

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Bolton's return concerns South Korea

The Washington Post

TOKYO — President Donald Trump's decision to make John Bolton his new national security adviser ricocheted across the globe, unsettling allies and raising alarm that a hawk who advocates military action against North Korea and Iran will have the president's ear.

From Berlin and Jerusalem to Seoul and Tokyo, U.S. allies who have long felt that Trump's unconventional rhetoric on foreign policy often did not translate to concrete policy are bracing for a shift. Following the nomination on March 13 of the hawkish Mike Pompeo to become secretary of state, Bolton's elevation means that Defense Secretary Jim Mattis is the lone survivor in a ring of advisers who pushed Trump to hew closer to conventional foreign policy positions.

Now, as U.S. policy on North Korea and Iran reaches a crucial juncture in coming weeks, Bolton's regime-change rhetoric toward both nations may move closer to reality, allies believe. Europeans, who widely support a 2015 deal to restrict Iran's nuclear program, fear its imminent demise. Some Israelis — even those who criticized the pact — are also concerned. In South Korea and Japan, fears rose that Trump is preparing for war if talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un fail to yield breakthroughs.

"We would desperately wish to see the United States in a constructive leading role as a steward of the international system," said Norbert Ren, chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the lower house of the German Parliament. He said he fears that Washington is moving in the opposite direction.

"We are concerned that the policy is coming closer to the rhetoric," he said. Trump "has now surrounded himself with people who share his intuitions

Mattis holds firm amid security team shake-up

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's shake-up of his national security team adds to the burden on one man at the center of any decision about war and peace: Defense Secretary Jim Mattis.

Long a champion of alliances and diplomacy, Mattis increasingly finds himself surrounded by policy hawks on issues such as Iran and North Korea. Yet his command of the nation's 1.2 million active-duty personnel makes him uniquely placed to steer Trump away from any rash decision to unleash the U.S. military.

Trump stunned his own aides this month by reshaping his foreign policy team in a more hawkish bent ahead of a key decision on the Iran

nuclear deal and a historic summit with North Korea's leader. With a tweet, he said he'd replace Secretary of State Rex Tillerson with CIA Director Mike Pompeo. Then Thursday he tapped former United Nations Ambassador John Bolton to be his third national security adviser in 14 months, dismissing H.R. McMaster.

While Mattis, 67, has broken with his boss on several top policy issues, he's as permanent a fixture as anyone can be in the tumultuous Trump administration.

"He'll be the last man standing," said MacKenzie Eaglen, a defense analyst with the American Enterprise Institute. "He is the most powerful Cabinet member and knows it. He gets to run DOD and be a shadow secretary of state."

and his general views."

H.R. McMaster, the outgoing national security adviser, was no dove on North Korea, repeatedly talking about military options for making it give up its nuclear weapons program. But Bolton's move into the president's inner circle comes at a particularly sensitive time in the world's dealings with Pyongyang. The South Korean president is preparing to hold a summit with Kim Jong Un at the end of April, and Trump plans to follow suit in May.

"By tapping Bolton, who has called for pre-emptive strikes against North Korea, Trump is sending a message to the re-

gime, telling them that they should come out to talks in order to avoid such drastic military backlash," said Kim Sung-han, a former South Korean vice foreign minister who is now dean of Korea University's Graduate School of International Studies.

Bolton has advocated a hard line against North Korea since he served as undersecretary of state for arms control and ambassador to the United Nations during the George W. Bush administration.

At that time, the North's state-run Korean Central News Agency regularly denounced Bolton, calling him "human scum and a bloodsucker" and "a beastly

man bereft of reason" who suffers from a "psychopathological condition."

He has often argued in favor of a pre-emptive strike against North Korea. Many analysts think that Kim's regime would respond to a military strike by unleashing the conventional artillery it has sitting near the demilitarized zone that separates the two Koreas. That artillery has all of the greater Seoul region, home to 25 million South Koreans, within range.

Japan has also been increasingly worried about becoming collateral damage, as North Korea last year fired several missiles over Japanese territory and threatened to strike American military bases in Japan.

There is also a significant deal of nervousness in Seoul that Bolton, who is set to take over as national security adviser on April 9, could try to sink the diplomatic effort now underway.

The proposed summit between Kim and Trump is tentative, with no date or location yet set and no clear indication that the North's nuclear weapons program will even be on the agenda.

By selecting Bolton, Trump could be trying to walk into the talks with a "formidable stance," said Park Hyeon-jung, a senior research fellow at Korea Institute for National Unification, which deals with inter-Korean relations.

Bolton's appointment also comes at a critical juncture on Iran, less than two months before a key deadline for U.S. adherence to the Iran nuclear deal. The Trump administration has said it will not sign a new sanctions waiver for Iran by May 12 unless changes are made to the agreement on grounds that Tehran has not lived up to the "spirit" of the deal. Bolton has long been a critic of the accord.

Marines boost forces in Australia

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps is boosting its annual rotation of forces to Australia's Northern Territory.

Elements of Marine Rotational Force-Darwin are turning up in Australia this month to prepare for the arrival of nearly 1,600 Marines, eight MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft and an artillery battery of six M777 Howitzers.

The seventh rotation to Darwin is more than 300 Marines stronger than last year's mission, but it's still more than 900 Marines short of the long-term plan to send 2,500 Marines Down Under for six months each year.

Australian Defence Minister Marise Payne welcomed the increase.

