

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Some senators doubt Marine promises

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Democrats on the Senate Armed Services Committee told Gen. Robert Neller on Tuesday that they were skeptical of his promises to change the Marine Corps culture in the wake of a nude photo-sharing scandal.

Neller, the Marine Corps commandant, called on victims of the “Marines United” Facebook page to come forward to assist in the ongoing probe by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and said new social media policies were set to be released by the service.

Acting Navy Secretary Sean Stackley, who also testified Tuesday to the committee,

called the social media activity a “cancer.”

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., her voice seeming to crack with emotion, said the response “rings hollow” after the service has failed for years to significantly reduce high rates of sexual assault. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., said the high level of sexual assaults in the Marines relative to the other services is likely connected to the photo-sharing problem.

“This committee has heard those kinds of statements since I’ve been on the committee and, I believe, much longer,” Shaheen said. “Why should we believe it’s going to be different this time than it’s been in the past?”

Neller acknowledged the

doubts and the services’ struggle with sexual assault but vowed that this effort to stamp out misogynist culture will be different.

“I don’t have a good answer for you,” Neller said. “I know you’ve heard it before, but we are going to have to change the way we see ourselves.”

The Marine Corps is on Capitol Hill this week to brief lawmakers on the investigation into the Facebook page, where photos — sometimes nude — of identified female servicemembers along with misogynistic comments were posted.

Copycat pages have popped up, and the Army has begun looking into whether soldiers are implicated.

“We all have to commit to getting rid of this perversion from our culture,” Neller told senators.

He is expected to meet Thursday with the House Armed Services Committee.

The service and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis condemned the activity in statements last week and said a task force has been created to look into policy changes to combat the problem.

The service estimates about 500 Marines were involved in the photo sharing out of the Facebook page’s 30,000 members and at least some of them are likely officers, Neller said, though the service did not provide a breakdown Tuesday.

Administration rejects rebalance to Asia – at least in name

BY KIM GAMEL

Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — The new U.S. administration has yet to unveil its plans for a new strategy toward the Asia-Pacific, but the “pivot” or “rebalance” — as former President Barack Obama’s policy of deeper engagement was known — has been officially put to rest.

A senior State Department official rejected the terms while acknowledging there’s nothing yet to replace them.

The comments came on the eve of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson’s first trip to Asia in his new role, with stops planned in Japan, South Korea and China.

“On the issue of pivot, rebalance, et cetera, I mean, that was a word that was used to describe the Asia policy in the last administration,” said

Susan Thornton, acting assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs.

During a press briefing in Washington on Monday, she outlined general principles as part of a preview of Tillerson’s Asia trip.

Those included remaining “engaged and active in Asia,” working on fair trade and free trade issues and, of course, addressing the growing threat from North Korea, which has test-fired two ballistic missiles in defiance of economic sanctions since President Donald Trump took office on Jan. 20.

That followed an unprecedented spate of activity last year that included two nuclear tests and two dozen missile launches.

“We’re working on regional security challenges such as North Korea and continue to press for a ... constructive,

peaceful, stable order in Asia,” Thornton said. “Whether there will be a kind of a bumper sticker to put on that at some point ... like I said, it’s early days so I think it’s early to say.”

The “pivot” or “rebalance” to Asia were terms used to describe Obama’s foreign policy aimed at boosting U.S. defense, diplomatic and economic ties with the Asia-Pacific region.

It was part of his effort to shift military and economic focus from the Middle East, but it was heavily challenged by continued war in Iraq and Syria as well as disputes with China and North Korea’s defiance.

Tillerson’s trip, which begins Wednesday in Japan, will be closely watched for clues about Trump’s Asia policy.

The Trump administration has promised to maintain Washington’s commitment to long-standing alliances with

Japan and South Korea, where the U.S. maintains 50,000 and 28,500 servicemembers, respectively.

But the president also has stressed the need to put American jobs and needs first.

Meanwhile, China is smarting over plans to deploy an advanced U.S. missile defense system in South Korea despite Beijing’s objections.

John Delury, an international relations professor at Yonsei University in Seoul, said the semantics underscore the uncertainty over Trump’s strategy.

“Strategic drift is not healthy for the region,” he said. “If it’s true that they really don’t have a strategy — that the pivot’s been repealed but there’s nothing to replace it — then Tillerson’s got his work cut out for him.”

North Korea warns of 'merciless' strikes

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea—North Korea warned of “merciless ultra-precision strikes” over U.S.-South Korean war games as a nuclear-powered U.S. aircraft carrier joined the drills.

The allies are conducting annual military exercises, which they insist are defensive in nature. The drills are a major point of contention with Pyongyang, which alleges they’re a rehearsal for an invasion.

North Korea’s state-run news agency said the deployment of the USS Carl Vinson in the waters off the divided peninsula is part of a “reckless scheme” for pre-emptive strikes against it.

The Korean Central News Agency warned that “nuclear-powered carriers and all other strategic assets of the U.S. imperialists are in sight” of its army.

“If they infringe on [North Korea’s] sovereignty and dignity even a bit, its army will launch merciless ultra-precision strikes from ground, air, sea and underwater,” it said,

adding “the war maniacs had better stop acting rashly.”

