

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Marines are in Syria with heavy artillery

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A couple of hundred Marines have deployed into Syria with heavy artillery as part of the ongoing preparation for the fight to oust the Islamic State group from its self-declared headquarters of Raqqa, a senior U.S. official said Wednesday.

The deployment is temporary. But it is likely an early indication that the White House is leaning toward giving the Pentagon greater flexibility to make routine combat decisions in the fight against the Islamic State group. Military commanders frustrated by what they considered micromanagement under the previous administration have argued for greater freedom to make daily decisions on how best to fight the enemy.

The Marines moving into Syria are pre-positioning howitzers to be ready to assist local Syrian forces, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

In addition, the U.S. is preparing to send hundreds of U.S. troops to Kuwait in order to be ready to join the Islamic State fight if they are needed, the official said.

The number would be fewer than 1,000.

The latest troop movements come on the heels of the recent temporary deployment of some dozens of Army forces to the outskirts of Manbij, Syria, in what the Pentagon called a “re-assure and deter” mission.

Flying American flags and moving in large, heavily armored vehicles, the troops were there to keep a lid on tensions in the area, the Pentagon said.

It appeared the forces were there largely to insure that Turkish fighters and Syrian opposition groups focused on battling Islamic State rather than each other.

## CENTCOM chief: More conventional forces could be used to stabilize Syria

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The general in charge of U.S. Central Command said Thursday that more conventional military forces might be needed in Syria in the future for stability operations.

Army Gen. Joseph Votel declined to discuss troop numbers and it was unclear whether any future decisions on stability forces would increase the total number of U.S. service-members now deployed in Syria to fight the Islamic State group.

About 500 special operators have been assisting local forces in Syria and in recent days a Marine artillery unit and a Stryker unit moved into the country in advance of an anticipated battle for Raqqa, the terrorist group’s center of power there, according to multiple news reports.

“I think as we move more towards the latter part of these operations into more of the stability and other aspects of the operations we will see more conventional forces requirements perhaps,” Votel said during testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Votel was responding to a question about the mix of special operations and standard military units in the fight, and said the decision on future troop levels will come down to decisions by ground commanders.

“We have become very comfortable and

capable of operating together,” he said. “So, what I have pledged to our commanders and what I expect from them is for them to ask for the capabilities that they need and then for us to ensure we have the right command and control, the right force protection, the right resources in place to ensure that we can function properly together.”

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis recently delivered new military plans for defeating the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq to President Donald Trump, who has pledged to swiftly eradicate its thousands of extremist fighters there. The administration of former President Barack Obama capped troop levels in Syria in an effort to avoid escalation after an eight-year ground war in Iraq, a move that rankled war hawks in Congress who believed it hobbled the war effort.

U.S. forces have been assisting Iraq in the fight to recapture its northern city of Mosul from the Islamic State group and are now turning their attention on Raqqa, where a major offensive is expected. This week, a Marine artillery unit was temporarily deployed to Syria to provide fire support to allies and more troops — less than 1,000 — were gathering in Kuwait for a possible deployment, according to The Washington Post and The Associated Press. Meanwhile, the Army Stryker unit was sent with U.S. flags flying to Manbij, Syria, where Rangers have been operating, according to The New York Times.

Under the existing limits put in place by the Obama administration, the military can have up to 503 U.S. forces in Syria. But temporary personnel do not count against the cap. The movement of the Marines to Syria was first reported by The Washington Post.

Pentagon leaders sent a new plan to defeat Islamic State to the White House late last month. It outlined a strategy that would likely increase the number of U.S. troops in Syria

in order to better advise and enable the U.S.-backed Syrian fighters who will take on the battle for Raqqa.

The military has mapped out a series of options for the Syria fight, including increased artillery support, more Apache helicopters and a more robust training campaign.

U.S. officials say the battle for Raqqa will look much like the fight in neighboring Iraq, where local forces are in a fierce battle to retake the north-

ern city of Mosul from Islamic State militants. As troops were preparing to move into Mosul, the U.S. set up bases outside the city to use as logistical hubs and as locations for heavy artillery.

The moves to pre-position U.S. troops closer to the fight, so they can be tapped as needed, are the kinds of decisions that military commanders say they need to be able to make more quickly, without going to the White House every time for approval.

## House OKs \$578B defense spending bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—The House voted decisively Wednesday to approve a \$578 billion spending bill that keeps the U.S. armed forces operating through September and sets the stage for substantial increases to the Pentagon's budget advocated by President Donald Trump.

The fiscal year 2017 defense legislation passed the GOP-led chamber by a wide margin, 371-48, clearing the way for the Senate to act. The Trump administration is preparing a \$30 billion supplement to the bill, which serves as a down payment on the president's promise to repair what he and other Republicans have described as a military "depleted" by the Obama administration's refusal to spend enough money.

The spending bill has \$516 billion for basic military requirements, which covers everything from the purchase of bombs and bullets to troop training. Nearly \$62 billion is included in the bill to pay for ongoing military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

## 'Every option' eyed on N. Korea

By KIM GAMEL  
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — U.S. officials have rejected China's proposal for Washington to halt war games with South Korea in exchange for a pause in the North's nuclear weapons program.

