

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US subs in training beneath Arctic ice

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Fast-attack submarines fired torpedoes beneath the ice during the Navy's five-week Ice Exercise that kicked off this month in the Arctic Ocean.

The Seawolf-class USS Connecticut and the Los Angeles-class USS Hartford each fired several training torpedoes, which carry no warheads and hold a minimal amount of fuel, the service said.

In step two of the torpedo drill, divers from the Navy's Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit Two and Underwater Construction Team One and the Coast Guard plunged through ice holes to retrieve the torpedoes.

"The primary objective of this year's ICEX is to test new under-ice weapons systems and validate tactics for weapon employment," Ryan Dropek, director of weapons testing at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center Division in Newport, R.I., said in a Navy statement. "Once the divers recover these torpedoes, we can extract important data about how they perform and react in these conditions."

The United States is seeking to beef up its Arctic military capabilities as ice continues to melt there due to the warming climate, sparking international competition for access and natural resources.

Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, head of U.S. European Command, told lawmakers this month that the U.S. was "not keeping pace" with Russia's military buildup in the Arctic region, which includes a new Arctic military command.

Scaparrotti told the Senate Armed Forces Committee that given what Russia is now put-

ting in place, "they would have the capability, in perhaps two or three years, to control the Northern Sea route if they chose to do so."

After the training torpedoes were fired, helicopters took gear and personnel to the location where the weapons were expected to run out of fuel, the Navy said. Each torpedo also had a homing device.

Teams of three to four divers drilled a series of holes in the ice big enough for entry, as well as a hole large enough for a torpedo to be pulled out by helicopter.

The torpedoes possess "positive buoyancy," meaning they were built to float toward the surface of the water near the bottom of the ice.

"Once we know the location of the torpedo and drill holes, our divers slip into the water to begin placing weights on a line attached to the tail end of the torpedo," Chief Warrant Officer Michael Johnson, officer-in-charge of MDSU-2 divers, said in the Navy statement. "The weights help shift the torpedo from a state of positive buoyancy to neutral buoyancy under the ice."

In neutral buoyancy, the torpedoes reached density equilibrium with water, a state where they neither floated up nor sank.

Divers then placed brackets with cables to the top and bottom of the torpedoes, and a helicopter pulled them out of the ice hole.

The divers were also essential in helping build two runways for the training camp, the Navy said.

The divers trained for the Arctic exercise during the Coast Guard's two-week Cold Water Ice Diving course in Seattle.

Texas bombing suspect manhunt ends in death

Associated Press

ROUND ROCK, Texas — The suspect in the deadly bombings that terrorized Austin blew himself up early Wednesday as authorities closed in on him, bringing a grisly end to a three-week manhunt. But police warned that more bombs could be out there.

The suspect's motive remained a mystery, along with whether he acted alone in the five bombings in the Texas capital and suburban San Antonio that killed two people and wounded four others.

Police zeroed in on the 24-year-old man in the last 24 to 36 hours and located his vehicle at a hotel on Interstate 35 in the suburb of Round Rock. Officers were waiting for armored vehicles to arrive before moving in for an arrest when his vehicle began to drive away, Austin Police Chief Brian Manley said at a news conference.

Authorities followed the vehicle, which ran into a ditch on the side of the road, he said.

When members of the SWAT team approached, the suspect detonated an explosive device inside the vehicle, the police chief said. The blast knocked one officer back, and a second officer fired his weapon, Manley said.

A law enforcement official identified the dead man as Mark Anthony Conditt. The official, who has been briefed on the investigation, spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because the official was not authorized to discuss the case publicly.

Authorities released few details about the suspect except his age and that he was white. Online postings indicate he was home-schooled. He later attended Austin Community College from 2010 to 2012, according to

a college spokeswoman, but he did not graduate.

A blogger who identified himself as Mark Conditt, of Pflugerville, described his interests as cycling, tennis and listening to music. In blogs dated from 2012, he wrote that gay marriage should be illegal and called for the elimination of sex offender registrations.

The mayor of Pflugerville, an Austin suburb not far from the site of the first of four bombings, said the suspect lived in his city, just two blocks from his house.

Pflugerville resident Jay Schulze said he was jogging Tuesday night when he was stopped by police and asked about the bombings. He said police flew drones over a home for about six hours between Tuesday evening and early Wednesday morning.

He described the home over which the drones were flying as "a weird house with a lot of people coming and going" and a bit rundown.

Austin was hit with four package bombings starting on March 2. A fifth parcel bomb went off early Tuesday at a FedEx distribution center near San Antonio.

Citing a high-ranking law enforcement official, the Austin American-Statesman reported that authorities had identified the suspect based largely on information, including security video, gleaned after he sent an explosive device from an Austin-area FedEx store.

Police warned Wednesday of the possibility that more bombs had yet to be found.

"We don't know where this suspect has spent his last 24 hours, and therefore we still need to remain vigilant to ensure that no other packages or devices have been left to the community," Manley said.

United's policy change strands pets

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

Military families on Guam moving to the U.S. mainland might be forced to leave their pets behind after United Airlines' decision to suspend its pet transportation program until no later than May 1 following multiple delivery mistakes and at least one pet death.