"These initiatives strengthen the ability of Australia and the U.S. to work together and with regional partners in the interests of regional stability and security," she said in a statement

issued Friday.

Since 2012, the Marines' Darwin mission has increased in size and complexity, enhancing the capability of Australian and U.S. forces to work together, the statement said.

"During major exercises, the rotation will include additional equipment and assets such as AH-1W Super Cobra helicopters, UH-1Y Venom helicopters, F/A-18 Hornet aircraft and MC-130 Hercules aircraft," Payne said.

The increase will enable a broader range of exercises and training activities. Marines are expected to participate in 15 training activities alongside the Australians, the statement said.

Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and other nations will participate in or observe some of those drills, Payne said.

"Australia and the U.S. have a long-standing history of working together to promote peace, security and stability across

the globe," he said. "Australia welcomes opportunities to work with the United States to foster greater cooperation with our regional partners."

The Australian Defence Force is also planning air training exercises with the U.S. Air Force this year under the Enhanced Air Cooperation Initiative, the statement said.

Activities under the initiative include aeromedical evacuation training, fighter integration, combat mobility drills with the Marines, integrated aircraft maintenance and expanding air-to-air refueling capabilities.

"Enhanced Air Cooperation activities complement and support training with the U.S. Marines, as it increases the ability of Australia and the U.S. to deploy into the region where and when they are required to do so," Payne said.

The Marines are expected to complete this year's rotation to Australia in October, the statement said.

Navy drones used to find coastal mines

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The Navy has completed developmental testing of a drone-based coastal mine detection system intended to become standard equipment on littoral combat ships.

The testing, done last month aboard the USS Coronado off the Southern California coast, put the system through its paces in a realistic environment using the assigned crew and aviation detachment to verify that it is ready for the next step of operational testing, a Navy statement said.

The system is designed to identify surface mines and other obstacles on beaches or surf waters, which until now needed to be done by sailors or Marines actually landing for a first-hand look. Aside from risking casualties, such reconnaissance can also potentially reveal landing zones.

The mine-detecting drone is part of the evolving Coastal Mine Reconnaissance system, a suite of technologies on littoral ships to be used to find and destroy mines that hinder amphibious operations.

Littoral combat ships, with shallow drafts, are designed to conduct operations close to shorelines.

Drones are steadily gaining prominence in Navy technology. On Tuesday, the Navy announced it was renaming Program Executive Office Littoral Combat Ship, created in 2011, to PEO Unmanned and Small Combatants to better reflect its scope of projects.

The Coastal Mine Reconnaissance module consists primarily of the MQ-8B Fire Scout, an unmanned helicopter developed by Northrop Grumman that carries the AN/DVS-1 Coastal Battlespace Reconnaissance and Analysis, or COBRA, sensor that in daytime detects surface-laid mine lines, mine fields and obstacles in the beach zone.

Army holds live-fire drills on Okinawa

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP SCHWAB, Okinawa — Even the Army's cooks and mechanics need to know how to handle an advancing enemy.

Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 10th Regional Support Group, recently took to the field at Camp Schwab for the Okinawa unit's first comprehensive live-fire exercise on the island in a decade.

Many of the soldiers are new to the Army or have job duties like paralegal, truck driver and supply specialist that don't usually involve squeezing the trigger of an M4 rifle.

The daytime and nighttime training was designed to ensure that all are ready for any situation that might pop up in the Pacific. It accomplishes many things, 10th RSG leadership said, from exposing young sol-

diers to near-combat conditions to making sure they're familiar with Army weapons systems.

"It gets us prepared for the worst," said 10th RSG paralegal specialist Pvt. Daiviah Walker, 22, of South Florida. "Not to say the worst is coming, but just for anything that may happen in the long run. At least we'll know what to do."

While such training isn't new — it takes place yearly on the small-unit level — this was 10th RSG's largest and most comprehensive effort on Okinawa in years, featuring about 100 soldiers.

The Army has a relatively small presence in Japan. Of the 50,000 servicemembers stationed here, only about 2,000 are soldiers. On Okinawa, they are based out of the small coastal facility called Torii Station.

Two months of intensive planning culminated in Wednesday's maneuvering and live-fire drills,

said 10th RSG 1st Sgt. Tennyson Grant, 39, of Los Angeles.

Their task was to relieve a unit in a front-line defensive position and engage an attacking enemy, he said. Squad leaders led things off with reconnaissance and put fire support in place, which in this case was Army Special Forces' mortar-men far from the battlefield. They would then bring their soldiers up to the line.

Pvt. Deovian Taylor, 19, a unit supply specialist from Atlanta, said the training was challenging, but she loved it.

"This is not something we do on a daily basis," she said. "This is my first time coming to the field since I'm new in the Army."

The company's executive officer, 1st Lt. Hannah Stark, 23, of Shippensburg, Pa., said all soldiers need to know these basic soldier skills.

Lawmaker: Austin bomber calls self 'psychopath' on recording

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — The suspected Austin bomber called himself a “psychopath” in a recorded confession and said he felt no remorse for deadly explosions that killed two people and terrorized the city, a U.S. congressman said Saturday.

Investigators are still looking into what motivated Mark Anthony Conditt, 23, but the recording he left on his cellphone shows that he was a “sick individual,” said Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas.

“He did refer to himself as a psychopath. He did not show any remorse — in fact, questioning himself for why he didn’t feel any remorse for what he did,” McCaul said.