Instead the longtime enemies seem to be digging in, with the U.S. military beginning the deployment of an advanced anti-missile battery in the South and Pyongyang conducting a missile test that appeared designed to suggest it could overwhelm such a system.

### ANALYSIS

Beijing acknowledged as much even as it suggested on Wednesday that North Korea could suspend its nuclear and missile activities if Washington and Seoul would halt annual joint military exercises underway in the South.

"The two sides are like two accelerating trains coming towards each other," Foreign Minister Wang Yi said. "The use of force is no solution. Talks deserve another chance and peace is still within our grasp."

The State Department said China's proposal was not a "viable deal."

"This is apples and oranges," spokesman Mark Toner said. "What we're doing in terms of our defense cooperation with South Korea is in no way comparable to the blatant disregard that North Korea has shown with respect to international law."

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, said separately that the exercises are defensive and have been held for 40 years.

She told reporters after emergency closed U.N. Security Council consultations that North

Korean leader Kim Jong Un is not "a rational person."

She also noted that President Donald Trump's administration is re-evaluating its approach to North Korea.

"We're not ruling anything out, and we're considering every option that's on the table," she said.

South Korea's military also said the joint military exercises, which began last week and are due to last through April, will continue as planned. The Foal Eagle exercises include numerous drills and will include a visit by the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson on Wednesday.

A computer-simulated command post drill called Key Resolve also is due to begin next week.

"The joint exercises will continue without a halt. They are purely defensive," Defense Ministry spokesman Moon Sang-gyun said during a regular press briefing.

The developments unfolded ahead of a planned trip by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to the region next week. Tillerson will kick off his first regional tour in his new role in Japan on Wednesday, then will travel to South Korea and finally China.

Tillerson and South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se will discuss the threat from North Korea and cooperation in applying more pressure and sanctions against Pyongyang, ministry spokesman Cho June-hyuck said, calling the visit "very timely."

Trump has given little indication about what his new strategy may be other than to say that he wants China to do more to rein in the North.

## US general: Russia deployed banned missile

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A senior U.S. general on Wednesday accused Russia of deploying a land-based cruise missile in violation of "the spirit and intent" of a nuclear arms treaty.

"We believe that the Russians have deliberately deployed it in order to pose a threat to NATO and to facilities within the NATO area of responsibility," Gen. Paul Selva, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a House Armed Services Committee hearing.

Selva said he sees no indication Moscow intends to return

to compliance with the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which bans an entire class of weapons — all land-based cruise missiles with a range between 310 and 3,410 miles. The treaty was a landmark in arms control in the final years of the Cold War.

Selva's accusation takes on added political significance in light of President Donald Trump's stated goal of improving relations with Russia. The alleged treaty violation comes amid multiple congressional investigations of alleged Russian interference in the 2016

presidential election. The FBI also is probing ties between Russia and Trump associates during the campaign.

Trump has questioned the value of a separate, more recent treaty that limits the number of strategic nuclear weapons the U.S. and Russia can deploy to 1,550 warheads each, starting in 2018. Trump has said it unfairly advantages Russia. And he has said the U.S. should expand its nuclear weapons capability.

Even before Trump's election, the Pentagon was weighing implications of a shift in

Russian nuclear doctrine that seems to lower the threshold for the combat use of nuclear weapons. The Russians have framed their new thinking as "escalate, to de-escalate," meaning possibly using a small number of nuclear weapons to persuade an opponent not to escalate the conflict and possibly lead to all-out nuclear war.

"We've begun an investigation of a series of potential strategy changes," Selva said, in part by conducting war games and military exercises.

Russia has claimed U.S. missile defenses violate the threat.

## WikiLeaks to help tech firms fight CIA hacking

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — WikiLeaks will work with technology companies to help defend them against the CIA's hacking tools, founder Julian Assange said Thursday. The move sets up a potential conflict between Silicon Valley firms eager to protect their products and an intelligence agency stung by the radical transparency group's disclosures.

In an online news conference, Assange acknowledged that some companies had asked for more details about the CIA cyberespionage toolkit that he purportedly revealed in a massive disclosure earlier this week.

"We have decided to work with them, to give them some exclusive access to some of the technical details we have, so that fixes can be pushed out," Assange said. Once tech firms had patched their products, he said, he would release the full data of the hacking tools to the public.

In response to Assange's news conference, CIA spokeswoman Heather Fritz Horniak said: "As we've said previously, Julian Assange is not exactly a bastion of truth and integrity. Despite the efforts of Assange and his ilk, CIA continues to aggressively collect foreign intelligence overseas to protect America from terrorists, hostile nation states and other adversaries."

The CIA has declined to comment directly on the authenticity of the leak, but in a statement issued Wednesday it said such releases are damaging because they equip adversaries "with tools and information to do us harm."

Assange began his online news conference with a dig at the agency for losing control of its cyberespionage arsenal, saying that all the data had been kept in one place. "This is a historic act of devastating incompetence," he said.

## GOP pushes ahead on health bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Determined House Republicans pushed ahead Thursday with divisive legislation to undo former President Barack Obama's health care law, holding marathon, all-night voting sessions in key committees despite Democratic protest and intense opposition from doctors and consumer groups.

The GOP scored a predawn triumph in the Ways and Means Committee after nearly 18 hours of debate along party lines, as the panel approved legislation to reshape the way millions of Americans pay for medical care, including abolishing the tax penalty Obama's statute imposes on people who don't purchase insurance.