United is the only carrier flying directly between the island and the mainland U.S., according to families there, some of whom took to social media Wednesday to say they felt blindsided by United's

announcement.

"We leave April 5th and our two pups will be stuck here, boarding (when) service resumes," said one Facebook post, from a woman on Guam named Ryane. "That could be a month. We are devastated and not even sure we will leave without knowing they will be on a flight."

Amber Fake, a Navy spouse living on Guam, told Stars and Stripes that United's decision is "very disheartening and worrisome for myself and many other military families."

"Our pets are our family and we jump through many hoops"

— such as rabies testing, vaccines, extended quarantine, entry permits and licenses — "to get them to Guam," Fake said.

"Now with United suspending the program without notice or exception, many military families are stuck with orders to (move) and no way to get their pets out of Guam," she said. Fake said the military community of some 7,000 people on the Pacific island doesn't have the option of using Air Mobility Command rotator flights, which don't serve Guam.

While Fake said her family isn't facing an immediate move,

"many of the people I know are in panic mode."

There are foreign airlines that fly to Japan and South Korea from Guam, where families could then fly to the United States. It remained unclear Wednesday whether service-members would be allowed to reroute their orders to those countries, even if they paid out of pocket for an additional flight, or whether additional quarantine measures for pets would apply. Spouses told Stars and Stripes that United was the only option they were given during moving briefings.

USAF spouse faces charges after on-base fight

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

An Air Force spouse and jiu-jitsu instructor was due in court next week after being accused of trying to kill a young airman and beating two others at Misawa Air Base, Japan.

Rodrigo Pineda Gomez, the husband of a Misawa-based officer, has been charged with attempted voluntary manslaughter and assault in the New Year's Eve 2016 incident. Federal prosecutors say he attempted to kill one of the airmen "by trying to snap his neck, punch him in the throat and stomp on his head repeatedly," according to court documents.

Gomez, who was barred from U.S. military bases in Japan after the fight, was arrested last month in Osan, South Korea. He was indicted in Arkansas because the alleged offense happened overseas and Gomez' last known U.S. residence was near Little Rock.

He was scheduled to appear in court in Little Rock on March 26; however, federal prosecutors said in an email Tuesday that the trial had been continued until Aug. 20.

Prosecutors allege in a court motion that Gomez had been drinking and was at Café Mokuteki, a popular coffee shop not far from Misawa's flight line, at about 2:30 a.m. and "upon a sudden quarrel and heat of passion

did attempt to kill [an airman]."

They say Gomez also assaulted two other airmen by hitting one in the head and the other in the face.

Security camera footage shows that Gomez instigated the fight when he hit one airman in the back of the head, according to the motion. The camera also captured the rest of the altercation.

A federal public defender representing Gomez did not respond to emailed questions or a phone message about the incident.

However, Gomez said in a written statement provided to military officials that the fight started when one of the airmen threw a punch at him and that he had been defending himself, the

court motion states.

The prosecutors' motion countered that statement, saying it was the "then-19-year-old victim, who was merely eating a snack with some friends and who had tried to de-escalate the situation in the beginning who bore the brunt of the defendant's rage and violent attack."

The Air Force barred Gomez from all U.S. Forces Japan facilities days after the fight, finding that his alleged actions posed a threat to the safety and well-being of others. After his arrest, Gomez was also barred from U.S. military installations in South Korea, according to prosecutors.

ISIS bomber strikes amid celebration in Afghanistan

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — An Islamic State suicide bomber struck on the road to a Shiite shrine in Afghanistan's capital on Wednesday, killing at least 31 people as Afghans celebrated the Persian new year, authorities said.

Wahid Majro, spokesman for the Public Health Ministry,

said 65 people were wounded in the attack, which was carried out by a bomber on foot.

ISIS claimed the attack in an online statement, according to the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors jihadi websites. The group said the attack targeted "a gathering of Shiites celebrating Nowruz."

The Persian new year, known in Afghanistan as Nowruz, is a

national holiday, and the country's minority Shiites typically celebrate by visiting shrines. The Sunni extremists of ISIS have repeatedly targeted Shiites, who they view as apostates deserving of death.

The attack took place near Kabul University and a government hospital, around 1 mile from the Sakhi shrine, where people were gathered to cel-

brate the new year, said Gen. Daud Amin, Kabul's police chief.

Daud said the attacker managed to slip past police checkpoints set up along the road.

He said an investigation into the security breach is underway, and that anyone found to have neglected his duties would be punished.

Still more work to do for military women

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military has seen gains when it comes to women entering service, from increases in academy enrollments to growing numbers in newly opened combat positions, service secretaries said Tuesday.

The Army and Air Force are on track this year to see increases in the percentage of women enrolled at their academies, service secretaries said. Of the applicants for this year's incoming Air Force Academy class, 30 percent are female, an academy spokesman said Tuesday.

However, the secretaries also agreed much work remains to address the remaining, sizeable gaps that still exist between men and women in the services.

"We are trying to change a little bit the way we talk and think about who the protectors are in this country," Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson told the House Armed Services Committee. "I think sometimes the way we talk about the services may appeal more to boys than to girls."