Conditt makes no mention of a racial motivation on the recording, but investigators are still looking into that as a possibility, McCaul said. The first three victims were minorities.

McCaul, a former federal prosecutor who chairs the House Committee on Homeland

Security, spoke at a news conference at which he thanked law enforcement officials for bringing the three-week spree to an end. He called the investigation, which included more than 800 officers, a textbook example of how local, state and federal agencies should work together.

Beginning March 2, police said, Conditt planted bombs in different parts of Austin, killing two people and severely wounding four others. He began by placing explosives in packages left overnight on doorsteps, killing a father, Anthony Stephan House, 39, and a musician, Draylen Mason, 17, and critically injuring Esperanza Herrera, 75.

He then rigged an explosive to a tripwire along a public trail, injuring two young men who crossed it. Finally, he sent two parcels with bombs via FedEx, one of which exploded and injured a worker at a distribution center near San Antonio.

Conditt died after detonating an explosive device early

Wednesday as SWAT team officers ran toward his vehicle to arrest him in an Austin suburb. Investigators discovered a roughly 25-minute recording that Conditt had made on his cellphone allegedly confessing to the crimes.

Interim Austin police Chief Brian Manley said the department will continue withholding the recording from the public as investigators look into Conditt’s motive and whether anyone else was involved. He noted that Conditt’s two roommates have been questioned and said that several more people will be interviewed. Releasing the recording now could jeopardize any future prosecutions, although no one else has been arrested or charged, Manley said.

For days, Manley has been under fire for calling Conditt “a challenged young man” and not a terrorist. He struck a different note Saturday, saying, “The suspect in this incident reined terror on our community for almost three weeks.”

‘Mad’ man builds his own rocket, blasts off

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — He finally went up — just like the self-taught rocket scientist had always pledged he would.

He came back down in one piece, too — a little dinged up, and his steam-powered vessel a little cracked up.

Still, mission accomplished for a guy more daredevil than engineer who drew more comparisons to the cartoon character Wile E. Coyote from his critics than he did to iconic stunt man Evel Knievel.

“Mad” Mike Hughes, the rocket man who believes the Earth is flat, propelled himself about 1,875 feet into the air Saturday before a hard landing in the Mojave Desert. He told The Associated Press that outside of an aching back, he’s fine after the launch near Amboy, Calif.

“Relieved,” he said after being checked out by paramedics. “I’m tired of people saying I chickened out and didn’t build a rocket. I’m tired of that stuff. I manned up and did it.”

The launch in the desert town — about 200 miles east of Los Angeles — was originally scheduled in November. It was scrubbed several times due to logistical issues with the Bureau of Land Management and mechanical problems that kept popping up.

Hughes, 61, a limo driver, converted a mobile home into a ramp and modified it to launch from a vertical angle so he wouldn’t fall back to the ground on public land. For months, he’s been working on overhauling his rocket in his garage.

It looked like Saturday might be another in a string of cancellations, given that the wind was blowing and his rocket was losing steam. Ideally, they wanted it at 350 pounds per square inch for maximum thrust, but it was dropping to 340.

“I told Mike we could try to keep charging it up and get it hotter,” said Waldo Stakes, who’s been helping Hughes with his endeavor. “He said, ‘No.’”

Trump defends budget, points to military funds

Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Donald Trump on Sunday defended his decision to sign a \$1.3 trillion federal spending bill despite his misgivings, pointing to billions in new funding for the military and national security.

Trump said on Twitter from his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida that because of the military funding, “many jobs are created and our Military is again rich.” He said building his signature border wall “is all about National Defense.”

Since grudgingly signing the bill on Friday after threatening a veto, Trump has faced fierce criticism from conservatives who have accused him of caving to congressional Democrats. The president said Friday at the White House he was “very

disappointed” in the package, in part because it didn’t fully pay for his border wall. But Trump said he had “no choice” because the nation needed to fund the military.

Trump sought \$25 billion for his border wall, but the plan included much less — \$1.6 billion for building new sections of wall and replacing older sections. Trump tweeted Sunday that much can be done with the money, and it’s “just a down payment.”

He said the “rest of the money will come” and again reiterated that Democrats “abandoned” young immigrants seeking protections. Trump on Friday noted that the bill failed to extend protection from deportation to some 700,000 “Dreamer” immigrants due to lose coverage

under a program the president himself has tried to eliminate.

Trump’s veto threat had put him at odds with top members of his administration and Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan, who urged him to sign the bill. But prominent conservatives have criticized the massive spending plan, warning that it could add to the nation’s debt.

The president on Friday warned Congress that he would “never sign another bill like this again.” He called for the Senate to overhaul its rules to allow for simple-majority votes on all bills and urged Congress to provide him with a line-item veto power to kill specific spending items he disagrees with. The Supreme Court ruled in 1998 that a congressionally passed line-item veto was unconstitutional.

Space lab may crash to Earth on April Fools' Day

The Washington Post

When Tiangong-1 rocketed into the sky in 2011, optimists hoped the space station — literal translation: “heavenly palace” — would be a model for a permanent fixture among the stars, a space laboratory that was among humankind’s first footsteps in the Cosmos.

So, when an out-of-control Tiangong-1 comes plummeting to earth in a superheated trail of plasma and space debris, it may literally be an April Fool’s joke.

Scientists have known for more than a year that Tiangong-1 would eventually turn into a man-made meteorite after the station stopped responding to Chinese commands in 2016, according to Space.com. The lab was returning from whence it came, they were certain, but when and where was out of anyone’s control.