The Nimitz-class Carl Vinson and about 5,500 crewmembers are on a patrol as part of Foal Eagle drills that began on March 1. The aircraft carrier and the guided-missile destroyer USS Wayne E. Meyer are due to visit the southern port of Busan on Wednesday.

The commander of U.S. Forces

Korea, Gen. Vincent Brooks, and South Korea’s chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Lee Sun-jin, visited the Carl Vinson as it conducted patrols on Sunday.

“The USS Carl Vinson’s presence is another tangible example of how the [South Korean-U.S.] alliance continues to enhance interoperability and key capabilities to ensure security and stability on the Korean Peninsula and the region,” Brooks said in a statement.

KCNA claimed many carrier-based aircraft flew near North Korea’s territorial air and waters on Saturday to stage drills simulating bomb drops and a

surprise attack.

Foal Eagle is a field-training exercise that involves about 10,000 U.S. servicemembers, including 3,500 who are coming from off the peninsula.

USFK also began a computer-simulated, command-post drill called Key Resolve on Monday that will involve about 13,000 American forces, including 3,600 from off the peninsula, and 10,000 South Korean military personnel.

The military insists the exercises are aimed at strengthening regional security cooperation and demonstrating the U.S. commitment to its long-standing alliance with South Korea.

“Key Resolve scenarios do not reflect any real world situation or crisis,” USFK said in a fact sheet issued by the public affair’s office.

There are about 28,500 U.S. servicemembers in South Korea, which is separated from the North by the world’s most fortified border. The countries remain technically at war after the 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice instead of a peace

treaty.

Tensions have risen sharply after North Korea stepped up its nuclear weapons program last year, conducting two underground nuclear tests and test-firing two dozen ballistic missiles despite two rounds of tightened U.N. Security Council sanctions aimed at stopping it.

Pyongyang has launched two more missiles into the sea off the east coast this year, posing a major challenge to President Donald Trump’s new administration.

The U.S. military has started to deploy an advanced anti-missile battery known as THAAD to South Korea despite strong objections from China, which fears the system could be used to spy on its military.

Beijing, which has been a traditional ally of North Korea, suggested last week that the communist state could suspend its nuclear-weapons program if Washington and Seoul would halt the exercises. The U.S. State Department rejected the offer, saying it was not a “viable deal.”

Osprey moves delayed until '20

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — A plan to base CV-22 Ospreys in western Tokyo has been delayed, with the first of the tilt-rotor aircraft due to arrive in fiscal year 2020, the Department of Defense said.

Yokota — headquarters of U.S. Forces Japan and 5th Air Force — was to have received three Ospreys this year. The hybrids are capable of taking off and landing like helicopters, then tilting their rotors to fly long distances as fixed-wing aircraft.

“Originally announced to arrive in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2017, DOD now expects their permanent arrival in fiscal year 2020,” a statement said.

Eventually the base is supposed to accommodate a Spe-

cial Operations Squadron of 10 Ospreys, adding 1,100 personnel to a population of 11,500.

Yokota officials did not immediately provide reasons for the delay.

Some people living in communities near Yokota oppose the plan to base the aircraft there and have held a number of protests to make their concerns known.

The Osprey will provide increased capability for U.S. Special Operations forces to respond quickly to crises and contingencies, including humanitarian crises and natural disasters, in Japan and across the region, the DOD has said.

“It will also increase interoperability, enhance operational cooperation, and promote stronger defense relations with the Japan Self-Defense Forces,” the Pentagon said in May 2015.

3-nation drills focused on N. Korean missile threat

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Ships from the United States, Japan and South Korea kicked off drills Tuesday aimed at countering the growing missile threat from North Korea.

The “trilateral missile warning informational link exercise” runs through Wednesday off the Korean Peninsula in the Sea of Japan, a Navy statement said.

Ships will use data-link systems to share communications, intelligence and other data during drills designed to “enhance tactical capabilities, increase self-defense, strengthen partnerships, and improved situational awareness,” the statement said.

Participating vessels include the guided-missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur, Japanese guided-missile destroyer JS Kirishima and South Korean destroyer Sejong the Great. All are equipped with the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System, which is able to intercept and destroy short- and medium-range ballistic missiles.

The Navy has several Aegis-equipped ships forward-deployed to Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, where they could be the first responders to missiles fired at Japan.

The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson, which recently wrapped up joint drills with Japan in the East China Sea, arrived in the area this week.

US probes BMW car leases to military

Bloomberg

The Justice Department sought information from BMW AG's leasing business last year about how it handles overdue payments from U.S. military personnel, according to documents obtained by Bloomberg.

BMW Financial Services said it doesn't know how many of its leases might be affected by terms of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, according to the documents, which are tied to a \$1 billion bond transaction being marketed to investors this week. The law bans action or penalties against military personnel when they're deployed or transferred.

BMW Financial, based in Woodcliff Lake, N.J., is cooperating with the request, which came late last August, according to the documents.

A BMW spokesman said he couldn't elaborate.

Spokespeople for the Justice Department and for Barclays Plc, the bank arranging BMW's lease-backed bond deal, declined to comment.