Overall, U.S. military has seen gains in the recruitment

of women in recent years, with new combat positions open to women and growing enrollment at the academies.

The Air Force, in particular, will mark the highest percentage of women ever enrolled at their academy, Wilson told the House panel during a wide-ranging hearing on the services' 2019 budget proposals.

Wilson's comments came on the heels of testimony by other service secretaries, who said they have also seen gains but are still working to expand those efforts in recruitment and especially retention of women. The hearing could influence the development of the next National Defense Authorization Act.

"Each of the military services experience challenges retaining women to a varying degree with a particularly wide gender gap in operational specialties," Rep. Susan Davis, D-Calif., said in questioning the secretaries. "More women than men, as we know, leave the military at various career points, so concerns persist that this attrition will result in a disproportionate impact to mission readiness if left unresolved."

U.S. News & World Report recently estimated the U.S. Air

Force Academy has a gender distribution of 75 percent male vs. 25 percent female. That's up from when a Rand Corp. study found female enrollment at the academy had reached 21 percent by 2009, up from 16 percent several years earlier.

Army Secretary Mark Esper said he's also seen an increase.

The U.S. Military Academy at West Point is estimated to have 22 percent female enrollment. This, as the U.S. Naval Academy is estimated to have more than 20 percent female enrollment, said retired Navy Capt. Lory Manning, director of government operations for the Service Women's Action Network.

"The percentage of women in classes entering the Air Force Academy and Naval Academy has been growing to a goal over 20 percent for about 10 years," Manning said after hearing of the comments about the academies at Tuesday's hearing. "The Coast Guard Academy has been in the 33 percent vicinity for a number of years now."

Some people, however, remained concerned the Army has an artificial cap in place that is keeping West Point from boosting its enrollment of women. Among them, retired Army Col.

Ellen Haring, who is SWAN's director of programs and research. She said it's difficult to explain the significant gap in Army ROTC programs with a 28 percent female enrollment rate vs. West Point's 22 percent.

"I want to know why West Point, which provides a completely free education, a prestigious education, doesn't seem to be able to enroll women at the same rate as Army ROTC programs, which offer more limited scholarships," Haring said.

Wilson made a series of remarks that a cultural shift has to be addressed first, moving from a focus on men to one of women as protectors serving their country. "If I asked everyone in this room to ... just close your eyes for a second and think about the most protective person you know in your life, someone who would do anything to keep you safe ... half the people in the room are thinking about their moms," Wilson said in response to a question about efforts in addressing the gaps between men and women serving in the military. "We are the protectors. That's what the military does. We serve to protect the rest of you and that's a very natural place for a woman to be."

Lawmakers work to meet budget deadline

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Talks over a \$1.3 trillion government spending bill are almost complete as the White House and Capitol Hill Democrats ironed out deals on a first round of funding for President Donald Trump's U.S.-Mexico border wall.

Congressional aides said early Wednesday that Trump would win \$1.6 billion for border security, including technology and constructing older wall designs, but would be denied a more recent, far larger \$25 billion request for multiyear funding for the wall project.

Negotiators planned to officially unveil the massive gov-

ernmentwide spending bill later Wednesday in hopes of passing it before a Friday midnight deadline to avoid a government shutdown. A temporary funding bill to keep operations going this weekend might be required.

The bill would give Trump a huge budget increase for the military, while Democrats would cement wins on infrastructure and other domestic programs that they failed to get under President Barack Obama.

The aides required anonymity because the agreement is not yet public.

Battles over budget priorities in the huge bill were all settled, while a handful of nonbudget issues remained, including a

GOP effort to fix a poorly drafted section of the recent tax cut law that is harming Midwestern grain companies.

Another fight, resolved in Trump's favor, would remove an earmark for a rail tunnel under the Hudson River that's a top priority of Trump's most powerful Democratic rival, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. The project would remain eligible for funding but would have to compete with dozens of other rail and transit projects sought by other states.

The measure on the table would provide major funding increases for the Pentagon — \$80 billion over current limits — bringing the military budget

to \$700 billion and giving GOP defense hawks a long-sought victory.

Domestic accounts would get a generous 10 percent increase on average as well, awarding Democrats the sort of spending increases they sought but never secured during the Obama administration.

Democrats touted almost \$4 billion to fight the nation's opioid addiction epidemic. More than \$2 billion would go to strengthen school safety through grants for training, security measures and treatment for the mentally ill. Medical research at the National Institutes of Health, a longstanding bipartisan priority, would receive a record \$3 billion increase to \$37 billion.

Officer's response praised in quick end to shooting

Associated Press

GREAT MILLS, Md. — In the latest school shooting in America, the gunfire was over and done with in less than a minute.

This time, the shooter, a 17-year-old student, was killed. Authorities said a 16-year-old girl who had some type of relationship with the shooter was critically injured and a 14-year-old boy also was wounded.

The school resource officer who responded inside of 60 seconds and fired off a shot at the attacker was praised as a hero.

The violence erupted as classes were beginning Tuesday at Great Mills High School in southern Maryland in a community where many families have military ties, with parents working at the Patuxent River Naval Air Station or Andrews Air Force Base.