Elsewhere at the Capitol, lawmakers on the Energy and Commerce Committee struggled past the 24-hour mark, with pressed suits and coiffed hair giving way to rumples and wrinkles. The lawmakers guzzled coffee and took breaks in their private cloakrooms but couldn't stray far out of fear they could miss a vote.

Republican Richard Hudson, of North Carolina, said: "I cheated. I snuck down to the gym at 5 and took a shower and put on a clean shirt."

Earlier, Republicans claimed progress as the Ways and Means Committee voted its approval. Said panel chairman Kevin Brady of Texas, "We voted repeatedly to end Obamacare's crushing taxes and mandates and ensure patients have more power over their own health care."

But the panel's top Democrat, Richard Neal, of Massachusetts, protested that the GOP bill "would drastically increase costs and lower coverage and quality care."

The intense effort underscored GOP leaders' desire to keep the momentum on their drive to undo Obama's health care law after seven years

of promises to voters. President Donald Trump is telling lawmakers he's all-in on the endeavor, and he assigned Vice President Mike Pence to travel on Saturday to Louisville, Ky., home state of one of the most prominent GOP critics, Sen. Rand Paul.

The White House and Republican leaders confront a GOP and outside groups badly divided over the party's high-stakes overhaul campaign, including conservatives like Paul who say the party should simply pursue a straight-forward repeal bill.

Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., weighed in over Twitter Thursday against the House GOP effort, which leaders hope to send to the Senate in time for final passage by early April.

"House health care bill can't pass Senate w/o major changes. To my friends in House: pause, start over. Get it right, don't get it fast," Cotton wrote, contending that Republicans are making the same mistake Democrats did when they passed the Affordable Care Act in the first place by moving forward with little time for review and without official cost estimates from the Congressional Budget Office.

The American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association and AARP, the nation's largest advocacy group for older people, were arrayed against the measure. Seven years ago, their backing was instrumental in enacting Obama's health care statute.

A national association of hospitals — major employers in many districts — wrote lawmakers complaining about the bill's cuts in Medicaid and other programs and said more uninsured Americans seem likely to be the result, adding, "We ask Congress to protect our patients." Groups representing public, children's, Catholic and other hospitals also expressed opposition.

## 24 held as NYC cops thwart gun ring

Associated Press

NEW YORK — An undercover cop in New York City bought 217 assault weapons, Tommy guns and handguns, dismantling a trafficking ring that exploited Virginia's looser gun laws and sent sellers north on buses with bags full of weapons, prosecutors said Wednesday.

Traffickers were caught on wiretaps bragging about their ability to buy guns for resale, authorities said. They used code words like "chopper" and "joint" to peddle the weapons, investigators said. Ammunition was "food."

"There's no limit to how many guns I can go buy from

the store," suspect Antwan Walker is heard saying on a police wiretap. "I can go get 20 guns from the store tomorrow. I can do that Monday through Friday. ... They might start looking at me, but in Virginia, our laws are so little, I can give guns away."

Acting Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez said 24 people were arrested, mostly in Virginia. One person was from Brooklyn, and one from Washington. They are charged in an indictment alleging a conspiracy to bring up to a dozen guns illegally into New York City at a time.

Walker, 21, and others were being held in Virginia awaiting

extradition to New York, and it wasn't clear if he had an attorney who could comment on the charges. Police and prosecutors say they arrested ringleaders, plus straw purchasers who bought guns to give them to other defendants for resale.

Most illegal guns in the nation's largest city come via southern states with laws that are less restrictive than New York's. Gonzalez said that must be changed.

"I find this case truly, truly infuriating," he said. "As so long as anybody continues to peddle death in our borough, we will continue this hard work ... including beyond state lines."

## NATO, US warn Kosovo against forming army

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — NATO and the U.S. warned Wednesday they could scale back cooperation with Kosovo's security services if the government goes ahead with plans to transform its lightly-armed security force into an army without the required constitutional changes.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said he told Kosovo's leaders by telephone "that unilateral steps such as these are unhelpful."

He warned that if Kosovo goes ahead as planned, "NATO will have to review its level of commitment, particularly in terms of capacity-building."

A U.S. Embassy statement said "adoption of the current proposed law would force us to re-evaluate our bilateral cooperation with and ... assistance to Kosovo's security forces."

The move must be carried out through an "inclusive and

representative political process," the statement added.

Kosovo President Hashim Thaci on Tuesday sent a draft law to parliament asking approval to form a regular army. The move was denounced by Serbian leaders, who refuse to recognize Kosovo's independence and said they will use all political means available to prevent the formation of an army.

Constitutional amendments would require approval from the ethnic minorities at Kosovo's parliament. Serbia in effect holds a key say through Kosovo Serbs on if the required constitutional changes can happen.

Thaci said Kosovo cannot "coordinate with Serbia" on its own affairs and that "Belgrade cannot decide for Kosovo."

Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic on Wednesday said he expects "help and support" from the European Union, the U.S. and Russia over Kosovo's plan.

## China says it followed law in approving Trump trademarks

Associated Press

SHANGHAI — China defended its handling of 38 trademarks it recently approved provisionally for President Donald Trump, saying it followed the law in processing the applications at a pace that experts view as unusually quick.