Car loans are under intense scrutiny as auto debt outstanding in the U.S. has surged past \$1 trillion. Many of the riskiest loans also are being financed in securitizations, similar to the way subprime mortgages were bundled into bonds. The deals free up lenders to make new

loans and leases.

The U.S. began investigating industrywide auto lending practices in 2014. While early attention focused on lending to borrowers with subprime credit and securitizations of the loans, officials more recently have taken action against lenders over how they handle defaults.

The Justice Department in October started scrutinizing subprime car lender Westlake Financial Services Inc. for allegedly repossessing cars from customers on active duty without court orders, Bloomberg reported this month. Westlake has said it's cooperating.

Lenders and their servicing partners typically must obtain

court orders before seizing vehicles from soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines whose loans are overdue. Congress approved the relief act decades ago to protect soldiers from legal hassles while they're on active duty.

The U.S. sanctioned Wells Fargo & Co. over violations of the same law in September, with regulators extracting \$24 million in penalties. Wells Fargo didn't admit or deny the allegations. The investigation started when the bank took back a Ford Escape from a soldier getting ready to deploy to Afghanistan, the Justice Department said.

Trump looks to make drone strikes easier

The Washington Post

In his final months in office, President Barack Obama sought to lock in a structure and set of rules governing targeted killings and drone strikes so that the incredibly lethal tool would not be abused by his successors.

In his first six weeks in office President Donald Trump, who has made destroying the Islamic State his top foreign policy priority, has pressed to roll back those checks.

The Trump administration is close to finishing a review that would make it easier for the Pentagon to launch counterterrorism strikes anywhere in the world by lowering the threshold on acceptable civilian casualties and scaling back other constraints imposed by the Obama administration, senior U.S. officials said.

The ongoing review, which has reached senior levels of the National Security Council, would undo a series of rules that Obama imposed, beginning in 2013, to rein in drone operations outside of active war zones.

The Trump review must still be approved by the president, but recent drafts of the new

policy would represent a major change in the way the United States approaches drone strikes and other targeted-killing operations in places such as Yemen, Somalia and Libya.

The changes to the Obama-era Presidential Policy Guidance would empower the Pentagon to make decisions on targets without approval from the White House and potentially scrap the "near certainty" standard of no civilian deaths for strikes outside of war zones. The Trump plans are also likely to relax the requirement that potential terrorist targets pose a "continuing and imminent threat" to U.S. personnel, officials said.

Obama imposed the restrictive rules because he was worried that future administrations might be seduced by the power of drones to destroy potential threats to the United States at very low cost in both blood and taxpayer dollars anywhere in the world.

He also hoped that his policy would provide a check internationally as armed drones proliferate, to countries such as China or Iran.

"We have to create an architecture for this because [of] the

potential for abuse," Obama said in August during a speech. At the time Obama said one of his goals before leaving office was to create an "internal structure" and "institutionalized process" that would restrict his successors.

Now it is likely that Trump will move to lift many of those restrictions, making it easier for the U.S. military to strike potential terror targets anywhere in the world. Senior U.S. officials said Trump is almost certain to back changes that would shift final approval for individual strikes from the White House back to the Pentagon and the CIA, where they resided before the new rules were imposed.

The move to streamline the process and delegate decision-making would also free up the White House to consider larger issues, such as its overall strategy in places such as Yemen, Libya and Somalia.

"A big goal is getting the White House out of the way of itself," said a senior U.S. official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal administration debates. "The president believes too much has been centralized in

the White House and he wants to push decisions down to the agencies."

The White House is also weighing whether to relax or drop the current standard on civilian casualties, which demands near certainty that no civilians are killed or injured in U.S. raids or drone strikes outside of conflict zones.

Senior U.S. officials said current proposals being circulated in the White House would in some instances lower the requirement to a "reasonable certainty" that no civilians would be killed or injured in a strike, which is essentially the standard that the U.S. military has followed in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan.

In a letter released Friday, 37 former top U.S. officials, most of whom served in the Obama administration, urged Trump to move cautiously when modifying or overturning restrictions imposed in recent years. On the issue of civilian casualties, the signatories pressed Trump to stick with the current approach.

"Even small numbers of unintentional civilian deaths or injuries ... can cause significant setbacks," the letter warned.

Officials: Pirates hijack freighter off Somali coast

Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia — Pirates have hijacked an oil tanker off the coast of Somalia, Somali officials and piracy experts said Tuesday, the first such seizure of a large commercial vessel on the crucial global trade route since 2012.

The Aris 13 on Monday reported being approached by two skiffs, John Steed, with the organization Oceans Beyond Piracy, said. The ship was carrying fuel from Djibouti to Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, he said. Eight Sri Lankan crewmembers were aboard.

An official in the semiautonomous state of Puntland said more than two dozen men boarded the ship off Somalia's northern coast, an area known to be used by weapons smugglers and members of the al-Qaida-linked extremist group al-Shabab. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the press.

The ship was anchored off the town of Alula, said Salad Nur, a local elder. "The ship is on the coast now, and more armed men boarded the ship," he told The Associated Press by phone.

An official based in the Middle East with knowledge of the incident told the AP that no ransom demand had been made.

It was not immediately clear who owned the ship or where it was flagged.