It came a month after 17 people were killed at a Florida high school and intensified calls for Congress to act on gun violence at schools.

It wasn't immediately clear in Tuesday's attack whether the shooter — identified as Austin Rollins, a student at Great Mills — took his own life or was killed by the officer's bullet, nor was it clear how the 14-year-old boy was wounded, St. Mary's County Sheriff Tim Cameron said. But the sheriff credited the officer with preventing any more loss of life.

The officer, Deputy 1st Class Blaine Gaskill, a six-year veteran with SWAT team training working his first year inside the high school, responded quickly, Cameron said.

ed quickly, Cameron said.

Within a minute after Rollins fired his first shot, Gaskill had responded and fired a shot of his own. Cameron said Gaskill fired his weapon simultaneously with a final shot fired by Rollins. Cameron said he did not know whether Rollins was intending to shoot himself or Gaskins, who was unharmed.

"He had to cover significant ground," Cameron said of Gaskill's response. "The premise is simple: You go to the sound of gunfire."

Authorities didn't release a motive, but said they believe the girl and Rollins previously had a relationship.

Police did not identify the victims, but the family of Jaelynn Willey, 16, a sophomore at Great Mills, confirmed she had been shot.

Politicians responded swiftly with calls to change laws and policies.

"We sympathize. We empathize. We have moments of silence. But we don't have action," said the No. 2 U.S. House Democrat, Steny Hoyer, who represents the area in Congress. "Wringing our hands is not enough."

It appeared Rollins possessed the gun illegally. In Maryland, a person must be 21 to possess a handgun, unless carrying one is required for employment. It's unclear how Rollins obtained the weapon.

Attempts to reach his family were unsuccessful.

Northeast hit by another wintry storm

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — A spring nor'easter targeted the Northeast on Wednesday with strong winds and a foot or more of snow expected in some parts of the region.

Airlines canceled flights and schools canceled classes ahead of the fourth major storm in three weeks.

Conditions were calm in most areas early Wednesday, but forecasters said the storm was expected to kick into high gear by early afternoon.

"I didn't think I'd still need to keep storm stuff in my car in late March, but what are you going to do?" Wilson Collins said as he prepared to leave his Toms River, N.J., home Wednesday morning.

"I'm hoping most of the snow will accumulate just on the grass, but the roads will be a mess no matter what. I just hope this is finally it."

Residents were being urged to stay home and off the roads, if possible, on Wednesday so crews could work to keep streets clear.

The bulk of the snow and sleet was expected to pound New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware and parts of eastern Pennsylvania on Wednesday before heading toward Cape Cod early Thursday.

Widespread power outages were possible with gusts blowing up to 35 mph.

Dog walker Emily DiFiglia said she was done with winter.

"I'm outside all day long. So having the weather constantly fluctuating has driven me a little mad," she said on Philadelphia's South Street.

"Mother Nature, let's get some warm weather!"

The flight-tracking site FlightAware reported more than 3,000 canceled flights across the U.S. on Wednesday, most in the Northeast.

On the ground, Amtrak scaled back service on the Northeast corridor and some states banned certain types of trucks from major highways.

Teacher fired over anti-military rant

Staff and wire reports

A California school board voted unanimously Tuesday to fire high school teacher Gregory Salcido, whose rant about the military went viral after it was recorded by a student in his classroom.

Board of Education President Aurora Villon told The Los Angeles Times that Salcido has 30 days to appeal the El Rancho Unified school board's decision.

"The classroom should never be a place where students feel that they are picked at, bullied, intimidated," she said.

After the announcement, Salcido said in a text message

to the Whittier Daily News that it "would not be appropriate to comment until I am officially notified of a decision by the district."

Salcido has been on leave from El Rancho High School in Pico Rivera after a video was circulated on social media of him in the classroom urging a 17-year-old student who was wearing a U.S. Marine Corps sweatshirt not to join the military.

"They're not like high-level thinkers, they're not academic people, they're not intellectual people; they're the frickin' lowest of our low," Salcido said in the recording.

The video drew widespread

criticism. White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly, a retired Marine general, said on Fox News Radio, "Well, I think the guy ought to go to hell. I just hope he enjoys the liberties and the lifestyles that we fought for."

During a Pico Rivera City Council meeting last month, Salcido elaborated on his comments.

"I don't think it's all a revelation to anybody that those who aren't stellar students usually find the military a better option ... that's not a criticism of anybody. Anything I said had nothing to do with their moral character," he said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Ex-official: Chances missed to save boy, 3

KS WICHITA — A former state welfare official said multiple chances were missed to save a Wichita toddler before he was found encased in concrete.

Dianne Keech said the “point of no return” was when the Department of Children and Families failed to call 911 last April after receiving a report that Evan Brewer, 3, had hit his head while taking a bath and “had no pulse” before being revived. The Wichita Eagle reported that Keech, a DCF deputy director from 2013 to 2015, said the agency “never recovered from that point on.” Evan’s body was found in September.

The boy’s mother and her boyfriend are charged with murder.

Drugs, guns seized from men found asleep

MA NEWBURYPORT — Police in Massachusetts said they found more than 4 pounds of marijuana as well as heroin, two guns and more than 200 rounds of ammunition when they arrested two Colorado men sleeping in their car.

