their bunks.

The Detroit Free Press reported that an officer in a tower at the Macomb Correctional Facility northeast of Detroit spotted the men walking toward a fence Saturday evening as other prisoners headed to a chow hall.

Officials conducted an emergency prisoner count at the facility in New Haven and found the mannequins in the cell Chakaris Loury, 24, shared with Darius Culpepper, 27.

Returning from holiday, family find man in home

GA MARIETTA — An Atlanta-area family said they returned home from holiday travel to find their locks changed and a man living inside.

WSB-TV quoted Janice Henson in as saying she called Cobb County police when the key wouldn't turn and a man came to the door. Henson said they were returning Wednesday when the man told her to leave and that it's his home now.

Police said Nathaniel Jacob Nuckols, 26, threatened to shoot at officers and was arrested after a five-hour standoff.

Henson said thank-you notes were left, drawers emptied and their food was gone.

Man held for theft of \$10M lottery ticket

CA SACRAMENTO — Authorities arrested a California man they say tried to steal his roommate's \$10 mil-

lion winning lottery ticket.

Vacaville police arrested Adul Saosongyang at a California Lottery office in Sacramento where he'd been told to go to collect his winnings.

Police said the winning Scratchers ticket was bought Dec. 20 in Vacaville. But when the winner went to collect the next day, he was told he had a losing ticket that had been altered.

The player suspected a roommate had switched tickets while he slept and called police. A day later, Saosongyang arrived at the lottery office with the real ticket.

No takers for historic 80-year-old bridge

MO WEBB CITY — No one wants an eight-decade-old southwest Missouri bridge that state transportation officials were giving away for free.

The Joplin Globe reported that the Missouri Department of Transportation had to offer to donate the Route D bridge in Jasper County for reuse because it was eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Officials said no one presented a proposal to reuse the bridge before the deadline.

The bridge was built in 1935 but had suffered severe deterioration.

MoDOT's senior historic preservation specialist, Karen Daniels, said it's "very difficult" to give away state bridges.

Alaska's population dropped by 1,600

AK JUNEAU — An Alaska report shows the state's population declined by about 1,600 people, bringing the total down to about 736,000.

The Juneau Empire reported the state Department of Labor

and Workforce Development report released Thursday shows 7,577 residents left as Alaska gained 5,969 people from July 2017 to July 2018.

Some residents left to pursue job opportunities outside the state as Alaska has the highest unemployment rate in the country at 6.3 percent as of November.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the national average was 3.7 percent in November.

Unemployment rates in the state have consistently topped 6 percent in the last two years.

Woman breaks into station to date cop

PA WYOMING — Police in Pennsylvania said a woman smashed her way into a closed police station looking for an officer she'd been sexually harassing ever since he arrested her.

Police said Ashley Keister, 27, of Nanticoke used a large cigarette butt receptacle to smash glass doors into the West Wyoming police building around 12:45 a.m. Monday. Once inside, she started rummaging through filing cabinets.

West Wyoming Police Chief Curtis Nocera said she sent sexually harassing messages on social media and would call 911 just to talk to him.

Two men deemed too dangerous for bail

MA CHICOPEE — Two men charged with forcing their way into a Massachusetts home and attacking a resident with a hammer have been deemed by a judge as too dangerous to be released on bail.

The Republican newspaper of Springfield reported that Andrew Newell, 23, and Christian

Barbosa, 26, can be held for up to four months.

The Chicopee men are charged with breaking into an apartment Dec. 17 and using a hammer to beat a man they claimed disrespected Newell's girlfriend.

Debut for hand-crafted ice castles to explore

NH WOODSTOCK — Hand-crafted ice castles opened again in New Hampshire.

The castles that have been under construction for weeks include art made up of more than 20 million pounds of ice spiraling to heights around 40 feet. The ice is also embedded with color-changing LED lights set to a musical soundtrack.

Opening day was Friday. This year, the castles are on Clark Farm Road in North Woodstock. Guests can also buy tickets for horse-drawn sleigh rides.

Human waste truck spills, closes freeway

MI ERIE TOWNSHIP — A freeway in southeastern Michigan just north of the state line with Ohio was closed for several hours after a truck hauling human waste rolled over and spilled its contents along the roadway.

The crash happened about 9:40 a.m. Thursday on northbound Interstate 75 near Monroe County's Erie Township.

The Detroit Free Press reported that Michigan State Police Sgt. Rod Goss said the spill initially was "reported as tar, then it was reported as human waste."