A Britain-based spokeswoman for the European Union Naval Force operation off Somalia, Fleet Lt. Louise Tagg, confirmed that an incident involving an oil tanker had occurred and an investigation was underway. The U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, which is based in Bahrain and oversees anti-piracy efforts in the region, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

This would be the first commercial pirate attack off Somalia since 2012, Steed said.

GOP health bill critics get ammunition from CBO report

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Critics of GOP health care legislation got fresh ammunition from a report that estimates the bill would increase the ranks of the uninsured by 14 million people next year alone, and 24 million over a decade.

The findings from the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office could make prospects for the legislation backed by President Donald Trump even tougher, with a few House and Senate conservatives already in open revolt and moderate Republicans queasy about big cuts to the Medicaid safety net for the poor.

But with the legislation headed for votes in the House Budget Committee within days and floor action next week, its supporters at the White House and on Capitol Hill showed no sign of retreat. Instead, they attacked the parts of the CBO report they didn't like while touting the

more favorable findings, including smaller deficits from their bill and lower premiums over time.

"I'm pretty encouraged by it. It actually exceeded my expectations," House Speaker Paul Ryan, of Wisconsin, said on Fox News Channel shortly after the report was released Monday evening.

Ryan said the CBO findings about millions losing coverage were to be expected because the GOP legislation removes the penalty in former President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act aimed at coercing people into buying coverage.

The GOP legislation would use tax credits to help consumers buy health coverage; expand health savings accounts; phase out an expansion of Medicaid and cap that program for the future; end some requirements for health plans under the ACA; and scrap a number of taxes.

Ryan pointed to other CBO

figures, including that the GOP bill reduces federal deficits by \$337 billion over a decade, and begins to bring down insurance premiums by around 10 percent starting in 2020, though that comes only after premiums sharply rise in 2018 and 2019.

Democrats scoffed at Ryan's positive take, calling the CBO analysis damning evidence that Republicans are interested only in giving hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks to the rich, which their bill would accomplish, while yanking health coverage from the poor.

At the White House, Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price rejected portions of the CBO's findings, in comments that seemed to contradict Ryan.

"We believe that the plan that we're putting in place is going to insure more individuals than currently are insured. So we think the CBO simply has it wrong," Price said.

Winter storm buries early spring in a foot of NE snow

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A storm pounded the Northeast with more than a foot of snow in places Tuesday, paralyzing much of the Washington-to-Boston corridor after a remarkably mild February had lulled people into thinking the worst of winter was over.

The powerful nor'easter grounded more than 5,000 flights, closed schools in cities big and small and prompted dire warnings to stay off the roads. Nearly 100,000 customers from Virginia to Pennsylvania lost power.

Blizzard warnings were issued for parts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Con-

necticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont.

"The winters seem to be upside down now. January and February are nice and then March and April seem to be more wintry than they were in the past," said Bob Clifford, who ventured out on an early morning grocery run for his family in Altamont, near Albany, N.Y., where 5 inches of snow had fallen by daybreak.

The storm was expected to unload 12 to 18 inches of snow on the New York City area, with wind gusts up to 55 mph. It tracked a little farther west than forecasters originally anticipated, resulting in a sloppy

mix of snow and sleet for larger portions of Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

The National Weather Service's office near Philadelphia called the storm "life-threatening" and warned people to "shelter in place." Coastal flood warnings were in effect from Massachusetts to Delaware.

The flight cancellations included more than 2,800 in the New York City area alone, where about 200 passengers were stranded at Kennedy Airport. Amtrak canceled or modified service up and down the Northeast Corridor. The above-ground portions of the New York subway system were being shut down.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

This town could be yours for \$3.85 million

OR PORTLAND—Looking for a home with lots of land? Then Tiller, Ore., might be the place for you.

The entire southwestern Oregon town is up for sale, and could be yours for \$3.85 million. Based in Douglas County, the town is nestled on the banks of the South Umpqua River, about 30 miles east of Canyonville.

Listing agent Garrett Zoller said the town has few actual residents, but there are about 250 people nearby. Tiller's elementary school has been closed for years and is a separate sale from the purchase of the town.

City allows golf carts on downtown streets

OH TOLEDO — An Ohio city is going to allow golf carts and other low-speed vehicles on downtown streets and two residential neighborhoods.

Toledo's City Council approved the plan and, starting in April, drivers who are at least 16 and hold a valid license will be able to take golf carts onto Toledo's streets.

Toledo has about 280,000 residents.

Under Ohio law, golf carts may be legal within specific parameters and with safety features added. They must be titled, licensed and insured like any other vehicle.

Cemetery given photo of 'Little Drummer Boy'

NY ALBANY — A cemetery in New York where a Civil War veteran known as "Albany's Little Drummer Boy" is buried has received the only image of him known to exist.

Laura LaDuke, of Enfield, Conn., told the Times Union that she discovered the tintype while going through Civil War memorabilia collected by her late father.

A Google search of the name on the back — Barney Ross — led her to a 2012 Times Union article describing Kelly Grimaldi's efforts to identify all the Civil War veterans interred at St. Agnes Cemetery, where Ross is buried.

Ross was only 12 when he enlisted in a New York regiment soon after the war started in April 1861. He served as a drummer during two enlistments. He died in 1886.