Newburyport police arrested Traevon McGairty and Kahiland Phillips just before 5 a.m. Saturday while performing a welfare check. The Newburyport Daily News reported that police were called to the scene by a store clerk who thought the men had passed out.

McGairty, of Moffat, Colo., and Phillips, of Broomfield, Colo., face multiple drug and weapons charges.

Firefighters stand down due to old gear

ME LIMINGTON — Officials have ordered

a Maine town’s fire department to “stand down” because the group’s rescue gear is outdated and doesn’t meet national standards.

The Portland Press Herald reported that the Limington Board of Selectmen released a statement Sunday explaining that the Limington fire department’s gear is more than 10 years old and it doesn’t meet the National Fire Protection Association’s standard.

Nearby fire departments will help Limington if a fire occurs.

Police had visited scene of horse deaths

MD QUANTICO — A Maryland sheriff said his agency visited a farm where horses were found dead and starving more than 80 times.

The Daily Times of Salisbury reported that an 18-page record of complaints from 2010 to 2018 largely centers on horses roaming outside the farm.

But Wicomico County Sheriff Mike Lewis said Tuesday he wasn’t allowed in the fenced-in portion of the property until Saturday, when he found 25 dead horses in various states of decay and others starving in “absolutely inhumane” conditions.

About 100 feral horses have been seized so far and around 30 still need to be caught. Owners Barbara Pilchard and Paige Pilchard have not been charged.

Man hits 2 cruisers in multistate chase

RI EAST PROVIDENCE — Authorities said a man led police on a chase from Massachusetts to Rhode Island, striking two police cruisers in the process.

Police said the chase began near Fall River, Mass., on Saturday as officers were search-

ing for a suspect in connection with the vandalism of the city’s police station. Authorities said the 20-year-old suspect struck a police cruiser in Seekonk and continued to flee before crashing into another Seekonk cruiser in East Providence. The police officers involved in the crash were not injured.

The man has been charged with felony assault with a dangerous weapon, reckless driving and being a fugitive from justice.

Man accused of leaving mom for dead

NC CARY — A North Carolina man has been accused of leaving his mother on their home’s floor because he knew she would probably die and that he would get access to \$30,000 she had in a bank account.

The News & Observer of Raleigh reported that Eric Paul Brunner, 39, was arrested March 13 and charged with murder and elder abuse.

Warrants and other information from Wake County sheriff’s deputies say Cynthia Brunner, 74, had fallen more than 24 hours before her son and caretaker reported her death on Feb. 19. Brunner is being held without bail.

Farmer’s cows say ‘hi’ to SpaceX, Starman

KS WICHITA — A Kansas farmer famous for cow art has gathered about 300 of his cattle to say “hi” to SpaceX, the orbiting Tesla and its “driver” called Starman.

The Wichita Eagle reported that David Klingenberg is known for using his feed truck to move cattle into shapes before filming them with his drone. In his latest YouTube video, “Cow Space Art,” Klin-

genberg explains how he got the photo proving his cows can be seen from outer space.

Klingenberg gets daily satellite images of his farm from FarmersEdge. He said he used shadows on the images to find out when the photos would be taken and then moved his cows to spell out the word “hi” during that time.

Woman mauled by possibly rabid coyote

PA BROOKVILLE — Authorities are on the hunt for a possibly rabid coyote that mauled a Pennsylvania woman, leaving her badly wounded and “drenched in blood.”

Brookville borough police said a night-shift employee of an assisted living community was attacked about midnight Sunday while she was walking in the area. The Courier Express reported that the animal attacked her from a nearby bush, biting her numerous times.

Brookville police Chief Vince Markle said the woman was “drenched in blood” and required over 20 stitches and a rabies vaccination.

47 people arrested on Fake Patty’s Day

KS MANHATTAN — Police said they arrested 47 people and issued 494 citations during this year’s Fake Patty’s Day celebration in Manhattan.

The Riley County Police Department said in a news release March 12 that law enforcement responded to 287 calls from citizens during a period spanning from 7 p.m. March 9 to 6 a.m. March 11.

Complaints included reports of parking problems, welfare checks, calls for disturbing the peace and reckless driving.

From wire reports

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'Snacks' fires up low-key Gonzaga

Associated Press

Zach Norvell Jr. earned the nickname "Snacks" for his affinity for candy and chocolate. Gonzaga's coaches picked up on it when Norvell's father used the moniker during a visit, so Snacks followed the shooting guard to Spokane.

Now Norvell is gobbling up opponents in the NCAA Tournament.

Gregarious and confident, Norvell has provided the fire the low-key Zags have needed and has them in position to make another Final Four run.

"He's got a persona that we really need in our program right now, quite frankly," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said. "We have an overabundance of introverts and that's one thing he's not. And so I call him our spiritual leader. He gets us going every practice, even the ones they don't want to be at."

Norvell has the Zags in a

position few outside Spokane thought they would be: Two wins from a return trip to the Final Four.

Gonzaga reached the Final Four for the first time last season, losing to North Carolina in the title game. The Bulldogs lost key players from that team: Przemek Karnowski, Jordan Mathews, Zach Collins and Nigel Williams-Goss.

