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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Pentagon considering overhaul to onerous training requirements

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

KANDAHAR AIR FIELD, Afghanistan — Military leaders have said they're overwhelmed by unnecessary training requirements, but seasoned officers at this airfield in southern Afghanistan said they see signs of a turnaround as the Pentagon looks to streamline military policies.

To illustrate the excesses, a group of Army chief warrant officers listed some of the 23 mandatory computer-based modules they had to do before deploying here to train Afghan helicopter pilots. None had anything to do with their jobs as advisers, they said.

Standing on the flight line, the four officers said they're required to submit three times as many forms to request leave back home as they do to fly an MD-530 Cayuse Warrior attack helicopter over this largely Taliban-controlled Afghan province.

It's all part of a slew of bureaucratic demands many say has gotten out of control, in some cases affecting unit readiness and contributing to widespread dishonesty as officials "fudge" compliance reports. Now the Trump administration is seeking to lighten the load.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis announced a review of personnel policies, professional military education and training last summer to refocus the military on combat effectiveness. In January, the National Defense Strategy called out professional military education as stagnant.

Decisions have not yet been

made on reforms aimed at honing training and education, a Pentagon official said last week.

In Kandahar, Chief Warrant Officer 3 John Cornetto, who deployed here in January, said he's already seen things "turning around," with less micromanaging and greater decision-making authority at lower levels. Soldiers already are hopeful about a renewed focus on combat, he said.

"What you see is the morale ... is greatly improved because we're finally able to do our jobs properly," said Cornetto, a Pennsylvania National Guardsman with nearly 21 years in the military.

The abundance of mandates was hampering operations, he said. He knew of helicopter crew chiefs getting just 12 hours per week to do their actual jobs. However, room for improvement remains, he said.

"You can't go out on missions until your sexual harassment training's complete or your cyberawareness training's complete," Cornetto said as an example. "Then you have to sit through that class, and they're just painful."

Part of the agony is that the class content doesn't change from year to year, said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Justin Watts, of the Hawaii-based 25th Combat Aviation Brigade, also deployed to Kandahar.

"It's one thing to do it once," he said. "It's another thing to insult someone's intelligence by telling them the same thing every year. I get it, don't put a random CD (in a government computer)."

US boots 60 Russian diplomats in wake of attack on ex-spy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. and more than a dozen European nations kicked out Russian diplomats on Monday and the Trump administration ordered Russia's consulate in Seattle to close as the West sought joint punishment for Moscow's suspected role in the poisoning of an ex-spy in Britain.

Warning of an "unacceptably high" number of Russian spies in the U.S., the Trump administration said 60 diplomats would be expelled — all Russian intelligence agents working under diplomatic cover, the U.S. said. The group includes a dozen posted to Russia's mission to the United Nations who the officials said were engaged in "aggressive collection" of intelligence on American soil.

The move was one of the most significant actions President Donald Trump's administration has taken to date to push back on Moscow and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Less than a week ago, Trump congratulated Putin by phone for his reelection but didn't raise the spy case, renewing questions about whether the U.S. president is too soft on the Kremlin.

The American penalties were echoed by announcements in European capitals across the continent, including those in Russia's backyard.

Fourteen European Union nations were expelling Russian diplomats, EU chief Donald Tusk said, with more likely to follow. An EU official put the total from those countries at

more than 30 Russians. Germany, Poland and France each planned to boot four, the Czech Republic three and Italy two.

Ukraine, a non-EU country with its own conflicts with Moscow, was expelling 13 Russians, President Petro Poroshenko said. All three Baltic states said they would kick diplomats out. Canada, too, said it was taking action, kicking out four and denying three who have applied to enter the country.

Almost all of the countries said publicly that the Russian diplomats they were expelling were actually spies.

The expulsions came with a chorus of condemnation for the Kremlin — for the poisoning, Russian spying and other Western grievances. Poland's Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz called it "the right response to the unfriendly, aggressive actions of Russia." In the Czech Republic, where Russian officials have claimed the poison may have originated, Prime Minister Andrej Babis dismissed that allegation as "an utter lie."

"The United States and many of our friends are sending a clear message that we will not stand for Russia's misconduct," said U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley, Trump's envoy to the U.N.