Democrats in Congress were critical of Trump after The Associated Press reported Wednesday that the potentially valuable trademarks had been granted, raising questions of conflict of interest and political favoritism.

Critics fear foreign governments might gain leverage from Trump's global portfolio of brands, particularly in countries such as China, where the courts and bureaucracy are designed to reflect the will of the ruling Communist Party.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said

in a briefing with reporters that Chinese authorities handle all trademark applications "in accordance with the law and regulation."

If no one objects, the approved trademarks will be registered after 90 days, laying the groundwork for a range of branded businesses including hotels, financial and real estate services, golf clubs, educational institutions, restaurants and bars. That would bring the number of Trump-related registered marks in China to 115.

Trump Organization Chief Legal Officer Alan Garten said the latest registrations were the result of "longstanding, diligent" efforts to protect the Trump brand in China. "Any suggestion to the contrary demonstrates a complete disregard of the facts as well as a lack of understanding of international trademark law," he said in an email.

## US bases in Japan manage quake risk

BY ERIK SLAVIN  
AND HANA KUSUMOTO

*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Most servicemembers and their families now living in mainland Japan weren't there on March 11, 2011, when a magnitude 9.0 earthquake combined with a tsunami killed nearly 20,000 people and set off an ongoing nuclear crisis.

Aftershocks in the ensuing months came in the hundreds, with several registering above magnitude 6.0.

The passage of time left people with the feeling that current earthquakes, which are an everyday occurrence in Japan, are unrelated.

But oceanographic data show that the sea floor has continued expanding as a result of what happened six years ago — meaning that when the tens of thousands of Department of Defense personnel in mainland Japan feel a tremor, they may be experiencing the faint legacy of the great earthquake in East Japan, also known as Tohoku.

Naoshi Hirata, a University of Tokyo professor and head of the Earthquake Research Institute Prediction Center, said it is a certainty a large-scale earthquake will occur sometime in the region encompassing Tokyo and outlying prefectures, where the U.S. has bases for all four DOD service branches.

If a major natural disaster occurs, each base in Japan will handle communication and safety measures in its own way. But much of what they will do is a result of lessons learned from the Tohoku earthquake.

The military was widely lauded for relief efforts during Operation Tomodachi, when about 24,000 servicemembers joined with the Japan Self-Defense Force in aid operations.

However, firsthand accounts from personnel and family members at some bases during the disaster reflected fears fu-

eled by a flood of rumors and contradictions.

At Yokosuka, commanders told base personnel they had nothing to fear from ambient radiation levels, comparing them to radiation found in bananas; meanwhile, hospital officials called parents and told them to send their children out of Japan because of radiation.

Messages on TV told people to seek higher ground as tsunami warnings continued on March 11. When several people did that by walking up the highest hill on base, a Navy officer told them to go back down, according to multiple accounts.

It's difficult to say how bases will respond in the next disaster. But improving communication has been a priority in recent years, Navy emergency response officials said.

Yokosuka and Ikego are once again upgrading the "giant voice," a loudspeaker system that sometimes came out garbled and didn't reach all corners of Yokosuka in 2011.

Officials are also making sure that those using it know what they're doing, said Sigmund Evans, the Navy's regional emergency manager.

A system can be perfect, but if someone isn't using the microphone properly, the message may still be misunderstood. Pre-recorded messages also may be used, Evans said.

Navy officials are also more confident in their relationships with Japan's various emergency operations.

When personnel report to several bases in Japan, they are given a form to sign up for email emergency alerts at their orientation briefings — though officials acknowledge that some do not for privacy reasons.

However, similar messages will be posted online during emergencies.

Evans dubbed Facebook and other social media outlets "the first line of defense in rumor control."

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Twins make academic history at their school

**NY** LOCUST VALLEY — Teenage identical twins have made academic history at a Long Island high school

WCBS-TV reported that Locust Valley High School seniors Nick and Matt Rizzo have the top two highest grade-point averages in their Nassau County graduating class. Nick earned the spot as valedictorian, while Matt will be named salutatorian.

The pair says they have always competed inside the classroom. Both teens also enjoy online strategy games and bowling when they're not hitting the books.

The twins say they are considering giving a combined speech at graduation.

## 3 people arrested for 'hodgepodge' of drugs

**CA** LOS ANGELES — Authorities arrested three people in Southern California after finding what they called a "hodgepodge" of different types of illegal drugs during a traffic stop.

The Los Angeles Times reported that Kern County deputies conducted the traffic stop in Lake Isabella early Sunday.

Sheriff's office spokesman Ray Pruitt said deputies searched the vehicle and found hallucinogenic mushrooms, methamphetamine, Ecstasy, marijuana and fentanyl.

Authorities also discovered a replica handgun and hundreds of dollars in cash.

The three suspects in the car, ages 38, 46 and 53, were arrested on suspicion of possession of a controlled substance and other charges.

## Woman charged after receiving drugs in mail

**CT** MIDDLETOWN — A Connecticut woman was charged after police say she received more than seven pounds of cocaine in the mail.

Middletown police said Jasmine Delgado, 27, is charged with criminal attempt to possess narcotics and attempt to possess narcotics with intent to sell.