In recent months, scientists got better numbers. They told Spain, Portugal, France and Greece a) don’t worry too much, but b) a 19,000-pound flying laboratory might be disintegrating over your skies.

Or, in the words of fear-allaying scientists, Tiangong-1 was experiencing an “uncontrolled re-entry.”

But semantics will do nothing

to change the time of the increasingly likely disintegration date: April 1, or April Fools’ Day, according to Business Insider. Although there is some wiggle room with that date, scientists have a pretty good sense of the drama that will unfold over the next few days.

Tiangong-1 is currently spinning around our atmosphere at a speed of about 17,500 mph, taking one trip around the planet every 90 minutes. Although the air is thin in the zone where Earth’s atmosphere ends and space begins, it’s enough to slow the craft. As it loses its forward speed, gravity will begin to accelerate the craft toward Earth, and that’s literally when the fireworks start.

The friction caused by thicker air will rip off anything sticking out of the side of Tiangong-1 — solar panels, antennae. That friction will also likely surround parts of the craft in superheated plasma.

Some components nestled inside may be relatively safe.

Jonathan McDowell, an astrophysicist from Harvard University, told the Guardian pieces weighing up to 220 pounds could make it to Earth’s surface. According to the latest estimates, the parts of the lab that survive will crash into the ocean.

French police officer is hailed as a hero

The Washington Post

Arnaud Beltrame, a French police officer who willingly took the place of a hostage during a standoff with a rampaging gunman Friday in France died early Saturday from the injuries he suffered in the incident. His bravery earned him recognition as a hero in a country that has been shaken by a number of terrorist attacks over recent years.

Beltrame, 44, was a lieutenant colonel in the gendarmerie, a part of the French military that focuses on domestic policing. He had been decorated for his bravery during operations in Iraq and spent four years in the early 2000s in France’s Republican Guard, protecting the Elysee Palace in Paris.

On Saturday evening, the Elysee announced that Beltrame would receive a national honor for “giving his life to protect our fellow citizens,” according to reports in French media.

“He fell as a hero,” President Emmanuel Macron said in a statement earlier Saturday, calling on French citizens to honor Beltrame’s memory.

According to the Elysee, Beltrame had graduated from France’s top military college,

Saint-Cyr, in 1999. He was later chosen to join the gendarmerie’s elite GSGN in 2003, and he was deployed to Iraq in 2005. He was married but had no children.

It was only last year that he had been named deputy chief of the gendarmerie in France’s Aude department.

Beltrame lost his life while trying to end a standoff police had with a gunman at a supermarket.

Authorities said Radouane Lakdim, 25, hijacked a car Friday near the town of Carcassonne, in Aude, killing a passenger and wounding the driver. In the nearby town of Trebes, the gunman then stormed into a supermarket and took hostages.

Beltrame was one of the first officers to respond, authorities said. Police negotiated with Lakdim to release the hostages, and Beltrame offered himself in place of the final one. Inside the supermarket, Beltrame tried to negotiate with Lakdim. He left his cellphone active on a table to allow authorities to listen in. When police heard gunshots, they stormed the building and shot Lakdim, killing him.

Three other people were killed and several more were injured during Lakdim’s rampage.

Passengers plead with sleepy driver to pull bus over

The Washington Post

At some point on the 20-plus-hour bus trip between Phoenix and Dallas, passengers’ attention turned from the scenery to what was going on in the driver’s seat.

“The bus was leaning a little bit,” Philip Hurd told CBS-11 on Thursday after he and nearly four dozen others had reached the safety of the downtown Dallas Greyhound terminal.

Hurd swayed back and forth, imitating the bus. “That’s when people really started to get, you know, worried.”

Only the driver seemed unconcerned by her driving, passengers told the station.

“We saw her going like this, and just dozing off,” Jasmine McClellan said, sinking her head and then jerking it up. “I politely asked her four times to pull over.”

As the bus sped and wobbled toward Dallas, McClellan said, politeness eventually had to go out the window.

“It got to the point we had to raise our voice. ‘Pull over! We have children on this bus!’” she said. “She’d be going over the white line, and everyone would be like, ‘Wake up!’”

Instead of pulling over, McClellan said, the driver tried to ward off sleep by jabbing herself in the face with a pair of tweezers.

Finally, what CBS called a “mutiny” took place on the Greyhound. It was partially captured on video.

A man got out of his seat and stood directly behind the driver, clapping his hands above her head as he screamed: “You should have stopped when you were swerving! You should have stopped when you were swerving!”

The man told the driver to report her exhaustion. “Call them,” he said. “Call them right now!”

“Our drivers are in regular contact with our dispatch office,” a Greyhound spokeswoman wrote in a statement, “and if they state they are feeling tired or fatigued, they are immediately removed from the schedule for at least 12 hours to allow them to get some rest.”

The spokeswoman added that Greyhound has opened an internal investigation into the allegations and temporarily grounded the driver, who eventually relinquished control of the bus.

Passengers told CBS-11 that Border Patrol agents finally escorted the bus off the road, where Greyhound found someone else to drive them to Dallas — several hours late but safe.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man pleads guilty over extortion of women

NY HAUPPAUGE — Prosecutors have announced a guilty plea in the case of a New York man accused of trying to extort sexually explicit photos from more than 30 women.