Russia's Embassy in Washington responded to the decisions on Twitter by hinting at retaliation, asking its followers to vote which U.S. consulate should be shuttered: St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg or Vladivostok.

Videos cast doubt on Saudi missile defense claims

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — As with nearly every ballistic missile launched by Yemen's Shiite rebels targeting Saudi Arabia, the kingdom overnight said it intercepted all seven fired — but online videos raise new questions about those claims.

One video appears to show a Patriot missile launch Sunday night going rapidly wrong, with the missile changing course in midair, crashing into a neighborhood in Riyadh and exploding. Another appears to detonate shortly after being launched in the Saudi capital.

Saudi Arabia's Information Ministry did not respond to requests for comment Monday from The Associated Press. However, the videos appear to show the kingdom overstating the capability of the missile defense system, a tradition dating back to the 1991 Gulf War.

Saudi Arabia says it has been targeted by some 90 ballistic missile launched by Yemen's Shiite rebels, known as Houthis, and their allies since launching a war against them three years ago.

Sunday night's launch saw one Egyptian killed and two others wounded in Riyadh by a missile fragment, marking the first casualties in the Saudi capital since the war began. Rockets fired by the Yemeni rebels have caused deaths in other parts of the kingdom.

IG: DOD can't track \$3.1B given to Afghanistan forces

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — U.S. military officials failed to properly track some 95,000 vehicles provided to Afghan forces or to ensure millions of dollars of gasoline and other commodities were used for their intended purposes, according to a Pentagon watchdog.

In all, the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, or CSTC-A, cannot definitively account for \$3.1 billion of U.S. taxpayer money that it provided the Afghan government from 2014 to 2017 to aid the Afghan army and national police, the Defense Department's Inspector General found, according a report released last week. The lack of accountability leaves the funds vulnerable to "fraud, waste and abuse," the IG reported.

"CSTC-A officials did not effectively manage and oversee the U.S. direct funding provided to the Ministries of Defense and Interior, which oversee Afghanistan's Army and National Police, respectively," the report stated. "CSTC-A management and oversight of the direct funding is intended to increase [Afghan security forces] effectiveness and capabilities so the [forces] can become more professional and increasingly self-sustaining."

Officials from the command, which is

charged with funding and training Afghan forces, largely blamed "inadequate staffing and security concerns" for any shortcomings. However, the IG found systemic issues also were to blame.

CSTC-A officials established unrealistic and unattainable goals for the Afghans to improve their own capabilities toward achieving independence in supplying their own troops, the IG also found.

The Afghan government has remained reliant on the U.S. to furnish its supplies because U.S. officials have not provided adequate training, according to the report.

The report also stated CSTC-A officials have not enforced penalties within U.S. agreements with the Afghan government. Penalties include levying fines when terms and conditions of contracts, such as providing detailed logs of vehicle maintenance and fuel consumption data, are not met.

For example, Afghan officials only provided CSTC-A fuel consumption reports for the Afghan army when directly requested by the U.S., though contracts require bi-weekly reports. The IG concluded the U.S. cannot be certain that at least \$174 million worth of fuel was used properly.

CSTC-A also cannot properly track the status of some 95,000 vehicles that the U.S. has given the Afghans because officials did not properly inventory the types and quantities of vehicles provided.

'Biggest restructuring' is planned for Japan's military

By MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force will undergo a sweeping reorganization this week designed to improve responses to natural disasters and incursions from countries like China.

The Ground Component Command, which the service plans to establish Tuesday, will liaise with the Joint Staff Office and oversee the operations of all JGSDF brigades and divisions across the country, Japan's Yomiuri newspaper reported.

The Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade, also expected to be formed Tuesday, will be responsible for retaking remote islands should they be seized by a foreign military.

The shakeup is the "biggest restructuring" of the JGSDF — the only service branch without a central command serving as a "gateway" for the JSO — since its formation in 1954, the newspaper said.

Plans call for the GCC to be staffed by approximately 180 personnel and headquartered at Camp Asaka on the northwestern outskirts of Tokyo, Yomiuri reported. It will take command of the JGSDF's five regional armies — northern, northeastern, eastern, middle and western — in the event of an incident and carry out the JSO's orders. These armies now operate independently under their own commanding generals.