Police said the drugs were mailed from Puerto Rico to one of Delgado's neighbors, who became suspicious and went to police. Police confirmed the presence of drugs, which they say had a street value of as much as \$120,000.

The woman told police she had reluctantly allowed Delgado to have the package sent to her. Delgado said she thought the package contained children's clothing and had no knowledge of drugs.

## Woman is charged in child adoption scam

**NC** WILMINGTON — Authorities in New Hanover County said a Carolina Beach woman is accused of fleecing a dozen people hoping to adopt a child.

District Attorney Ben David said Wendy George, 37, is charged with four counts of obtaining property by false pretenses.

David said George posted messages on various websites devoted to adoption and surrogacy, and offered her services to people hoping to become parents. Investigators said at least 12 victims have come forward.

In 2012, George was convicted of 16 counts of obtaining money by false pretenses after she and an accomplice took money from several people across the U.S. for vacation rentals in Carolina Beach that didn't exist.

## Nearly \$52M awarded to family in car crash

**FL** OCALA — A north Florida jury has awarded a family nearly \$52 million for a 2013 car crash that left them all with life-altering injuries.

The Ocala Star-Banner reported that Yolanda Aldana and her four children were stopped at a red light when their vehicle was struck from behind by a car driven by Nathan Pyles.

Aldana suffered a brain injury, among other injuries. All the children were 12 or younger at the time, including a 23-month-old who is now a paraplegic with no use of his hands.

Pyles was found guilty for careless driving with serious bodily injuries and not wearing a seat belt. He told police he didn't remember the crash.

## Man awarded \$100M in suit over Scout abuse

**MO** KANSAS CITY — A Kansas City area man who claimed in a lawsuit that he was sexually abused for five years by a Boy Scout leader has received a \$100 million judgment.

The Kansas City Star reported the judgment against Jackson County Boy Scout leader Scott Alan Bradshaw was handed down Tuesday.

The 36-year-old plaintiff, who is not identified in the lawsuit, claimed he was abused up to 2,000 times between the ages of 12 and 17. He said he suffered mental and emotional anguish and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Jackson County Circuit Court Judge J. Dale Youngs heard the case without a jury. The plaintiff was awarded \$25 million in compensatory damages and \$75 million in punitive damages.

## Man gets 20 years in case of mistaken killing

**WA** YAKIMA — A Washington state man was sentenced to 20 years in prison for killing an Oregon man he mistakenly believed impregnated a 13-year-old girl.

The Yakima Herald reported Yoset Dominguez-Serrano, 21, of Outlook, Wash., received the sentence March 3 in Yakima County Superior Court.

Dominguez-Serrano in January pleaded guilty to first-degree murder in the February 2015 killing of Antonio Hernandez-Ledezma, 24, of Boardman, Ore.

Dominguez-Serrano told police he believed Hernandez-Ledezma had impregnated Dominguez-Serrano's 13-year-old relative and he killed the Oregon man to protect his family's honor.

DNA tests showed Hernandez-Ledezma wasn't responsible for the pregnancy.

## Woman gets beer after giving it up for Lent

**TX** HARLINGEN — A South Texas woman who says she gave up beer for Lent won a case of Budweiser delivered to her home by a team of Clydesdales.

The Valley Morning Star reported Leandra Ruiz received the beer March 2 in a special drop-off at her neighborhood in Harlingen.

Ruiz, 35, said that several weeks ago she entered an online contest for a chance at home delivery of some beer. Ruiz was on hand with family and friends to watch the Clydesdales pull up to her home.

From wire reports

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# Duke coaching tree bears fruit

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — The Duke coaching tree is blossoming in the Midwest.

Marquette coach Steve Wojciechowski and Northwestern counterpart Chris Collins share a bond that dates back to their days at Duke as point guards and assistants under Mike Krzyzewski.

Now the close friends are leading programs on the rise at schools separated by an 80-mile drive on Interstate 94.

Wojciechowski, in his third season at Marquette, is trying to take the school to its first NCAA Tournament since 2013. Collins, in his fourth year on the sideline, has his team close to its first NCAA tourney bid ever.

Imagine how proud Krzyzewski might be if the prized pupils make their first appearances in the tournament as head coaches in the same season.

"I feel like I live and die every game that (Collins coaches). So proud of him," Wojciechowski said.

Collins says Wojciechowski is like a brother. Their wives are best friends. Heck, the couples even lived four houses apart when they coached together at Duke.

"We've been through so much together. In this profession, being a head coach, there (are) not a lot of people that understand what you go through on a daily basis. He and I both do," Collins said.

They talk on the phone several times a week, exchanging ideas over how to run a play or how to handle the grind of the long season. Often, they're simply checking in with each other to see how things are going.

"We're both kind of at similar" points, Collins said. "We're both in the building stages and it's been great for me and hopefully for him, too, to have someone you trust, that you

can really lean on and help you through different times."

They've had some good talks this season.

Northwestern (21-10, 10-8 Big Ten) has set a program record for wins. With a sixth-place finish in the league, the team appears to be in good shape to finally make the NCAAs, though at least one more win in the Big Ten Tournament would give the Wildcats more secure footing on the bubble. They open the conference tourney on Thursday against either Ohio State or Rutgers.