Crews were called in to clean up the mess.

From wire reports

Your objective source for military news
updated 24/7 from bases
around the world.
Now online at www.stripes.com.

STARS AND STRIPES®

Cold weather works to Pats' advantage

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — His coach downplays it. Tom Brady does not.

Brady knows the cold-weather New England Patriots should have an advantage when they host the warm-weather Los Angeles Chargers in Sunday's AFC divisional-round game.

Hours before, Bill Belichick said, "We're playing the Chargers. We're not playing the weather — whatever it is, it is. We're going to be on the same field" when asked about having no advantage. His quarterback made it clear this team is quite comfortable in the expected chilly conditions.

New England will apparently dodge the snowstorm that's making its way to the East Coast, but it will be cold. It's the kind of cold the Patriots, who are seeking their eighth straight trip to the AFC title game and a sixth Super Bowl title in the Brady era, know all too well.

"I just think the ability to practice in it," Brady told his regular Friday media session. "Like today, it's very similar to what we're going to get on Sunday, so just knowing

how many layers you have to put on, and kind of how you're going to feel when you have the nice, warm, heated benches out there like we will on Sunday.

"It's cold and that's just this part of this time of year. But it's good to be playing when it's cold out, it's good to be playing this time of year in Foxborough."

Thursday provided the home team with much of what this area has to offer in early January.

"The weather changed a little bit yesterday," Brady said. "It snowed at the start, then got sunny, then got cloudy, then got windy, then got sunny and it was just a bunch of different things. Just to practice in it, we're prepared for it, and hopefully we can use some of the things that we've learned to our advantage."

Brady has reached the AFC title game 12 times in 16 seasons as a starter. He will play in his record 38th postseason game and comes in 27-10. He's 41 years old and hasn't had the greatest season of his stellar career, but still gets, well, chills about playing in the cold.

"It's a good time of year," he said. "I think everyone's ex-

cited to be out there. It's just a great environment of football."

Brady and counterpart Philip Rivers (37) combine to be the oldest pair of quarterbacks to face each other in a postseason game, breaking the mark Brady had with Peyton Manning.

"That's pretty cool," Brady said of the age record. "It's just fun to be around; I'm out there today practicing and it's whatever degrees out: 10 degrees, 15 degrees with the real feel. And I'm sitting here just playing with my friends, throwing the football around. So it's just a great blessing to be able to do it, do it here for this team, which I have loved to do. Philip's been on the same team — it means a lot.

"We all work hard to get to this point. These things aren't guaranteed, very tough to get to this point in the season. Every team four months ago thought they'd be playing in these games. The reality is that's not the way the NFL is. We're very fortunate and we have to go out and try and take advantage of it."

Brady is 7-0 head to head with Rivers. The only time Rivers has beaten New England

was in 2008, when Brady was injured and Matt Cassel was at QB.

But Rivers has had a terrific season, and the Chargers (13-4) won at Baltimore in the wild-card round. LA is 8-1 on the road, while New England is 8-0 at home this season.

"He's a great player," Brady said. "They've had a lot of great teams in San Diego over the years, led by him. He's a great passer, tough, very accurate. He's a great leader. So when I think of that team it's just he's an emotional leader and he always gets those guys going. They always have a good offense ... it's a good team, obviously they're good in all three phases, they've won a lot of games this year, gone on the road a bunch, so they're very mentally tough. It's going to take our best to win."

Led by Rivers, Brady notes the Chargers' ability to come back in games, something that has been a Brady trademark over the years.

"They were down 14 to KC with four minutes left, down a bunch to the Steelers," Brady said. "You just can't count them out."

Backups, castoffs helping shore up Eagles' secondary

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — When injuries ravaged the secondary, the Philadelphia Eagles turned to inexperienced guys and castoffs.

The no-names are making themselves known.

Cre'von LeBlanc, Tre Sullivan, Rasul Douglas and Avonte Maddox have stepped up in a big way down the stretch, helping the Eagles (10-7) win four straight games and advance to an NFC divisional playoff at New Orleans (13-3) on Sunday.

LeBlanc had only joined the team 13 days earlier when the Eagles were destroyed by the Saints, 48-7, on Nov. 18. The third-year pro saw his first action with his new team at cor-

nerback in that game and was part of a defense that Drew Brees tore apart.