The amphibious brigade — modeled after the U.S. Marine Corps — will have roughly 2,100 personnel and be based at Camp Aino, northwest of Sasebo Naval Base in Nagasaki prefecture, Yomiuri reported.

Some of these troops, which have been observing and training with U.S. Marines for several years, could deploy to Okinawa in the early 2020s — possibly even sharing Camp Hansen, Japan's Asahi newspaper reported in October.

Also, two of the JGSDF's 15 divisions and brigades will be transformed into rapid deployment divisions and brigades with hopes that they, too, can be quickly deployed outside their regional commands, the report said. The JGSDF hopes to eventually transform eight divisions and brigades into rapid deployment units.

U.S. Forces Japan officials did not immediately respond Monday to requests for comment about what the reorganization means for the U.S. military, which has a security treaty with Japan and keeps about 50,000 troops stationed across the nation.

UN official: ISIS shift could spur migrant crisis

Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia — The head of the United Nations food agency warned Monday that the relocation of Islamic State members from the Middle East to Africa could trigger a massive, new migrant crisis in Europe.

David Beasley, executive director of the World Food Program, said many of the militants who fled Syria amid the collapse of ISIS' self-described caliphate had ended up in the greater Sahel region, a belt of semi-arid land spanning east-west across Africa and home to 500 million people.

ISIS militants are now collaborating with other extremist groups, including al-Qaida, al-Shabab and Boko Haram, to create "extraordinary difficulties" across the Sahel, Beasley said in an interview with The Associated Press.

He said he has warned European leaders that they could face a far larger migrant crisis from the Sahel than the Syrian conflict generated if they do not help provide the region with food and stability.

"You're talking about the greater Sahel region of 500 million people, so the Syria crisis could be like a drop in the bucket compared to what's coming your way," Beasley said he told them.

"What they're now doing is coming into an already fragile area, a very destabilized area because of climate impact and governance, and they're infiltrating, recruiting, using food as a weapon of recruitment to destabilize so that they can have mass migration into Europe," he said.

"Mother after mother will tell you that 'my husband did not want to join ISIS or al-Qaida, but we had no food,' and if you haven't fed your little girl or little boy in two weeks and the alternative is signing up with ISIS, you sign up," Beasley added.

The World Food Program wants to provide stability, economic growth and sustainable development as well as food to the region, said Beasley, who was in Australia for talks with the government on funding strategies.

The Sahel — which includes Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Mali and Mauritania — is vulnerable to droughts and floods and faces constant food insecurity.

Five nations also have been grappling with a growing menace from extremists, including groups linked to al-Qaida's North Africa branch.

In February 2017, the so-called "Group of Five" agreed to assemble a 5,000-strong force to combat extremist groups, organized crime and human trafficking.

DOD: Reports of US leaving Incirlik, Al Udeid bases false

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTT GART, Germany — The U.S. military denied news reports that it was preparing to abandon bases in Qatar and Turkey after issuing a flurry of Twitter posts from multiple commands Sunday.

The information appears to have been posted initially by DEBKAFfiles, an Israeli military and security news website. The news got picked up by various outlets in the Middle East and made the front page of a newspaper in Bahrain.

By Sunday afternoon, U.S. Central Command took to Twitter.

"The U.S. is not leaving Incirlik Air Base in Turkey, nor is the U.S. leaving Al Udeid AB, Qatar. These reports are false and without merit," CENTCOM said.

The Pentagon, U.S. European Command and other commands followed suit, issuing similar denials in what could be a sign of a more coordinated effort by the military to counter what it sees as false news.

"There is zero credibility to news reports asserting the U.S. is leaving Incirlik and Al

Udeid AB in Turkey and Qatar," Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White tweeted Sunday. "These reports are unhelpful and feed mistrust and division among regional partners at a time when we need to work together to address shared security concerns."

Along NATO's southern flank in Turkey and across the Persian Gulf, the future of America's bases in the region has long been a source of speculation.

With Washington and Ankara increasingly at odds over the conflict in Syria, the durability of their alliance has been called into question, as has future U.S. access to Incirlik. Meanwhile, Qatar's political isolation by other Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, has put a spotlight on U.S. operations at the Al-Udeid base.

During the past couple of years, the military has talked about the need to get more aggressive in responding to misinformation campaigns. Much of the focus has been on Russia and its state-controlled media outlets.