Suffolk County District Attorney Timothy Sini said Joseph Iorio, 21, of Holtsville, pleaded guilty Friday to stalking and scheming to defraud.

Sini said Iorio was a moderator of an online forum where users would upload nude images of women along with their identifying information.

The district attorney said Iorio was able to find the women on social media and attempted to extort them for additional explicit photos and videos.

Hiker rescued after father calls sheriff

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Authorities rescued a 26-year-old who broke his leg in an Emery County canyon thanks to a call from his father.

The Deseret News reported that Brigham Holladay said he made sure to tell others where he was going before heading to the trail Tuesday afternoon. His father called the sheriff's office about midnight after not hearing back from his son.

Holladay was found roughly 2 miles from the trailhead of the Ding and Dang Slot Canyons near Green River.

He said he had attempted to jump down into a drop on the canyon floor and he broke his fibula.

Unticketed officer stops are halted

MS STARKVILLE — A Mississippi police chief said his officers will stop

following what he called an “unwritten rule” that gives fellow law enforcement officers a break not offered to civilians suspected of driving under the influence.

Starkville Police Chief Frank Nichols made the announcement Thursday after his department decided not to ticket a drunken Columbus police officer during a traffic stop. He called that a bad judgment call.

News outlets reported that a Starkville police officer pulled over a part-time Columbus officer on March 9 after he was seen swerving between lanes. A breath test showed the presence of alcohol, but no ticket was issued.

Police: Mom slapped man over crying baby

SC ROCK HILL — Authorities said the mother of a baby was charged with assault after hitting a man in the face in a South Carolina restaurant when he complained that her baby had been crying for 30 minutes.

Rock Hill Police said they were called to Luke's restaurant about 7:30 p.m. Tuesday after Shacoya Long, 25, was cursing after employees and a man complained about the crying infant.

The report said Long is charged with third-degree assault and battery.

Drive-thru prayers set for Good Friday

LA NEW ORLEANS — A Louisiana church is gearing up drive-thru prayers on Good Friday, when its pastor and volunteers gather on the church's long, circular driveway.

The Rev. Robert Johnson said he got the idea four years ago as he watched traffic pass Louisiana Avenue United Methodist Church in Lafayette.

From 8 a.m. to noon on Friday, some volunteers will hold signs advertising “free prayers” while others bring coffee and doughnuts to cars or pray with drivers and passengers.

German gets 33 years in prison in arsons

CA LOS ANGELES — A German man was sentenced to 33 years in prison for setting fire to cars and homes over several nights in Los Angeles to avenge his mother's deportation.

Harry Burkhardt was sentenced in Los Angeles Superior Court on Friday after being found guilty of 49 arson charges in 2016. Burkhardt used an insanity defense, but a jury found him sane.

Burkhardt, 30, set small fires that spread fear in Hollywood, West Hollywood and the San Fernando Valley between Dec. 30, 2011 and Jan. 2, 2012. There were no serious injuries but damage was estimated at more than \$3 million.

Prosecutors said Burkhardt threatened to “roast America” after his mother, Dorothee Burkhardt, was ordered extradited to Germany to face fraud charges.

Ex-doctor convicted in murder-for-hire plot

TX HOUSTON — A jury found a former Houston medical resident guilty of capital murder solicitation in a plot to arrange the deaths of his ex-girlfriend and his new girlfriend's ex-husband.

The Harris County jury in Houston deliberated just over an hour before returning its verdict on Leon Philip Jacob, 40. He could be sentenced to life imprisonment.

His girlfriend, Houston veterinarian Valerie Busick McDaniel, 48, also was charged

with capital murder solicitation. However, she leaped to her death from her seventh-floor condominium a year ago while free on bond.

Jurors heard evidence on how Jacob and McDaniel hired an undercover police officer posing as a hit man.

Man admits tax fraud scheme run from jail

CO DENVER — A suburban Denver man acknowledged his role in a tax fraud scheme in which he, his mother and his girlfriend filed false income tax returns while he was in prison.

The Denver Post reported Friday that Jaquon Mucsarney, 36, of Aurora, pleaded guilty to felony fraud and identity theft charges and is scheduled to be sentenced in June.

Prosecutors said Mucsarney was the mastermind of a scheme in which he and the two women set up fictitious companies through the Georgia Secretary of State's Office and filed false corporate income tax returns between 2010 and 2015. They set up bank accounts for 50 shell companies that existed only on paper.

Library's archivists scan 1 millionth item

OH COLUMBUS — The library system in Ohio's capital city said archivists have scanned the 1 millionth item into the system's digital collection.

The Columbus Metropolitan Library said the item is a panorama photograph taken from the cupola atop the Ohio Statehouse. The library estimates the picture is one of the oldest panoramas in Columbus, likely taken in 1858.

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Surprising Loyola reaches Final Four

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Porter Moser stood in front of the scarf-clad Loyola cheering section, a bit dazed but beaming from ear to ear.

"Are you kidding me! Are you kidding me!" the Ramblers coach screamed over and over.

No kidding.

Loyola is headed to the Final Four.

An improbable NCAA Tournament took its craziest turn yet Saturday night, when Ben Richardson scored a career-high 23 points and the 11th-seeded Ramblers romped to a 78-62 victory over Kansas State to cap off a stunning run through the bracket-busting South Regional.

The Ramblers (32-5) matched the lowest-seeded team ever to reach the Final Four, joining LSU (1986), George Mason (2006) and VCU (2011). Those other three all lost in the national semifinals.