Northwestern lost six of its last nine games, but one of the wins during that season-ending stretch came at then-No. 7 Wisconsin on Feb. 12. Two months earlier, Wojciechowski had a look at Wisconsin, when the Badgers beat Marquette 93-84 in the annual in-state rivalry game.

Wojciechowski offered Collins some tips, right?

"I can neither confirm nor deny," Wojciechowski said with a smile.

The Golden Eagles (19-11, 10-8 Big East) open their conference tournament on Thursday as the fourth seed against Seton Hall. They boast a win over then-No. 1 Villanova on their résumé, though like Northwestern, they could use at least one more victory to feel better about their chances on Selection Sunday.

The steel-jawed Wojciechowski still looks like he could suit up with the way he paces the sideline with energy. In front of reporters, he speaks with the reserved tones of a CEO giving a boardroom presentation. It's a style that might remind some basketball observers of Krzyzewski.

"I think at the end of the day, too, none of us are going to be viewed as successful if we're going to be judged by the standards of Coach K," Collins said.

# Bucknell punches tournament ticket

Associated Press

LEWISBURG, Pa. — Zach Thomas waved his arms in the air as he walked toward the baseline and exhorted the rowdy Bucknell students to cheer even louder.

Nana Foulland yanked him back to the huddle. The Bison still had 68 anticlimactic seconds to wait before the students would burst toward them for a court-storming celebration that ignited a Patriot League party.

Kimbal Mackenzie scored 18 points to help send Bucknell into the NCAA Tournament with an 81-65 victory over Lehigh in the conference championship game Wednesday night.

The Bison (26-8) are back in the tournament for the first time since 2013 and seem ready to shake up the brackets one more time. Bucknell beat Kansas in 2005 and Arkansas in 2006 to earn a reputation as March upset masters.

The Bison were knocked out of the NCAA Tournament in the first game each of the last two trips. But Foulland and Thomas, who had 17 points and nine rebounds, had the electric home crowd ready to taste the tournament from the opening tip.

The crowd of 4,254, sixth largest in Sojka Pavilion history, stormed the court and mobbed the players to set off a March celebration. Bucknell students danced and snapped selfies on the court as the public address announcer urged them to head back to the bleachers for the traditional cutting of the nets.

Bucknell opened the second half on a 12-0 run that turned Sojka Pavilion into a zoo, complete with a dancing Bison (mascot) and a gyrating shark. The Mountain Hawks (20-12) were the endangered species, and lost in the Patriot League Tournament championship game for the second straight season.

"We had great individual careers but we never made it to the Tournament. That hurts," senior guard Austin Price said.

While so many conference tournament games this week were played in half-empty arenas in major cities, Bucknell's 4,000-seat Sojka rocked from the moment the doors opened to hundreds of students lined up outside all the way to the postgame madness on the court.

The two schools are separated by 125 miles, and the student sections engaged in dueling insults and sarcastic signs that gave this championship game a true big-game flavor.

Bucknell has won six straight games and has not lost consecutive games all season. The Bison entered 24th in the country in field-goal percentage (48.1) and could prove to be a tough out in the tournament.

**Air Force 83, Wyoming 68:** At Las Vegas, Jacob Van and Hayden Graham combined for 33 points, 21 in a dominant first half, and the 10th-seeded Falcons defeated the seventh-seeded Cowboys 83-68 in the opening round of the Mountain West Tournament on Wednesday.

Air Force scored the first 25 points of the game, making 10 of 14 shots, including four three-pointers. Wyoming ended the drought at the 11:25 mark after missing its first eight shots with seven turnovers.

Graham had 11 of his 15 points and Van 10 of his 18 in the first half as the Falcons (12-20) took a 48-27 lead. The final score was as close as it got in the second half.

The Falcons, who face second-seeded Colorado State in the quarterfinals on Thursday, shot 53 percent with six three-pointers in the first half and had 12 turnovers.

Air Force only shot 27 percent in the second half but went 19-for-22 from the line, finishing 29-for-24 to outscore Wyoming by 15.

# Cowboys parting ways with QB Romo

Associated Press

DALLAS — Tony Romo's star-crossed career as the starting quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys will soon be over.

A person with knowledge of the decision told The Associated Press that the Cowboys would release Romo on Thursday. The person spoke to the AP on Wednesday on condition of anonymity because the team hadn't announced a decision on Romo, who would get a chance to pursue a starting job elsewhere.

However, multiple news and league sources reported Thursday that the Cowboys were instead seeking to trade Romo.

Romo will leave the Cowboys as the franchise leader in yards passing (34,183) and touchdowns (248). But he could never match the postseason success of Hall of Famers and multiple Super Bowl winners Roger Staubach and Troy Aikman.

A 10-year starter who joined the Cowboys as an undrafted free agent in 2003, Romo lost the job last season to rookie Dak

Prescott after breaking a bone in his back in a preseason game.

When he was healthy again, Romo conceded the job to Prescott during a franchise-record 11-game winning streak. His departure has been expected ever since.

Romo turns 37 next month, carries a \$24 million salary cap hit and has missed most of the past two seasons with injuries.

A release would free about \$5 million in cap space for the Cowboys, who can split the dead money from a \$19 million hit over two seasons.