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US strikes al-Qaida targets in Libya

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTT GART, Germany — The U.S. military has launched its first airstrikes against al-Qaida in Libya as operations expand beyond targeting Islamic State.

"The United States will not relent in its mission to degrade, disrupt, and destroy terrorist organizations and bring stability to the region," U.S. Africa Command said in a statement on Monday.

The strikes on Saturday were launched near the remote Saharan desert town of Ubari, long a crossroads for bandits, various tribal groups, traffickers and militants.

Until now, AFRICOM has focused its military efforts in the north around the coastal city of Sirte. In 2016, about 500 airstrikes were carried out during a four-month campaign to dislodge ISIS from the town. The airstrikes were coordinated with forces on the ground aligned with the Libyan government.

Some fighters managed to flee, and AFRICOM has continued to carry out occasional strikes in other parts of the country.

But the attack in Ubari is the first known strike that reached deep into Libya's iso-

lated southwestern region, a place where al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb has long maneuvered between borders with Niger and Algeria.

"These terrorists have used safe havens and freedom of movement in Libya to launch external terror attacks into neighboring countries," AFRICOM said.

The command did not say if there were signs al-Qaida affiliates are gaining in strength in the region, a development that potentially could prompt an escalation of U.S. operations.

The Saturday strikes come as AFRICOM adds capabilities to carry out surveillance operations and possible strikes in the broader Sahel region. In the central Niger city of Agadez, the U.S. military is developing a new drone site that will extend its reach into southern Libya.

The base is expected to be operational later this year. The Nigerien government authorized the armed drone flights in the wake of an October ambush that killed four U.S. soldiers.

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Porn star details alleged Trump encounter

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Adult film star Stormy Daniels says she was threatened to keep silent about an alleged sexual encounter with Donald Trump in 2006, telling her story in a highly anticipated interview with CBS' "60 Minutes" broadcast Sunday.

Daniels said she was threatened by an unidentified man in Las Vegas to keep quiet about her alleged relationship with Trump; it was an incident that she said happened while she was with her young daughter. She said in the interview that she had one encounter of consensual sex with the future president.

"He knows I'm telling the truth," said Daniels, whose legal name is Stephanie Clifford. She

does not allege that she was coerced in her encounter with Trump, saying, "This is not a 'MeToo.' I was not a victim."

The adult film actress provided little new evidence of her alleged 2006 affair with Trump but said she faced intimidation tactics aimed at ensuring her silence in 2011.

Daniels said that in the incident, in a parking lot, the man told her: "Leave Trump alone. Forget the story." She said he then looked at her daughter and said, "That's a beautiful little girl. It'd be a shame if something happened to her mom."

Daniels received a \$130,000 payment days before the 2016 presidential election for her silence and has sought to invalidate a nondisclosure agreement.

The White House did not immediately comment Sunday on the interview. Trump, through his representatives, has denied the allegations. His attorney, Michael Cohen, has said Trump never had an affair with Daniels. Cohen has said he paid the \$130,000 out of his pocket.

Cohen has said neither the Trump Organization nor the Trump campaign was a party to the transaction with Daniels and he was not reimbursed for the payment.

However, Daniels' attorney, Michael Avenatti, told "60 Minutes" he has documents showing Cohen using his Trump Organization email address in setting up the payment and that the nondisclosure agreement was sent by FedEx to Cohen at his Trump Organization office

in Trump Tower.

In the interview, Daniels described a sexual encounter with Trump that began with him talking about himself and showing her an issue of a magazine with his picture on the cover. She said that she asked him, "Does this ... does this normally work for you?" He was taken aback, she said. "And I was like, 'Someone should take that magazine and spank you with it.'" She said she then ordered him to drop his pants and, in a playful manner, "I just gave him a couple swats."

She said they talked some more, although he quit talking about himself, and that she became more comfortable.

"He was like, 'Wow, you — you are special. You remind me of my daughter.'"

Following march, students aim at gun laws, elections

Associated Press

Charlie Goodman looked at the massive crowd around him, the largest youth-led protest in Washington since the Vietnam War era. He listened to people speak about toughening gun laws. They included some of his peers at the Florida high school who've sparked this movement, as well as the 9-year-old granddaughter of the Rev. Martin Luther King.

When she spoke, he was moved to tears.