Mom, daughter selling cookies are robbed

SC ANDERSON — A mother and her daughter were robbed as they sold Girl Scout cookies outside a Wal-Mart store in South Carolina.

Anderson County sheriff's deputies said a woman asked them for change for a vending machine. Then she went back and forth to a Jeep, supposedly to see what flavor cookies the driver wanted.

The woman then paid \$4 for a box of cookies and grabbed for the money box, kicking the mother several times as she tried to retrieve it.

Girl Scouts spokeswoman Karen Kelly said the thief dropped her cookies but left with the money Sunday afternoon.

Jet skiers saved as cruise ship approaches

FL PORT CANAVERAL — A Port Canaveral harbor pilot and a sheriff's deputy teamed up to rescue two spring breakers on a jet ski as a Carnival Cruise ship moved toward them.

A cruise ship passenger captured the rescue on video as Brevard County Sheriff's Deputy Taner Primmer pulled the women to safety.

A Canaveral Pilots Association statement said Capt. Doug Brown spotted them while navigating the Carnival Magic out of the port and alerted Primmer. As he approached in a marine patrol boat, one woman fell off the jet ski. It flipped as she tried to get back on, sending both women into the water.

With the ship approaching, Primmer pulled them out and steered his boat away.

Area news outlets identified them as Skylar Penpasuglia, 19, and Allison Garrett, 20, of Princeton, W. Va..

Lake house becomes entirely encased in ice

NY WEBSTER — Owners of an upstate New York home now have a house to defrost thanks to freezing temperatures.

WABC-TV reported that the Webster home is entirely encased in a thick layer of ice. The house sits on the banks of Lake Ontario.

Officials said frigid temperatures along with high winds encapsulated moisture from the lake to freeze the house.

Poop scooper faces sentencing for fake IDs

PA PITTSBURGH — A man whose company scoops up pet poop was placed on probation for two years and fined \$500 for buying fake Secret Service identification cards and badges online to impress women on a dating site.

Christopher Diiorio, 54, of Greensburg, was sentenced Monday by a federal judge in Pittsburgh. He had pleaded guilty in November to fraudu-

lently using an official seal, but acknowledged behavior in two other counts dismissed Monday: flashing an ID card during a traffic stop and trying to use a Secret Service badge to get a government rate for a hotel room.

"Your honor, I'm not a bad man, I'm a dumb man," Diiorio told U.S. District Judge Nora Barry Fischer.

Town sells alcohol for first time in decades

OH POLAND — An Ohio village is selling alcohol for the first time in decades after voters cast ballots to end the municipality's dry status.

The change in Poland in northeast Ohio was pushed by convenience store owners Dori and Daniel Rai who moved to the area from Canada last year.

The store began selling beer and wine last month. The owners said they were told it would be impossible to get a license approved for the dry town but they persevered.

Truck drivers carrying load of cabbage crash

SC WALTERBORO — Two truck drivers were recovering after a highway crash and being buried under a load of cabbage.

Multiple media organizations reported the two men survived their tractor-trailer crashing into a bridge over Interstate 95 in Colleton County on Friday.

Colleton County Fire and Rescue officials said the truck then went down an embankment and struck several trees. The front of the trailer gave way, hurling the load of cabbage onto the cab and trapping the two men. Both suffered multiple serious injuries.

From wire reports

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UConn women go for 5th straight title

Associated Press

NEW YORK—UConn's drive for five will begin at home.

Winners of 107 straight games, coach Geno Auriemma and the Huskies won't have to leave the state of Connecticut in the NCAA Tournament until the Final Four as they try for an unprecedented fifth consecutive national championship.

The top seed will open at home on Saturday against Albany and if the Huskies advance to the Bridgeport Regional, they would have a short drive.

"I worry sometimes about being at home. I worry about the distractions that kids have," Auriemma said. "When you are on the road you can just huddle everybody up and you can eliminate a lot of distractions. Sometimes the officials get funny against the home team in the NCAA Tournament."

While UConn won't have to leave the state until potentially heading to Dallas for the national semifinals, the other No. 1 seeds aren't as lucky.

South Carolina is the top seed in Stockton, Calif. The Gamecocks are headed out of the Eastern time zone for the third time in four seasons. Their lone trip to the Final Four came when they played a regional in Greensboro, N.C., in 2015.

"I don't know what more we can do," South Carolina coach Dawn Staley said. "We won our

conference tournament to play closer. Two years ago, we got sent to Greensboro. Last year, we had to take the time zone flight, over two time zones. I thought it was our turn to get flipped back to the Greensboro kind of ideology. I'm not going to say it's not fair. But they got to figure out a different way."

Baylor is the No. 1 in the Oklahoma City Regional and Notre Dame is the top choice in Lexington, Ky.

NCAA selection committee chair Terry Gawlik defended the choice to send South Carolina out west again.

"It made the most sense for the good of the game and the student-athlete experience to go out to Stockton and have Baylor go to Oklahoma City," she said.

All four hope to get to Dallas for the Final Four on Friday, March 31. The NCAA switched the national semifinals back to a Friday-Sunday format this season for the first time since 2002. The Huskies would matchup with Baylor while South Carolina and Notre Dame would play if all four teams advance that far. The Lady Bears are hoping to make the short drive from Waco to Dallas.