Gonzaga was picked to finish second in the West Coast Conference, but swept the regular-season and tournament titles to reach the NCAA Tournament for the 20th straight year.

Once the Zags reached the field of 68, Norvell took over.

The redshirt freshman averaged 12.3 points during the regular season, but has upped his game under college basketball's brightest spotlight.

Norvell overcome a rough shooting night to hit the tie-breaking three-pointer with 20.8 seconds left in Gonzaga's

opening-round, 68-64 win over UNC-Greensboro. He followed that up by scoring 28 points, hitting six three-pointers and grabbing 12 rebounds in a second-round win over Ohio State.

The win over the Buckeyes sent Gonzaga to the Sweet 16 for the fourth straight season and a match-up with Florida State on Thursday in Los Angeles.

"I'm a really confident guy and the coaching staff and all the guys around me put the confidence in me," Norvell said.

Norvell was a spectator to history a year ago.

A 6-foot-5 shooting guard from Chicago, he was a top-100 recruit who once scored 53 points and hit 14 three-pointers in an AAU game. But when he arrived in Spokane, Norvell was dealing with a lingering knee injury and joined a roster stacked with guard talent, so he ended up redshirting.

Instead of pouting, Norvell took the time to learn from Wil-

liams-Goss, Jordan Mathews, Josh Perkins and Silas Melson. He observed how those veteran guards went about their business, how they played the game and led Gonzaga to the national title game.

"Sitting last year was big," Norvell said. "Behind great guards, I learned a lot from those guys."

Norvell had to use those lessons as a backup to start the 2017-18 season, playing behind Corey Kispert. When Kispert injured his ankle in November, Norvell slid into the starting lineup and shined, finishing third in scoring on a team full of scoring options while becoming the emotional leader and spark for the Bulldogs.

"He's got a winning spirit about him," Few said. "He has an effervescence and charisma. He not only provides that stuff on the floor, but off the floor is very important."

Snacks has them covered.

Michigan winning ugly while relying on elite defense

Associated Press

ANNARBOR, Mich. — When Jordan Poole's long three-pointer dropped through the net for Michigan, a whole lot of unsightly shooting beforehand was forgotten.

It's been that kind of season for the Wolverines, who are winning without much concern for aesthetics.

It was just 14 months ago that Illinois center Maverick Morgan said, somewhat accurately, that Michigan had been a "white-collar team traditionally" — but you won't find many people saying that about the Wolverines this season. Michigan struggles at times from beyond the arc, and the free-throw line has been a nightmare. Yet here the Wolverines are, preparing to play in the Sweet 16 for the fourth time in six years.

"I think we take pride in our defense. We have that grit

— more so than maybe teams before," guard Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman said. "We have that mindset that we're going to defend people and stop them. It's not always going to be, we're making a whole bunch of threes and things like that. We have to win the game on the defensive end."

Watching Michigan win with defense is a bit disorienting. It's like if Tom Osborne showed up one year with an offense that averaged 500 yards passing.

For a decade under John Beilein, the Wolverines could put on an offensive clinic, with smart passing, sharp outside shooting and hardly any turnovers. Michigan still tries to operate the same way, but the shooting has been hit-or-miss this season. That was certainly true in the team's first two NCAA Tournament games, when the third-seeded Wolverines fell behind 10-0 against Montana and took over 5½

minutes to make a field goal against Houston.

Michigan still won comfortably against Montana, 61-47. Against the Cougars, it was 64-63 on the buzzer beater by Poole. The Wolverines finished that game 8-for-30 from three-point range.

"Everybody could execute better," Beilein said. "We've got to give credit where credit is due. We played two good defensive teams."

In the past, Beilein's best teams at Michigan were led by dynamic offensive players like point guards Trey Burke and Derrick Walton. This year's point guard, Xavier Simpson, has an awkward-looking outside shot and an even stranger routine at the foul line. But Simpson has been perhaps Michigan's most important player, a defensive pest who did a good enough job on Houston's Rob Gray that the Wolverines were able to advance.

Houston and Montana both shot under 40 percent from the field.

Michigan's matchup Thursday with seventh-seeded Texas A&M could be another battle of attrition. The Aggies have held opponents to 40 percent from the field on the season.

"You've seen a lot of grit from both of these teams," Texas A&M coach Billy Kennedy said. "We've been able to make some tough plays against some really difficult teams and Michigan, I like their energy. They hit a big shot and they believe that they're going to win and that's what you've got to have this time of year."

After making it past Houston, Michigan is suddenly the highest-seeded team remaining in its entire half of the bracket. If the Wolverines can return to the level they reached in winning the Big Ten Tournament, they'll be tough to beat.

Aggies ride roller coaster to Sweet 16

Associated Press

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — More than once in a roller-coaster season for Texas A&M, coach Billy Kennedy was asked if things could get any worse for his team.

It was something he wondered again and again as injuries, suspensions and inconsistent play had the talented Aggies clawing back from lows that good teams don't normally encounter.