"This is truly a revolution," said Goodman, a sophomore at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., where 17 people were gunned down. "We can really change the world."

The marches unified hundreds of thousands of people in cities across the country and galvanized this movement, he and others say. Now they are vowing to get young voters registered and send a message in upcoming elections.

"We have a lot of people who are inspired," said Kobey Lofton, a student from Chicago's

South Side who traveled overnight to Washington on Friday with 12 busloads of fellow students and adults.

Before the march, Lofton and his fellow Peace Warriors at North Lawndale College Prep High School had already met with the Florida students — young people from different worlds, but both affected by gun violence.

Now they and other students across the country are planning voter registration drives. Voter registration groups, including Rock the Vote, Voto Latino and HeadCount, a nonpartisan group that usually focuses on registering people at concerts and music festivals, also mobilized teams at Saturday's marches in 30 U.S. cities and have created a registration tool kit for high school students.

"I've never felt the energy that I felt," HeadCount spokesman Aaron Ghitelman said of the registration training that preceded the march in Washington. In a matter of hours, he said the groups registered nearly 5,000 people, many of them millennials.

Mueller investigation witness secretly backed UAE agenda

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A top fundraiser for President Donald Trump received millions of dollars from a political adviser to the United Arab Emirates last April, just weeks before he began handing out a series of large political donations to U.S. lawmakers considering legislation targeting Qatar, the UAE's chief rival in the Persian Gulf, an Associated Press investigation has found.

George Nader, an adviser to the UAE who is now a witness in the U.S. special counsel investigation into foreign meddling in American politics, wired \$2.5 million to the Trump fundraiser, Elliott Broidy, through a company in Canada, according to two people who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

They said Nader gave the money to Broidy to bankroll an effort to persuade the U.S. to take a hard line against Qatar, a longtime American ally but now a bitter adversary of the UAE. But the transaction was invoiced for consulting, market-

ing and advisory services.

A month after he received the money routed through Canada, Broidy sponsored a conference on Qatar's alleged ties to Islamic extremism.

During the event, Republican Congressman Ed Royce, of California, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, announced he was introducing legislation that would brand Qatar as a terrorist-supporting state.

The original draft considered by the Foreign Affairs Committee contained language singling out Qatar. The U.S. has long been friendly with Saudi Arabia and the UAE as well as Qatar, which is home to a massive American air base that the U.S. has used in its fight against Islamic State.

But tensions in the Gulf came to a head when the UAE and Saudi Arabia launched an embargo with travel and trade restrictions against Qatar less than two weeks after Royce introduced the sanctions legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Man attacked arches at McDonald's

OR SUTHERLIN — Police say a man tried to destroy the golden arches at a McDonald's restaurant in Oregon after workers refused to make him 30 double cheeseburgers. The 37-year-old is facing charges.

The News-Review reported that police arrested Jedediah Ezekiel Fulton on March 16 on suspicion of second-degree disorderly conduct, second-degree criminal trespass, second-degree criminal mischief and harassment.

Authorities said Fulton became upset when the fast food restaurant in the western Oregon town of Sutherlin declined to make his order. Police said he destroyed a banner and then attacked the arches.

Troopers suspended for overtime abuse

MA BOSTON — Massachusetts State Police said some troopers have been suspended without pay and others retired following an audit that found overtime abuse in 2016.

Nineteen troopers faced hearings to determine their duty status while the investigation is conducted.

State Police said nine officers retired since the start of the investigation last week. The department ordered nine people suspended without pay. One person was kept on active duty.

The audit found possible cases of officers being paid overtime for shifts they didn't work.

State Police said two more troopers would have faced hearings, but one retired before the opening of the inves-

tigation and the other already is suspended for an unrelated issue.

Robot project spurs school shutdown

FL TITUSVILLE — Authorities said a suspicious device that shut down a Florida high school turned out to be a student's robotics team project.

Florida Today reported that Titusville High School and surrounding roads were closed on Thursday after the device was found in the school's courtyard.

Police said investigators determined Friday morning that the device was meant to shoot makeshift missiles, similar to a T-shirt cannon. Police said the student left the device unintentionally, and no criminal charges were reported.

Man may have used GPS to track victim

KS KANSAS CITY — A Kansas City man has been charged with using a GPS tracking device to help kill a rival drug trafficker in front of the victim's 8-year-old daughter.