That scenario may be unlikely. Last year, the Huskies were the only top team to make the Final Four as Washington, Syracuse and Oregon State all pulled off upsets to advance.

UConn, which has won a

record 11 national championships, is the prohibitive favorite to win again. Unlike the past few years where it almost seemed a foregone conclusion that UConn would win the title, the Huskies weren't the favorite coming into the season with big losses to graduation.

Auriemma challenged his young team with a difficult schedule that saw the Huskies play most of the other top teams in the country, including Notre Dame, South Carolina and Baylor. Still, they did show some vulnerability with a single digit win over Maryland — the No. 3 seed in their region. UConn also beat Tulane by only three points in February, giving other teams hope the Huskies are beatable.

"We might be the No. 1 seed but I don't know that we are the clear-cut favorite," Auriemma said.

Maryland coach Brenda Frese wasn't thrilled at the low seed. The Terrapins were fourth in the final AP poll.

"We understand it's tournament time. I'm most surprised that being a team ranked top four in the country, [we] earn a three seed," Frese said. "Thirty wins, win your conference regular season and conference tournament at this point it doesn't matter. Put your head down and given the bracket you have, it's the next opportunity."

Duke is the No. 2 seed in the region after missing the

NCAAs last year for the first time since 1994.

For the second consecutive season the NCAA is having the top four teams in each region host the opening two rounds. No. 2 Stanford couldn't host because of a conflict in its facility so the Cardinal will head to seventh-seeded Kansas State.

Tennessee isn't one of those 16 teams, but the Lady Vols will be making their 36th consecutive appearance in the NCAA Tournament. They've been in the field ever year.

The Lady Vols who have shown they can beat nearly anyone in the field but also can lose to many teams too. They open up against Dayton in Louisville. The Cardinals are the four seed in the Oklahoma City Regional.

Elon and Texas Southern are the lone teams playing in their first NCAAs.

The SEC has eight teams in the field while the ACC and Pac-12 each have seven.

The Missouri Valley Conference got a second team in with Northern Iowa making the field as a 10-seed. Drake won the conference's automatic bid, going unbeaten in conference play.

Gawlik said the last four teams in the field were Northern Iowa, Auburn, California and Purdue. The first four out were Michigan, Virginia, George Washington and South Dakota State.

Venezuela ousts Italy in WBC tiebreaker

Associated Press

GUADALAJARA, Mexico — Miguel Cabrera hit a tying homer and Rougned Odor delivered a go-ahead single during a three-run rally in the ninth inning that carried Venezuela past Italy 4-3 on Monday night and into the second round of the World Baseball Classic.

In a one-game tiebreaker that determined the final team to advance out of the first round, Cabrera's solo shot to right-center evened the score at 2 in the top of the ninth. With a runner on, Odor launched an opposite-field drive off the top of the

left-center fence and held up at first base with an RBI single after thinking the ball had cleared the wall.

Odor later scored on a nicely executed suicide squeeze by Alcides Escobar. Francisco Rodriguez gave up Alex Liddi's lead-off homer in the bottom half before getting three straight groundouts for the save, eliminating Italy.

One night after getting a late reprieve from WBC officials, Venezuela moved on to face the United States in the Pool F opener for both teams Wednesday in San Diego.

Puerto Rico, which went 3-0 to win Venezuela's first-round pool, and the defend-

ing champion Dominican Republic are the other teams in Pool F. Two will advance to the single-elimination semifinals.

The Venezuelans lost to Mexico on Sunday night, leaving Italy, Venezuela and Mexico all at 1-2 after round-robin play was completed in Pool D. The host team was eliminated on a close tiebreaker — runs allowed per inning played — but the correct announcement did not come until long after the game was over.

Initially, the WBC Twitter account declared the tiebreaker would be between Mexico and Italy. Officials then informed Venezuela of the proper calculation.

Self: Jackson will play in tournament

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Kansas coach Bill Self had a two-word response when asked Monday whether star freshman Josh Jackson would miss NCAA Tournament games for a lingering off-the-court issue involving a member of the women's basketball team.

The first word began with the letter H. The second word was "No."

"That answered your question," Self said.

Self suspended Jackson for the quarterfinal game in the Big 12 Tournament — which Kansas promptly lost to TCU — as punishment of an accumulation of embarrassing incidents. The most recent case was Jackson hitting a parked car and fleeing the scene, but the one that continues to cause the most frustration for the Jayhawks is one involving basketball player McKenzie Calvert.

The incident occurred in early December, when Calvert allegedly threw a drink at men's basketball player Lagerald Vick at a Lawrence bar. The encounter escalated and Jackson followed her to the parking lot,

where he is accused of kicking her car and causing hundreds of dollars in damages.

Jackson was charged with misdemeanor criminal damage to property and is scheduled to be arraigned next month. In an interview with The Kansas City Star, the woman's father, Tim Calvert, accused Jackson's attorney of bribery by saying they "wanted to pay to make it all go away." Calvert said his family refused the offer.

Jackson has not commented on the allegation, though his attorney issued a brief statement last week in which he accused Tim Calvert of "single-handedly creating a narrative that is not accurate."