Don't bet against Loyola, which emerged from a regional that produced a staggering array of upsets. The South became the first regional in tournament history to have the top four seeds — including overall

No. 1 Virginia — knocked out on the opening weekend.

In the end, it was the Ramblers cutting down the nets.

After three close calls, this one was downright easy.

"We believed that we could do something like this — do something really special — because we knew we had such good chemistry and we've got such a good group," said Richardson, who was named MVP of the regional. "Everyone would say we were crazy. If we said this was going to happen, people would call us crazy, but you've just got to believe."

No one believes more than their 98-year-old team chaplain, Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt, who led a prayer in the locker room before the game. When it was done, she was pushed onto the confetti-covered court in her wheelchair to join the celebration.

Sister Jean donned a Final Four cap — she even turned it around backward, just to show she's hip to the kids — and gave a gleeful thumbs-up.

She's already looking forward to a bigger game next weekend.

"I'm going to San Antonio," she said. "That's going to be

great."

Also joining the celebration were several players from the Ramblers' 1963 national championship team, which played one of the most socially significant games in college basketball history on its way to the title. It was known as the "Game of Change," matching the Ramblers and their mostly black roster against an all-white Mississippi State team at the height of the civil rights movement, setting up an even more noteworthy contest three years later when Texas Western, with five African-American starters, defeated Kentucky in the national championship game.

Les Hunter, a member of that '63 team, said these Ramblers are capable of bringing home another title.

"I think they're the best right now," Hunter said. "They work so well together. They can play with anybody — anybody — right now."

Even with a title on its resume, this Loyola performance came out of nowhere. The Ramblers had not made the tournament since 1985 until they broke the drought by winning the Missouri Valley Conference.

Then, as if benefiting from

some sort of divine intervention, the Ramblers won their first three tournament games by a total of four points.

Finally, with the Final Four on the line, they turned in a thoroughly dominating performance against the ninth-seeded Wildcats (25-12), the other half of the first 9-vs.-11 matchup in tournament history.

Not the least bit intimidated, Loyola came out in attack mode right from the start against a Kansas State team that rode a stifling defense to the regional final. Moving the ball just as you'd expect from a veteran squad with two seniors and two fourth-year juniors in the starting lineup, the Ramblers kept getting open looks and bolted to a 36-24 halftime lead.

"They jumped out to that big lead and it was tough for us to come back," said Xavier Sneed, who led Kansas State with 16 points. "They kept their foot on the gas."

The Ramblers shot 57 percent against a team that is used to shutting opponents down, including 9 of 18 from three-point range.

Kansas State hit just 35 percent from the field — 6 of 26 beyond the arc.

Michigan tops FSU for spot in San Antonio

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Moe Wagner climbed the ladder, snipped the final strand and whipped the net around his head while thousands of Michigan's West Coast fans roared.

The Wolverines hadn't caused much disturbance to those nets at Staples Center during the West Region final. They also knew it didn't matter, because Florida State troubled the twine even less.

When shots aren't falling, Michigan knows it can rely on defense, discipline and tenacity. And by doing all the hard things, the Wolverines muscled their way to the Final Four.

Charles Matthews scored 17 points and Michigan earned

its first Final Four berth since 2013 with a 58-54 victory over the Seminoles on Saturday night.

"I've never seen a team work so hard and be so connected on both ends of the floor," Michigan coach John Beilein said. "Even when things do not go right on the offensive end, they were exceptional on defense."

Wagner added 12 points as the Wolverines (32-7) earned their 13th consecutive victory by persevering through a defense-dominated second half despite shooting 4-for-22 from 3-point range.

After taking a 10-point lead on Duncan Robinson's 3-pointer with 2:26 to play, Michigan's lead dwindled to three before P.J. Savoy missed a potential

tying three-pointer for Florida State with 58 seconds left. The Wolverines held off a late charge from the Seminoles (23-12), who had already knocked off three higher-seeded opponents on their school's longest NCAA Tournament run since 1993.

"We take pride in our defense, so we believe in ourselves," said Michigan guard Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rakhman, who scored nine points on 3-for-9 shooting. "We knew we had to get stops. We weren't making free throws. That comes with the game sometimes. We just had to continue to get stops."

With tenacious defense and just enough made free throws down the stretch, Michigan hung on and advanced to San

Antonio, Texas, next weekend to face the underdog heroes of Loyola-Chicago (32-5), who stunned the sport by winning the South Region.

The third-seeded Wolverines are much less of a surprise, but the achievement is no less impressive for Beilein's squad, which wore its "Do More, Say Less" shirts throughout the week.

Michigan let its fans do the talking. The Wolverines had a distinct home-court advantage from thousands of vocal fans packed into the lower bowl of the Lakers' and Clippers' home arena, and they seemed to need all of those cheers to survive an off shooting night.

"I felt like we were in Ann Arbor," Beilein said.

Women's NCAA Tournament roundup

All four No. 1 seeds make Elite Eight

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — It was a good day for the top seeds in the women's NCAA Tournament.

No. 1 seeds UConn and Notre Dame reached the Elite Eight, joining Louisville and Mississippi State, which advanced on Friday. The Huskies will face defending champion South Carolina and the Irish will play Oregon on Monday in matchups of the top two seeds in the Albany and Spokane regions.

It's been rare that UConn has played against the defending national champion in the past two decades. Then again, the Huskies have been the champ 10 times since they played Tennessee in 1997.