"Trials can break you or make you, and I think it's made this team closer and recognize that they need each other," Kennedy said. "They've grown up a lot in a short amount of time and I just think that the faith and belief in our team that we had a good team and that we could do something special was special if we could get it right."

The Aggies did get it right, winning three straight to wrap up Southeastern Conference

play and reach 20 wins to get a spot in the NCAA Tournament, where they beat Providence in the first round before knocking off defending champ North Carolina for a spot in the Sweet 16.

No. 7 Texas A&M, which is in the round of 16 for the second time in three years, will face three-seed Michigan on Thursday night in Los Angeles.

Texas A&M raced out to an 11-1 record and tied a school record by rising to No. 5 in the Top 25 with a team that included center Tyler Davis and sophomore big man Robert Williams, who returned for a second season despite being projected to be an NBA lottery pick.

It was then that things began to fall apart.

D.J. Hogg, who led the team in scoring early in the season, was suspended three games for an undisclosed violation of team rules, and starting

guard Admon Gilder missed five games with a knee injury. It was also during this time that Williams missed one game and was slowed for a couple more with flu-like symptoms, leaving the Aggies extremely short-handed.

It resulted in a five-game skid that left the Aggies 0-5 in SEC play and desperate to turn things around. Hogg returned in the middle of the losing streak, and Gilder was back in the lineup when the skid had reached three games, but Texas A&M still couldn't get back in the win column.

Kennedy said he never lost faith in his team and it was during this losing streak that he vowed that the Aggies would turn things around.

"People better beat us now while we've got guys injured and making mistakes," he said in January. "Because I really believe we're going to get this team right because we've got a

good group and we've got a talented group and we're going to learn from it."

The Aggies won for the first time in almost a month when they beat Ole Miss on Jan. 16 and they followed that victory up with one over Missouri. But their problems were far from over, and they dropped the next two to fall to 2-6 in conference play.

The players credit Kennedy for keeping them together and positive despite the setbacks. The devoutly religious coach would often provide his players with different Bible verses that helped them keep their heads up.

"We stayed connected," Gilder said. "We could have broken down and kept losing, but being able to have that fight in us and being able to come back and win the games that we did to get in the tournament and get into the position where we are now is truly a blessing."

Briefs

Golovkin rips 'dirty' Alvarez, De La Hoya

Associated Press

BIG BEAR LAKE, Calif. — Gennady Golovkin plans to go ahead with his rematch against Canelo Alvarez on May 5, even after Alvarez failed a doping test last month.

But Golovkin also believes Alvarez is a cheater whose attempt to blame the test on bad meat is a joke and a symptom of more extensive corruption in boxing.

"Again with Mexican meat? Come on," Golovkin said on Tuesday, referencing Alvarez's attribution of his failed test to his consumption of tainted meat in his native country.

"I told you, it's not Mexican meat," Golovkin added. "This is Canelo. This is his team. This is his promotion. ... Canelo is cheating. They're using these drugs, and everybody is just trying to pretend it's not

happening."

Golovkin (37-0-1, 33 KOs) spoke pointedly about Alvarez (49-1-2, 34 KOs) before a workout at his high-altitude training camp in Southern California. For the first time, the unbeaten Kazakh middleweight champion repeatedly said he believes Alvarez has used banned substances for previous fights, including their first bout last September.

"It was pretty obvious when (Alvarez's) muscles were all (enlarged) ... and with the traces of injections, which were visible," Golovkin said through a translator. "I can talk about Oscar De La Hoya, too. He is also not clean. He's dirty."

De La Hoya is Alvarez's longtime promoter and a former six-division champion. He retired from boxing in 2008.

Bills' Jones arrested

LOS ANGELES — Buffalo Bills receiver Zay Jones was arrested Monday night in Los Angeles after a naked, bloody argument with his brother, Vikings receiver Cayleb Jones.

The player, whose legal name is Isaiah Avery Jones, was arrested after officers were called to a disturbance in downtown Los Angeles, said Officer Luis Garcia, a police spokesman.

When the officers arrived, they found Jones "breaking glass doors and windows" and arrested him on suspicion of felony vandalism, Garcia said.

The arrest was first reported by TMZ, which posted a video of the brothers arguing that showed a nude Zay Jones pushing his brother. The site also obtained a photo of what appeared to be blood on the floor.

BIG3 hires Lieberman

NEW YORK — Hall of Famer Nancy Lieberman will coach a team this season in the BIG3.

The league announced Wednesday that Lieberman, one of women's basketball's star players who has gone on to coach in the NBA, WNBA and NBA Development League, will lead Power. She replaces Clyde Drexler, who recently accepted a job as commissioner of the 3-on-3 league of former NBA players.

Lieberman was a three-time All-American and two-time U.S. Olympian as a player. She was a head coach for the Dallas Mavericks' minor league affiliate and also in the WNBA, and was an assistant for the Sacramento Kings.

NBA roundup

Rockets end Blazers' winning streak

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — James Harden says he's constantly working on his step-back three-pointer. It paid off against Portland.

Harden scored 42 points, including a pair of threes down the stretch, and the Houston Rockets snapped the Trail Blazers' 13-game winning streak with a 115-111 victory on Tuesday night.