"Back then I was just coming in trying to figure things out," said LeBlanc, who began the season in Detroit. "Now I'm more comfortable, I'm more at ease and I know the game plan."

LeBlanc has become a key player, filling in for Sidney Jones at nickel cornerback. He shut down Chicago's leading receiver, running back Tarik Cohen, in Philadelphia's 16-15 win over the Bears in the wild-card round. Cohen had only three catches for 27 yards.

"I don't know where we'd be without Cre'Von," defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz said.

"I never heard of Cre'Von LeBlanc before (the scouting staff) said they were thinking about claiming this guy. ... We owe a lot of our season to that."

LeBlanc, who was released by the Patriots, Bears and Lions in his first three seasons, deflected the credit.

"I appreciate everything Jim said about me. It's a big honor. I'm thankful for it but I wouldn't say I saved the season," LeBlanc said. "It was a team thing. We did it collectively. We're on a roll right now and we believe in each other."

The Eagles already were missing starting cornerbacks Ronald Darby and Jalen Mills and starting safety Rodney McLeod going into the first meeting against New Orleans.

Maddox and Jones were injured in the game and things got ugly. Brees threw for 363 yards and four touchdowns and the offense racked up 546 yards.

"Night and day," LeBlanc said about the difference between then and now. "We had a lot of new guys out there trying to figure things out on the fly, on the run. All the hard work we put in week in and week out and getting together each day to communicate and study film helped us build."

Douglas, a third-round pick in 2017, was buried on the depth chart before all the injuries forced him into the starting lineup. He led the team with eight tackles against the Bears and coaches have praised his physical style.

Betts, deGrom, Davis in 1-year deals

Associated Press

NEW YORK — AL MVP Mookie Betts, NL Cy Young Award winner Jacob deGrom and major league home run champion Khris Davis reached high-priced one-year deals to avoid salary arbitration, while slugger Nolan Arenado and pitchers Gerrit Cole, Luis Severino and Aaron Nola were among 15 players still on track for hearings.

Betts and the World Series champion Boston Red Sox agreed to a \$20 million, one-year contract on Friday, a \$9.5 million raise that topped pitcher Max Scherzer's \$8.8 million hike from Detroit in 2014.

Betts' standard didn't last the day, broken when deGrom and the New York Mets agreed at \$17 million, a \$9.6 million increase.

Cleveland shortstop Francisco Lindor, eligible for the first time, got an even bigger raise. His salary went up more than \$9.9 million, from \$643,200 to \$10.55 million.

Davis and the Oakland Athletics reached a \$16.5 million deal, a \$6 million raise after he

hit 48 home runs with a career-high 123 RBIs.

Arenado asked for a record \$30 million in arbitration from Colorado and was offered \$24 million. He will top the record for a salary for an arbitration-eligible player, a \$23 million deal last year by Toronto and third baseman Josh Donaldson.

Among the 157 players eligible for arbitration at the start of the day, 142 reached deals on the busiest day of the offseason. All were for one year, though Milwaukee catcher Manny Pina's agreement included a team option for 2020.

There will be fewer hearings this winter than last year, when players won 12 of 22 cases argued — the most since 24 in 1990.

Washington reached an \$18.8 million deal with third baseman Anthony Rendon, who got a \$6.5 million raise, and Chicago White Sox slugger Jose Abreu agreed at \$16 million, a raise of \$3 million.

Boston also reached deals with shortstop Xander Bogaerts for \$12 million and outfielder Jackie Bradley Jr. for \$8.55 million.

Suspended shortstop Addison Russell and the Chicago Cubs agreed to a \$3.4 million, one-year contract, a relatively small \$200,000 raise for a player whose relationship with the team appeared strained after a domestic violence suspension.

Russell accepted a 40-game suspension last October for violating baseball's domestic violence policy following allegations made by his ex-wife. He missed the final 11 regular-season games plus the wild-card playoff loss and will be eligible to return May 3, barring postponements.

Russell will lose pay during the suspension. He can earn an additional \$600,000 in roster bonuses if he is on the active roster for up to 150 days.

Cubs third baseman Kris Bryant agreed to a \$12.9 million, one-year deal, a raise from \$10.85 million.

Among the players still on track for hearings, Cole asked Houston for \$13.5 million and was offered \$11,425,000; and Trevor Bauer asked Cleveland for \$13 million and was offered \$11 million. Bauer won his hearing last winter.