Romo was 78-49 as the starter, but his playoff debut 10 years ago illustrated the postseason struggles ahead when he infamously flubbed the snap on what could have been a winning field goal in Seattle.

The four-time Pro Bowler went 2-4 in the playoffs, never winning on the road or reaching the NFC championship game.

Owner Jerry Jones and Romo talked "Cowboy for life" when Romo signed the franchise's first \$100 million contract in 2013 — a \$108 million, six-year extension

through 2019.

And there wasn't any reason to think it wouldn't happen as recently as two years ago after Dallas won the NFC East at 12-4 in Romo's last full season as the starter. The Cowboys beat Detroit in the wild-card round before losing to Green Bay in the divisional round after the famous catch that wasn't by receiver Dez Bryant.

In the second game of 2015, though, Romo broke his left collarbone when he was sacked, and the Cowboys went 0-7 without him. He returned for two games and broke the collarbone again as Dallas sunk to last in the division at 4-12.

When Romo injured his back in the preseason against the Seahawks, Prescott had already shown promise in two preseason games. It carried over to the regular season with 11 straight wins after Dallas lost the opener. The Cowboys were the top seed in the NFC at 13-3 but lost their first playoff game to the Packers.

Romo played just one series in his final season with Dallas.

## Teams mull taking chance on backup QBs

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Matt Hasselbeck is one of the poster boys for success when it comes to backup quarterbacks changing teams and becoming effective starters in the NFL.

After throwing just 29 passes in his first three seasons as Brett Favre's backup in Green Bay, Hasselbeck spent most of the next 10 years as the starter in Seattle where he made six trips to the playoffs, one Super Bowl and three Pro Bowls.

For every successful example like Hasselbeck or Mark Brunell, there are probably even more busts such as Brock Osweiler, Kevin Kolb and Matt Flynn.

With backup quarterbacks such as Jimmy Garoppolo, A.J. McCarron and Colt McCoy possibly on the move this offseason, the task for talent evaluators will be figuring out which group best fits each quarterback.

"One of the things that helped me immensely was the fact that I was Brett Favre's backup for three years," Hasselbeck said.

"I really became a better player by playing with him every single day. It's like playing golf with Jordan Spieth every day. You're just going to get better by osmosis."

That was a similar pattern that Brunell followed. After two years as Favre's backup, Brunell was traded to Jacksonville where he made three Pro Bowls and four playoff appearances in eight seasons as starter for the Jaguars.

Hasselbeck believes Garoppolo is in that same mold if a quarterback-needy team tries to trade for him this offseason, even though he has started just two games in his first three seasons as Tom Brady's backup in New England.

Garoppolo has completed 67 percent of his passes with five touchdowns and no interceptions in his limited playing time, with just 94 career attempts. He could cost a team a hefty package, possibly including a first-round pick.

"If I'm trying to get over the hump and find a guy who's going to be the leader of my offensive huddle, you really can't

go wrong with how Tom Brady does things. That's what Garoppolo thinks is normal," Hasselbeck said. "When I see him play, he almost looks like Tom Brady with his mannerisms. At the end of the day, you have to evaluate how did this guy take advantage of his opportunity or not take advantage of his opportunities? He certainly has."

But that has been no guarantee of success, as evidenced by the lack of strong résumés for Matt Cassel, Ryan Mallett and Brian Hoyer after stints as Brady's backup.

It's not just New England passers who haven't been able to make the transition from second string to star.

Osweiler spent four years as Peyton Manning's backup in Denver and helped the Broncos earn the top seed in the AFC in 2015 on the way to a Super Bowl title when he got the chance to start. That led to Houston giving Osweiler \$37 million in guaranteed money last offseason, only to have him lose the starting job late in the schedule to Tom Savage. The Texans are on the hook for one more year of

guaranteed money for Osweiler, but could be in the market for another starter or go with Savage next season despite the lucrative investment.

Osweiler is far from the only quarterback who was a big acquisition for a team after serving behind a star. Flynn was one of the top quarterbacks to change teams in 2012 when he got a \$26 million, three-year contract with Seattle based heavily on a six-touchdown performance in the 2011 finale for Green Bay.

Flynn was beaten out for the starting job by rookie Russell Wilson in 2012, was traded the next offseason to Oakland, where he was beaten out once again for the starting job by Terrelle Pryor, who has gone on to have more success as a pass catcher than a thrower.

"The less tape, the harder it is," 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan said. "So, you have to go off what you have. If there's not a lot of tape in pros, you study everything in preseason, you study everything they've done in college, you study everything that's available."

# Celtics take down Warriors at home

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — The Boston Celtics had their way in Golden State's typically imposing building again. Last April, it was wrecking the Warriors' record 54-game home winning streak.

This time, they spoiled Golden State's lone appearance at Oracle Arena in a nearly three-week span.

Isaiah Thomas scored 25 points and Kelly Olynyk added 17 points, five rebounds and five assists off the bench as Boston beat the sloppy Warriors 99-86 on Wednesday night.

Splash Brothers Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson combined to shoot just 4-for-17 from three-point range as Golden State went just 6-for-30 from long range and struggled again without injured star Kevin Durant, who spoke before the game wearing a bulky brace on his injured left knee and using crutches.

"They did a good job of guarding the three," Thompson said. "Teams know we can kill them from three."