"It is clear that he is frustrated with several parties and with matters unrelated to Josh, yet he continues to manipulate the facts as it relates to a good faith offer of restitution," attorney Scott Boatman said in the statement. "Mr. Calvert specifically requested that we discuss restitution with his attorney and we complied with his request."

Boatman said he could not comment further because it is a pending legal case, but that

"it is our hope that any further reporting will authenticate statements with fact and not emotion."

The Jayhawks (28-4) were in position to earn the No. 1 overall seed in the NCAA Tournament before their collapse against TCU last Thursday. They still wound up with top seed in the Midwest Region and will face the winner of the First Four game between North Carolina Central and UC Davis. Self made it clear Jackson will be on the floor for that game Friday in Tulsa, Okla.

"There is absolutely nothing that I would be remotely concerned about as far as the one thing I heard, as far as unethical things taking place," he said. "I don't believe that to be the case. Having read Josh's attorney statement, I certainly feel stronger about that now than ever."

Self indicated he knows more about the case than can be discussed in public. He did acknowledge its potential to be a distraction to the team.

"To be real candid with you, I'm mad at the situation, but I'm not necessarily pointing fingers and saying that I'm

mad at an individual or a parent or anything like that," he said, "because here's the reality of it: You don't know, I don't know, (Tim Calvert) doesn't know what transpired."

"I can't talk to him, nor would I ever attempt to do so," Self said. "Nor would I ever talk about a student-athlete from another program — never. We would never do that."

The Calvert family has accused the school of treating McKenzie Calvert unfairly after the incident, claiming she was barred from Allen Fieldhouse for two days and had her playing time cut. The school has declined to discuss any punishments that may have been handled internally.

"I don't know what the women's basketball program has told those parties or educated them to the different things that were going on," Self said, "If I'm a parent and I haven't been educated, I can see being very upset. Totally. ... Now, if it has been shared and all of the facts are out there and some things are being said, you know, to me that's disappointing."

Swanigan ready to help Boilermakers make deep run

Associated Press

When NBA scouts critiqued Caleb Swanigan's weaknesses last spring, he got right to work.

Swanigan committed himself to a workout program that was designed to improve his body, extend his shooting range and become a better all-around player.

It also helped the sophomore power forward become a stronger leader in the locker room, emerge as the runaway choice as Big Ten player of the year and put fourth-seeded Purdue in position to make its deepest NCAA Tournament run since 2010.

"I feel like I'm a lot better player than I was a year ago,"

Swanigan said. "You've got to get into a routine that you can do, and I found one. I get up, get in the gym, get shots up, work on the dribble, do cardio for like an hour, go to practice and shoot after practice."

The 6-foot-9, 250-pound Swanigan is a basketball junkie at heart who honed his skills by becoming a workaholic. He makes an estimated 400 shots each day. He doesn't bother to count the misses.

Because of a voracious appetite for desserts, he tipped the scales at about 360 pounds just before the start of eighth grade. Classmates started calling him "Biggie," a nickname that has stuck with him though the meaning has clearly changed after one of the greatest sea-

sons in Purdue history. Swanigan's six conference player of the week awards this season were one more than former No. 1 overall draft pick Glenn Robinson had in 1994. It's second in league history to Evan Turner (seven, 2010).

The Big Ten's rebounding champ (12.6 per game) also finished second in the conference in scoring at 18.5 points and is the only Division I player to average more than 18 points and 12 rebounds this season.

He leads the nation with 26 double-doubles and can break the Big Ten single-season record against 13th-seeded Vermont on Thursday in Milwaukee. His shooting percentage has jumped from 46.1 percent to 53.4 percent while

his three-point percentage, one specific area the scouts discussed, has gone from 29.2 percent to 43.1 percent.

Swanigan also led the Boilermakers (25-7) to their first outright conference title since 1996.

"What Biggie is doing numbers-wise this year is just out of control," said 24-year-old guard Spike Albrecht, who played with four future NBA players on Michigan's most recent Final Four team. "I remember when Trey (Burke) averaged 17 points and seven assists, and people were saying it was the best since Magic Johnson was at Michigan State. But Biggie's double-doubles and 30-20 games are things you've never seen before."

Leonard returns, leads Spurs by Hawks

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — The Spurs made mistakes, missed shots and looked lost at times offensively, yet Gregg Popovich was pleased.

Overcoming a season-high 23 turnovers with a strong defensive showing kept the Spurs from getting into real trouble with their coach and the Atlanta Hawks.

Kawhi Leonard scored 31 points in his return from a concussion and San Antonio tied Golden State for the NBA's best record with a 107-99 victory on Monday night.

"I was really pleased that they continue to guard and hustle the way they did despite being sloppy with the ball," Popovich said.

San Antonio made a season-high 16 three-pointers in its 19th consecutive home victory over Atlanta. The Spurs

and Warriors are 52-14 with 16 games remaining, including the final regular-season matchup between them on March 29.

Atlanta point guard Dennis Schroder had 22 points and 10 assists. Tim Hardaway Jr. added 17 points, but the Hawks had their three-game winning streak snapped.

San Antonio's Patty Mills had 15 points and Danny Green added 14. The starting guards combined to shoot 7-for-12 on three-pointers.