"You can't waste a lot of time worrying about the other team because until today we didn't know who the other team was going to be, so you concentrate more on you being ready. At this time of year, you say to yourself: 'What's South Carolina going to do that we haven't seen yet this year?'" UConn coach Geno Auriemma said. "And the same thing with them. We're not going to do something that they're going to say, 'This takes us completely by surprise.' You just want to make sure that you're going to do the things that you're good at, and then whatever happens after that happens."

"Just because you're ready for something doesn't mean you're going to be able to handle it great."

Both UConn and South Carolina got strong efforts from their seniors to advance to the regional finals Monday night.

Gabby Williams and Kia Nurse played solid defense, holding Duke's talented backcourt of Lexie Brown and Rebecca Greenwell to just 16 points — nearly 18 below their average.

"We're fortunate that our two seniors are two of the better defensive players in the country," Auriemma said. "We can count

on those two every game. Gabby's going to play great every game. She plays at a certain level every game. Kia's one of the toughest competitors we've had at Connecticut."

Wilson had 20 points and 13 rebounds to help the Gamecocks beat a plucky Buffalo squad.

"I just feel like my energy really helps my teammates," Wilson said. "That's the biggest thing. That's my goal, whether it's screaming at one or just screaming at everyone. That's just how I operate. I really try to use that on every possession."

Notre Dame got a solid shooting effort from Marina Mabrey, who set the school's tournament record with seven three-pointers in a win over Texas A&M.

"I think a few times in transition, they might have mixed up some players. Got some shots there," Mabrey said.

The Irish advanced to the Elite Eight for the seventh time in nine seasons.

Albany Regional

UConn 72, Duke 59: Napheesa Collier had 16 points and 11 rebounds to help the overall top-seeded Huskies advance to the regional finals for the 13th consecutive season. UConn will try to advance to a record 11th straight Final Four.

"Last time we played them we got out to an early run so I don't think any of us are expecting it to be easy (Monday)," said Williams, who had 15 points, seven rebounds and six assists. "A'ja (Wilson) doesn't want her college career to be over on Monday. We know they are going to put up a fight and it will be a battle."

Connecticut scored the first seven points of the game beginning with a banked-in three-pointer from Nurse and they were off and running.

Fifth-seed Duke (24-9) had only given up an average of 49 points in its first two games of the tournament. UConn had that

by the end of the third quarter, much to the delight of the partisan crowd of 10,658 that took in the Albany Regional.

The Blue Devils were only down seven early in the second quarter when they went cold from the field, going scoreless over the next 5½ minutes. UConn extended its advantage to 30-16.

South Carolina 79, Buffalo 63: That the upstate New York crowd wasn't rooting for South Carolina didn't matter one bit to Wilson. Her imposing presence inside and her booming voice proved enough for the Gamecocks to escape Buffalo.

The 6-foot-5 Wilson, the consensus first pick in the next WNBA draft, had 20 points and 13 rebounds, Alexis Jennings added 20 points, and South Carolina held off the upstart Bulls.

"I just feel like my energy really helps my teammates," Wilson said. "That's the biggest thing. That's my goal, whether it's screaming at one or just screaming at everyone. That's just how I operate. I really try to use that on every possession."

"We have to let each other know that everything's going to be OK."

The Gamecocks led 55-48 entering the fourth quarter, and the Bulls stayed with them. A layup by Autumn Jones cut the lead to five, but after South Carolina committed a turnover, Buffalo center Cassie Oursler lost the ball out of bounds, the ball gently rolling off her fingertips under the basket at the other end, a critical miscue.

Wilson's three-point play gave the Gamecocks a 60-52 lead before Cierra Dillard's driving layup off the glass with 6:38 left cut the deficit again. But Buffalo missed three straight shots and a fast-break layup by Doniyah Cliney gave South Carolina a 10-point lead with just over five minutes to go.

South Carolina's dominance

inside against the smaller Bulls spelled the difference. The Gamecocks outrebounded Buffalo 48-21, outscored the Bulls 20-5 on second-chance points, and finished with a 52-30 edge in the paint.

"We just did what we do best," Jennings said.

Spokane Regional

Notre Dame 90, Texas A&M 84: Muffet McGraw checked through the list of all the things the Irish did poorly early on. Bad shot selection. Lack of rebounding. Not enough stops on defense.

"We got down big. We've been down in other games. We feel like we are poised and can come back," McGraw said.

The Irish (32-3) rallied from a 13-point first-half deficit and are back in their familiar spot of playing for a trip to the Final Four. They will face No. 2 seed Oregon in the regional final on Monday.

Arike Ogunbowale scored 17 of her 27 points in the second half and Marina Mabrey added 25, hitting a career-high seven three-pointers.

Oregon 83, Central Michigan 69: Oregon's run to the Elite Eight last season was a delightful surprise. This year, the Ducks made it with a more businesslike attitude.

Asked if the team was elated to be returning to the regional finals after beating Central Michigan, guard Sabrina Ionescu replied: "Define elation."

"We have high expectations of ourselves," she said.

Ionescu just missed another triple-double with 16 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds for second-seeded Oregon, which jumped on No. 11 seed Central Michigan early in their Spokane Region semifinal and never really let up.

Ruthy Hebard had 23 points and 14 rebounds.

NBA roundup

Rockets set record for franchise wins

Associated Press

HOUSTON — James Harden is certain the Houston Rockets won't let up in their last nine regular-season games despite holding a 4½ game lead over Golden State for the top seed in the Western Conference.