Two first-time eligible starting pitchers didn't reach deals: Severino asked for \$5.25 million and was offered \$4.4 million by the New York Yankees, and Aaron Nola requested \$6.75 million and was offered \$4.45 million by Philadelphia.

Traded to Cincinnati by the Los Angeles Dodgers, Alex Wood asked the Reds for \$9.65 million and was offered \$8.7 million.

Hearings are scheduled for Jan. 28 to Feb. 15 in St. Petersburg, Fla. While many teams say they have a "file and trial" strategy for players who don't reach deals before the exchange, some with pending cases may settle. Some of the gaps are relatively modest: Washington outfielder Michael A. Taylor (\$3.5 million vs. \$3.25 million), Houston right-hander Chris Devenski (\$1.65 million vs. \$1.4 million) and Toronto right-hander Ryan Tepera (\$1.8 million vs. \$1,525,000)

Three of the remaining cases involve the Astros: shortstop Carlos Correa asked for \$5 million and was offered \$4.25 million.

Maryland rallies from 14 down to beat No. 22 Indiana

Associated Press

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Maryland gave up the game's first nine points, trailed by 14 with 13 minutes elapsed and faced a double-digit deficit early in the second half.

Strangely enough, with this team that's just about a sure-fire formula for victory.

Bruno Fernando had a career-high 25 points and 13 rebounds, Anthony Cowan Jr. scored 24 and the Terrapins rallied past No. 22 Indiana 78-75 Friday night.

It was the fifth straight victory for Maryland (14-3, 5-1 Big Ten), which used a 16-0 run in the second half to take control.

"Just an incredible win, because we were not very good at the start," coach Mark Tur-

geon said.

Three times during their winning streak, the Terrapins rebounded from a halftime deficit. It also happened on Jan. 2 against then-No. 24 Nebraska and at Minnesota on Tuesday.

The Terps are 5-1 this season when trailing at the break. Not bad, but it's been tough on their coach.

"Hopefully we can become a better first-half team," Turgeon said.

Freshman guard Romeo Langford scored 28 points, Devonte Green had 15 and Juwan Morgan added 14 for Indiana (12-4, 3-2). The Hoosiers shot 12-for-28 in the second half and were outscored 51-40.

Indiana went 16-for-16 at the foul line and committed only

seven turnovers, but that was offset by Maryland's 18 offensive rebounds.

"We just couldn't get it done on the glass tonight," coach Archie Miller said. "We just gave them 18 second shots and that was the difference in the game."

Fernando led the charge with five offensive rebounds, some of which he turned into putbacks. He went 11-for-12 from the field to surpass his previous career best of 21 points.

"He was as good as it gets in terms of what he was being asked to do: finishing around the rim, offensive rebounding," Miller said. "He's a load."

After Morgan made the first basket after halftime to make it 37-27, the Terps used their 16-

point surge to take the lead for the first time.

Cowan and Darryl Morsell each contributed five points to the surge, and Maryland applied a tight zone defense to force Indiana into nine successive missed shots.

"We really keyed in on defense. We were able to get some easy ones in transition," Cowan said.

The Terrapins never lost the lead, in part because their only turnover of the second half came with 11 seconds left. And that is how you make up for a lousy first half.

"Obviously, we had another slow start," said Cowan, who finished with a game-high seven assists. "We've got to figure that out."

NBA roundup

Butler and Atlanta hold off Philadelphia

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — John Collins hit a fadeaway jumper with 25 seconds left and Atlanta hung on 132-121 when Philadelphia flopped on its final plays.

Jimmy Butler was fouled on a drive and had a chance to tie it with 2.4 seconds left. Butler, an 86 percent free-throw shooter, clanged both shots to waste the chance at the tie. Wilson Chandler slipped under the basket on the second miss and missed a gimmie tip-in at the horn.

Collins scored 25 points, and Kevin Huerter hit five threes and led the Hawks with 29 points.

Rockets 141, Cavaliers 113: James Harden had 43 points, 10 rebounds and 12 as-

sists in three quarters to lead Houston in a rout of visiting Cleveland.

Harden had his 15th straight game with at least 30 points, his franchise-record 13th game with 40 points this season and the seventh in the last nine games.

Warriors 146, Bulls 109: Klay Thompson picked up where he left off on his record-setting night in Chicago earlier this season, making seven three-pointers and scoring 30 points to lead host Golden State to a win.