David Lee had 14 points in place of LaMarcus Aldridge, who missed his second straight game with a minor heart arrhythmia. Aldridge's status remains unknown.

"We just want him to get better, don't want to rush it," Leonard said. "That's something serious with his heart."

The Spurs were also without injured point guards Tony

Parker and Dejounte Murray, but Leonard returned from a one-game absence after suffering a concussion in the second half against Oklahoma City last Thursday.

"I felt good," Leonard said. "Just like any other game. Our medicine team and trainers did a good job of getting me prepared."

Jazz 114, Clippers 108: Gordon Hayward scored 27 points as Utah broke a nine-game home losing streak to Los Angeles.

Timberwolves 119, Wizards 104: Karl-Anthony Towns had 39 points and 13 rebounds while Ricky Rubio scored 22 points and broke his own franchise record with 19 assists as host Minnesota beat Washington.

Grizzlies 113, Bucks 93: Vince Carter made all eight of his shots, including six from beyond the arc, to score a sea-

son-high 24 points and lead host Memphis.

Bulls 115, Hornets 109: Nikola Mirotic scored 24 points, Rajon Rondo had a season-high 20 in his return to the starting lineup and Chicago beat host Charlotte to snap a season-high, five-game losing streak.

Raptors 100, Mavericks 78: DeMar DeRozan scored 25 points, Norman Powell added 19 and host Toronto beat Dallas for the third consecutive time.

Nuggets 129, Lakers 101: Will Barton and Jamal Murray scored 22 points apiece and Denver beat host Los Angeles for its third victory in a row, matching a season high.

Kings 120, Magic 115: Darren Collison had 19 points and 13 assists, reserve Anthony Tolliver also scored 19 and host Sacramento beat Orlando to snap an eight-game losing streak.

Versteeg's SO winner helps Flames win 10th straight

Associated Press

CALGARY, Alberta — Kris Versteeg and the Calgary Flames equaled a team record Monday night that was set long before any of their current players were born.

Versteeg had two assists and scored the shootout winner as the Flames beat the defending Stanley Cup champion Pittsburgh Penguins 4-3 to match the club record with their 10th consecutive victory.

Before the franchise moved to Calgary, the Atlanta Flames won 10 games in a row from Oct. 14 to Nov. 3, 1978.

"It's really cool to be a part of those things," said Versteeg, born seven years after that streak.

Calgary's first shooter, Versteeg moved in slowly and made a nifty deke before zipping a shot high past Marc-Andre Fleury.

Versteeg also scored the only goal of the shootout when the Flames beat Pittsburgh 3-2 on Feb. 7.

"When you're coming down on goalies that are world class like Fleury, you just try to do a move," Versteeg said. "You have a couple picked out and you hope it works."

Brian Elliott stopped Evgeni Malkin, Sidney Crosby and Phil Kessel to clinch the victory.

"That's a \$40 million payroll for three shots," Versteeg said. "It's pretty amazing the three shooters he stopped."

Pittsburgh had a great chance to win in overtime when Calgary captain Mark Giordano was sent off for slashing Nick Bonino, but the Flames killed off the 4-on-3 power play.

"It's been a great ride," Giordano said. "It felt like bounces were starting to go their way, but we found a way to hang on. A huge kill by the guys in OT."

Johnny Gaudreau, Deryk Engelland and Dennis Wideman scored in regulation for Calgary, which moved back into second place in the Pacific Division. The Flames are even in points with Anaheim, but

have more regulation/overtime wins.

"A great hockey game," Calgary coach Glen Gulutzan said. "Hard on Coach's life expectancy a little bit, but two really good teams battling it out."

Malkin, Crosby and Conor Sheary scored for Pittsburgh. The Penguins had their five-game winning streak snapped, but still moved into a tie with Washington atop the Metropolitan Division. The Capitals are ahead on the tiebreaker.

"Big point for us," Penguins coach Mike Sullivan said. "They're a hard team to play against. It was a competitive game. It was a fairly even game. It could have went either way."

Blue Jackets 5, Flyers 3: Cam Atkinson scored twice and Brandon Dubinsky had the go-ahead goal in the third period to help visiting Columbus set franchise records for wins and points in a season with a victory over Philadelphia.

Blues 3, Kings 1: Magnus Paajarvi scored a power-play

goal, Jake Allen made 38 saves and visiting St. Louis extended its winning streak to five games by beating Los Angeles.

Bruins 6, Canucks 3: Brad Marchand had a hat trick in the third period, including the winning goal with under eight minutes to go as visiting Boston defeated Vancouver.

Lightning 3, Rangers 2: Brayden Point scored twice, including the tiebreaking goal with 6:39 remaining to lift visiting Tampa Bay over New York.

Hurricanes 8, Islanders 4: Jaccob Slavin had a hat trick, Jeff Skinner and Justin Faulk each scored twice and visiting Carolina ruined New York's return from a long road trip.

Predators 5, Jets 4 (OT): James Neal scored a power-play goal at 2:11 of overtime to give host Nashville a victory over slumping Winnipeg.

Coyotes 1, Avalanche 0: Mike Smith set a franchise record with his 22nd shutout, making 22 saves to help host Arizona edge Colorado.