Curry had 23 points, five rebounds and six assists and Thompson scored 25 points as the Warriors' 10-game home winning streak was snapped — nearly a year after Boston last stunned Golden State here.

It was the Warriors' first home defeat against the Eastern Conference this season and fifth in all out of 26 matchups.

"We're in a tough spot in the schedule and with KD's injury. Everybody goes through this at some point in the season," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "You just make your way through and you let everybody else freak out and panic. You just keep your nose down, keep working and things work out."

**Jazz 115, Rockets 108:** Rudy Gobert and Gordon Hayward each scored 23 points to help Utah beat host Houston for

its fourth straight victory.

James Harden had 35 points for the Rockets. They dropped their second in a row.

**Raptors 94, Pelicans 87:** Jonas Valanciunas had 25 points and 13 rebounds as Toronto beat a host New Orleans squad that played without All-Star forward Anthony Davis during the second half after he hurt his left wrist.

**Timberwolves 107, Clippers 91:** Karl-Anthony Towns had 29 points and 14 rebounds as host Minnesota beat Los Angeles.

**Spurs 114, Kings 104:** Manu Ginobili had 19 points while David Lee added 18 points and 10 rebounds as host San Antonio rallied without Kawhi Leonard to beat Sacramento.

**Bucks 104, Knicks 93:** Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 22 of his 32 points in the second half to help host Milwaukee rally.

**Heat 108, Hornets 101:**

Dion Waiters scored 24 points while Goran Dragic added 22 points and 10 assists as host Miami beat Charlotte to move within a half-game of a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

**Wizards 123, Nuggets 113:** John Wall scored 30 points and Bradley Beal had 23 as Washington beat short-handed host Denver.

**Magic 98, Bulls 91:** Elfrid Payton had 22 points, 14 assists and 14 rebounds for his second straight triple-double as host Orlando rallied to beat Chicago.

**Hawks 110, Nets 105:** Dennis Schroder scored 31 points while Paul Millsap added 24 as host Atlanta snapped a three-game losing streak with a victory over Brooklyn.

**Pacers 115, Pistons 98:** Paul George scored 13 of his 21 points in the third quarter to lead host Indiana past Detroit.

## Bonino scores hat trick to help Penguins wallop Jets

Associated Press

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Nick Bonino and Evgeni Malkin had different kinds of hat tricks Wednesday night.

Bonino had three goals to help the Pittsburgh Penguins beat the Winnipeg Jets 7-4 for their third win in a row. Malkin scored his 30th and 31st goals and had a "Gordie Howe hat trick" — a goal, an assist and a fight.

It was Bonino's second career three-goal game, and gave him 12 on the season.

"The first one went in and you're always feeling a little bit better, and then it just seemed like the puck was finding the net for (us) tonight," said Bonino, whose first hat trick was in February 2013 when he played for Anaheim. "I can't really explain it, but guys made great passes and guys forechecked hard and the puck just found my stick and found the net."

Just over three minutes into

the first period, Jets captain Blake Wheeler and Malkin dropped the gloves. In the team's last meeting Feb. 16 in Pittsburgh, Malkin hit Wheeler in the head and only drew a minor interference penalty. Wheeler wanted retribution and ended up punching Malkin to the ice.

"I respect his leadership," Malkin said. "This guy, he's a great player. I'm ready, you know? But it's not my greatest fight. I respect this guy. It's fine, just a couple punches and I lost. One fight is enough for me."

Wheeler was glad they tangled.

"A lot of respect for him answering the bell," Wheeler said. "He didn't have to do that so it was good to get that out of the way right away and focus on the rest of the game."

Justin Schultz and Jake Guentzel also scored for the Penguins. Matt Murray made 31 saves to set a team record

for wins by a rookie with 25, passing Gary Inness' mark set in 1974-75.

Three of Pittsburgh's goals came in a 57-second span in the second, including two on the power play.

Connor Hellebuyck, making his 12th straight start, was pulled midway through the second period after allowing five goals on 15 shots for the Jets. He was replaced by Michael Hutchinson.

Shawn Matthews, Niko-laj Ehlers, Dustin Byfuglien and Marko Dano scored for Winnipeg.

"We had our chances on the power play and it wasn't good enough," Jets center Bryan Little said.

**Bruins 6, Red Wings 1:** David Krejci scored twice and Drew Stafford had his first with Boston during a four-goal first period against visiting Detroit.

Brad Marchand had his team-leading 31st and 32nd goals while David Pastrnak added a

score and Tuukka Rask made 26 saves. Boston is 9-3 since interim coach Bruce Cassidy replaced the fired Claude Julien on Feb. 7.

Niklas Kronwall had his first goal of the season for Detroit.

**Senators 5, Stars 2:** Defenseman Fredrik Claesson scored his first NHL goal and added an assist to help visiting Ottawa beat Dallas for its fourth straight victory.

Ottawa moved within four points of first-place Montreal in the Atlantic Division. The Senators' winning streak began after they acquired Viktor Stalberg and Alexandre Burrows near the trade deadline.

Craig Anderson made 35 saves and tied the Ottawa franchise record with his 146th victory.

Stalberg and Cody Cedi each had a goal and an assist while Chris Wideman and Jean-Gabriel Pageau had goals.

Tyler Seguin and Jason Spezza scored for Dallas.