Thompson set an NBA mark in the first meeting between the teams on Oct. 29 by hitting 14 three-pointers as part of a 52-point night while playing

only the first three quarters. He made three from long range in the first 70 seconds of the rematch and the rout was on in the most lopsided win of the season for Golden State.

Wizards 113, Bucks 106: Bradley Beal scored 32 points, and Tomas Satoransky had 18 points, a career-high 12 rebounds and 10 assists for his first career triple-double to help Washington beat visiting Milwaukee.

Raptors 122, Nets 105: Kawhi Leonard had 20 points and 11 rebounds, Pascal Siakam scored 16 points and host Toronto beat Brooklyn.

Mavericks 119, Timberwolves 115: Luka Doncic scored 29 points and hit the

go-ahead three-pointer to lead Dallas past Minnesota, spoiling rookie coach Ryan Saunders' home debut.

Pacers 121, Knicks 106: Domantas Sabonis had 22 points and 15 rebounds to cap his sizzling season at Madison Square Garden, and Indiana beat New York.

Trail Blazers 127, Hornets 96: CJ McCollum had 30 points and Damian Lillard scored 20 before resting in the fourth quarter, and Portland routed visiting Charlotte.

Jazz 113, Lakers 95: Donovan Mitchell had 33 points and a career-high nine assists, helping host Utah beat Los Angeles.

NHL roundup

Guentzel's trick helps rally Pens past skidding Ducks

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Jake Guentzel scored three times, Phil Kessel got the tiebreaking goal midway through the third period and the Pittsburgh Penguins rallied from an early three-goal deficit for a 7-4 victory over the Ducks on Friday night, sending Anaheim to its 10th consecutive loss.

Tanner Pearson scored the tying goal midway through the third and added another with 3:25 left for the Penguins, who roared back for their 10th win in 11 games with a four-goal third period.

Evgeni Malkin had a goal and three assists, while Guentzel scored two goals in the second period and added an empty-netter to wrap up his second hat trick of the season in a wild opener to Pittsburgh's five-game West Coast trip.

Jakob Silfverberg scored a go-ahead, short-handed goal late in the second period, but the Ducks are 0-7-3 since win-

ning on Dec. 17 at Pittsburgh.

John Gibson made 29 saves against his hometown team, but was shredded in the third period along with Anaheim's struggling defense.

Matt Murray stopped 21 shots for Pittsburgh.

Hurricanes 4, Sabres 3: Sebastian Aho scored two goals off the skates of Buffalo defensemen, and Carolina held on to spoil Jeff Skinner's return to Raleigh.

Micheal Ferland had a deflected goal and two assists, Justin Williams also scored and Teuvo Teravainen added two assists. The Hurricanes scored three goals in 7:27 of the second period and have won five of six for the first time this season to move within five points of a playoff spot.

Skinner scored his 30th goal in his first game against Carolina since he was traded to the Sabres. Jason Pominville also scored and Kyle Okposo pulled Buffalo within one with

a deflected goal of his own with 3:12 remaining.

The Sabres have lost five of seven, going 2-4-1 in that stretch. They had Jack Eichel back in the lineup after the center with a team-best 49 points missed three games with an upper-body injury.

Flames 4, Panthers 3: Michael Frolik had a goal and two assists to lead streaking Calgary to a comeback victory over visiting Florida.

Frolik has eight points (four goals, four assists) in seven games since coach Bill Peters made the veteran a healthy scratch on Dec. 29.

Mark Giordano, Sean Monahan and Matthew Tkachuk also scored for the Flames (29-13-4). The Western Conference leaders have won four in a row to improve to 7-1-1 in their last nine.

Johnny Gaudreau had an assist to extend his point streak to seven games (seven goals, nine assists).

Mike Hoffman, Jonathan Huberdeau and Evgenii Dadonov scored for Florida. The struggling Panthers are winless in their last five, including an 0-2-1 start to a five-game road trip.

David Rittich made 24 saves for the Flames.

Jets 4, Red Wings 2: Kyle Connor had a goal and two assists as host Winnipeg defeated Detroit.

Bryan Little scored the game-winning goal for his 500th career point. Brandon Tanev and Blake Wheeler also scored for the Jets, and Wheeler added an assist.

Laurent Brossoit made his 10th start of the season and stopped 33 shots for Winnipeg.

Luke Glendening had a short-handed goal and defenseman Dennis Cholowski scored on the power play for Detroit, which lost its third straight. Jonathan Bernier made 23 saves for the struggling Red Wings, who are 1-7-2 in their last 10 games.