"The edge is going to be there no matter what," he said. "We haven't done anything. We don't have time to relax."

Harden scored 27 points in three quarters and the Rockets routed the New Orleans Pelicans 114-91 on Saturday night for their eighth straight victory.

The NBA-leading Rockets improved to 59-14 to overtake the 1993-94 championship team for the most wins in franchise history.

"It was just another win," Eric

Gordon said. "We have high expectations for one another."

Houston never trailed and already had a huge lead to start the fourth before scoring seven straight points early in the period to make it 92-63 with 10 minutes remaining. Clint Capela had four points and a steal to lead Houston in that stretch. Capela finished with 18 points, 16 rebounds, three steals and tied a career high with six blocks.

The Pelicans, who were playing their fifth game in seven days, finally ran out of gas, and looked worn out from the start. Entering Saturday's game they had played on three consecutive nights from Tuesday-Thursday because of a rescheduled game and won all of them to extend their winning streak to four in a row.

"I don't want to use that as an excuse," coach Alvin Gentry said. "I do think we were a little tired and we got off to a rough start and this is not a team you want to get off to a rough start with."

Anthony Davis, who also sat out the fourth quarter with the game out of reach, led New Orleans with 25 points and had eight rebounds and four blocks.

76ers 120, Timberwolves 108: Ben Simmons had a triple-double, Joel Embiid dazzled while getting the better of Karl-Anthony Towns, and host Philadelphia inched closer to its first playoff berth in six years.

Simmons had 15 points, 12 rebounds and 13 assists for the 10th triple-double of his rookie season. Embiid scored 19 points, and had a left-handed

block of Towns, a three-pointer and a windmill dunk in the Sixers' 20-4 run to start the third quarter.

Pistons 117, Bulls 95: Anthony Tolliver scored 25 points, and host Detroit made 13 three-pointers in the first half to rout Chicago.

Hornets 102, Mavericks 98: Dwight Howard had 23 rebounds and 18 points to cap an eventful four days and Charlotte held off host Dallas for its third straight victory.

Lakers 100, Grizzlies 93: Kyle Kuzma scored 15 of his 25 points in the fourth quarter and had 10 rebounds, and Los Angeles overcame a slow start to beat host Memphis.

Magic 105, Suns 99: Aaron Gordon had 29 points and 11 rebounds in host Orlando's victory.

NHL roundup

Landeskog, Avs top Knights in shootout

Associated Press

DENVER — The game had a postseason intensity. So Gabriel Landeskog brought out his best shot — even if he might've had his eyes closed when he took it.

A capacity crowd certainly let him know the result.

The Colorado captain beat Marc Andre-Fleury with a nifty move in the shootout and the Avalanche kept expansion Vegas from clinching a playoff spot on their home ice by beating the Golden Knights 2-1 on Saturday.

"It was a lot of fun and the crowd was incredible," said Landeskog, who explained that on his winning tally he came in from an angle on Fleury, cut toward the middle and shot the puck with his eyes shut. "[Fleury] made some nice saves on me during the game. It was nice to get that one back."

Semyon Varlamov stopped all three shots in the shootout. He finished with 39 saves, including seven in overtime.

Carl Soderberg was back on the ice after missing two games with an illness and contributed with a first-period goal. Colorado remains in the thick of the playoff picture as

the team picked up its 26th home win, tied for the third-most in Avalanche history.

The Pacific Division-leading Golden Knights are on the doorstep of earning their playoff spot. They were kept in this game thanks to the play of Fleury, who was back in the net after sustaining an undisclosed injury Tuesday. Fleury made 29 saves.

Devils 2, Lightning 1: Keith Kinkaid made 35 saves and host New Jersey took another major step toward making the playoffs for the first time since 2012 with a victory over Tampa Bay.

Capitals 6, Canadiens 4: Evgeny Kuznetsov and Tom Wilson each scored twice and Nicklas Backstrom had four assists as visiting Washington beat Montreal.

Panthers 4, Coyotes 2: Denis Malgin snapped a tie with 3:45 left and host Florida overcame a two-goal deficit by scoring four times in the third period to rally.

Rangers 5, Sabres 1: Jimmy Vesey had two goals and an assist, Alexandar Georgiev stopped 43 shots, and host New York completed a sweep of the teams' three-game season series.

Blackhawks 3, Islanders 1: Anton Forsberg stopped 30 shots and Patrick Kane and Brandon Saad scored in the second period to help visiting Chicago snap a five-game losing streak.

Sharks 5, Flames 1: Evander Kane scored twice, and host San Jose won its seventh straight.

Hurricanes 5, Senators 2: Phillip Di Giuseppe and Jordan Staal each had a goal and assist to lead visiting Carolina.

Maple Leafs 4, Red Wings 3: Nazem Kadri scored with 7:26 left in regulation, helping Toronto extend its club-record home winning streak to 13 games with a victory over Detroit.

Blues 2, Blue Jackets 1: Jake Allen made 33 saves, Alexander Steen scored on St. Louis' first shot of the game, and the visiting Blues stopped Columbus' 10-game winning streak.

Wild 4, Predators 1: Devan Dubnyk stopped 19 shots and Jason Zucker scored his 30th goal and added an assist to lead host Minnesota past Nashville.

Oilers 3, Kings 2: Connor McDavid had two goals to take over the NHL scoring lead, and host Edmonton held off L.A.