"This doesn't just happen," Harden said about his shot from distance. "I am constantly working on it every day, every single day. I am trying to get better and improve. I'm still doing that."

Portland's winning streak was tied for the second-longest in franchise history. The team also won 13 consecutive games in 2007.

Chris Paul added 22 points for the Rockets, who have won six straight and 23 of their past

24 and have the best record in the NBA.

Al-Farouq Aminu had 22 points, including six three-pointers, for Portland. The Blazers had also won nine straight at the Moda Center before the loss.

"They're the No. 1 team in the league for a reason. The find ways to win, they've got a lot of shooters out there. James is going to be the MVP of the league. They played how we thought they would play, and our team, I thought we came out and played a good game, too," Damian Lillard said. "We've just got to make a few more plays and make a few more shots if we want to beat a team like that."

Harden and Trevor Ariza each hit three-pointers to stretch Houston's lead to 110-102. Harden added another step-back three with 1:55 left and it seemed Portland was out of it.

"I just try to wait for the defender to make his move," Harden said. "When he gets to where I want him to be, then I take my shot. It's all about rhythm, timing."

But the Blazers rallied with a 9-0 run, capped by CJ McCollum's floater with 28 seconds left to pull within 113-111.

Paul went to the line with 1.3 seconds left and made both shots. After a timeout, Lillard tried a three-pointer but it missed.

Jusuf Nurkic finished with 21 points and 11 rebounds for Portland, while Lillard had 20 points. Neither Lillard nor backcourt mate McCollum hit a three-pointer in the game.

Celtics 100, Thunder 99: — Marcus Morris made a three-pointer with 1.2 seconds left and host Boston stunned Oklahoma City.

Timberwolves 123, Clippers 109: Karl-Anthony Towns racked up 30 points and 10 re-

bounds for his NBA-best 60th double-double and Andrew Wiggins scored 27 points in an all-around performance, leading host Minnesota over Los Angeles.

Hawks 99, Jazz 94: Dennis Schroder scored a career-high 41 points, including 17 in the fourth quarter, and Atlanta stunned host Utah.

Pelicans 115, Mavericks 105: Anthony Davis scored 37 points, and host New Orleans overcame the absence of second-leading scorer Jrue Holiday to beat struggling Dallas.

Raptors 93, Magic 86: Kyle Lowry scored 25 points and Toronto used a strong fourth-quarter defensive effort to beat host Orlando.

Pistons 115, Suns 88: Blake Griffin narrowly missed a triple-double and Detroit celebrated the return of Reggie Jackson by handing short-handed host Phoenix its ninth straight loss.

NHL roundup

Lightning rally from 3-goal deficit to beat Maple Leafs

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Alex Killorn and the Tampa Bay Lightning pulled off a rare comeback to knock off their division rival.

Killorn broke a tie with 10:46 left in the third period and Tampa Bay scored the final four goals to rally for a 4-3 victory over Toronto, stopping the Maple Leafs' four-game winning streak Tuesday night.

Killorn took a pass from rookie Tony Cirelli and fired in a shot from the slot to put the Lightning ahead after they trailed 3-0 midway through the second.

"In the intermission we just wanted to stick to our game and just thought about how good it would feel to come back and win this game," Killorn said.

The Lightning scored three times in the third as they came back from down three or more goals to win in regulation for the fifth time in franchise history — the first time since defeating the New York Rangers on Dec. 23, 2006.

"The vibe in the room was really good after two (periods)," coach Jon Cooper said. "Everybody thought it was an extremely winnable game."

Avalanche 5, Blackhawks 1: Nathan MacKinnon had two assists, extending his point streak to a career high-tying 13 games, and visiting Colorado beat Chicago.

Capitals 4, Stars 3: John Carlson scored with five minutes remaining to help host Washington beat Dallas and extend its lead atop the Metro-

politan Division.

Blue Jackets 5, Rangers 3: Artemi Panarin had three goals and an assist, Sergei Bobrovsky made 29 saves and visiting Columbus extended its winning streak to nine games with a victory over New York.

Islanders 4, Penguins 1: Mathew Barzal and Adam Pelech scored in the first period and host New York went on to beat Pittsburgh.

Red Wings 5, Flyers 4 (SO): Frans Nielsen scored his NHL-record 22nd shootout winner and host Detroit edged Philadelphia to end its 10-game losing streak.

Jets 2, Kings 1 (OT): Kyle Connor scored his second goal of the game 1:37 into overtime to lift host Winnipeg over Los Angeles after losing Patrik

Laine to a lower-body injury.

Panthers 7, Senators 2: Jared McCann had a goal and two assists to lead visiting Florida while Ottawa captain Erik Karlsson sat out following the death of his son.

Oilers 7, Hurricanes 3: Leon Draisaitl had a goal and three assists and visiting Edmonton rode a three-goal first period to a victory over Carolina.

Sharks 6, Devils 2: Jannik Hansen scored his first goal of the season and fellow fourth-liners Eric Fehr and Barclay Goodrow also scored to help host San Jose beat New Jersey for its season-high fifth straight win.

Golden Knights 4, Canucks 1: Jonathan Marchessault scored his 23rd goal and host Vegas defeated Vancouver.