Federal prosecutors said Lester Brown, 30, was charged Thursday with using the device to commit a crime of violence in the March death of Christopher Harris.

Harris was killed as he was returning his daughter to her mother's home in Independence.

Prosecutors said the shooting was the result of several conflicts between the two men over rival marijuana distribution trafficking operations.

Investigators were told Brown recruited two other people to carry out the shooting and placed the GPS tracking device onto Harris' vehicle.

City denies Father Jesus' plan for church

MS GULFPORT — Even Father Jesus isn't above the law of man.

A Mississippi city has denied a proposal for a church by a man named Father Jesus, saying he failed to have a professional engineer draw up the plans.

Jesus said the church he's calling "Saints of the Most High" wouldn't be very big — just 12 feet by 24 feet — and he'd begin with just three members.

The Sun Herald of Biloxi reported that local residents questioned what Jesus stands for during a Gulfport Planning Commission meeting Thursday.

Jesus reportedly said he's been diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic.

Man used UK passport with dead baby's name

OR PORTLAND — An Oregon man has pleaded guilty to using a passport obtained in the name of a baby who died in Wales more than 50 years ago.

Timothy Matthews faces a maximum of 10 years in prison when he's sentenced in June, but without prior convictions he's expected to get no more than probation.

According to court documents, the defendant was born Timothy Scheidt in Lander, Wyo., in 1963. He changed his surname in 2013.

Years earlier, he received a passport issued by the United Kingdom in the name of Peter Matthews — a baby who died shortly after birth in 1963. He used it many times before the fraud was detected in 2012.

Bottles to honor city's link to Coca-Cola

IN TERRE HAUTE — A western Indiana city is unveiling more than two dozen oversized Coca-Cola bottles for a public art project honoring its link to the uniquely shaped container.

The 27 fiberglass bottles were revealed Thursday in Terre Haute. Each sculpture stands 6 feet and was painted by local artists.

The Tribune-Star reported that in the coming weeks, the bottles will be moved to spots in the city about 70 miles west of Indianapolis.

The Root Glass Co. in Terre Haute won a 1915 competition to create the glass Coke bottle's distinctive contoured design.

Inmate holds guard hostage for hour-plus

SC BISHOPVILLE — Authorities said an inmate at a maximum security South Carolina prison took a guard hostage, but the incident ended after nearly 90 minutes with no injuries.

The Department of Corrections said on Twitter a prisoner overpowered the officer about 6:50 p.m. Friday at Lee Correctional Institution in Bishopville.

Authorities said the roughly 90 inmates in the dorm took control of the unit and officials began negotiating.

The prisons agency said the guard was released unharmed after nearly 90 minutes, and the inmates returned to their cells.

Authorities said no one was injured and no property was damaged.

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Newman leads Kansas over Duke in OT

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Kansas is going back to the Final Four.

It's hard to argue that Duke shouldn't be headed there as well after the most riveting show of the NCAA tournament.

Malik Newman and the top-seeded Jayhawks got past their Elite Eight roadblock Sunday, knocking off second-seeded Duke 85-81 in overtime to clinch the program's first trip to the Final Four since 2012.

Newman scored all 13 of the Jayhawks' points in OT and finished with a career-high 32 to lead Kansas (31-7).

The Jayhawks will face fellow top seed Villanova on Saturday in San Antonio — the site of KU's last title over Memphis in 2008 — after snapping a two-game losing skid in the regional finals.

"Everything we've been through...we do it for moments like this," Kansas star Devonte' Graham said. "Especially after the last two years, getting over the hump. It just feels (perfect)."

This was college basketball at its best, two blue bloods trading blows for 45 minutes in what was arguably the best game of March so far, one that featured 18 lead changes and 11 ties.

Had Grayson Allen's bank shot to end regulation gone half an inch in a different direction, it might be Duke heading to South Texas.

But it didn't, and instead the Jayhawks are moving on.

"It was an honor to play in this game,"

said Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski, who remained tied with UCLA legend John Wooden with 12 Final Four performances. "I think both teams were deserving of winning."

Newman, a redshirt sophomore who came on late this season, drilled his fifth and final three from the corner to make it 81-78 with 1:49 left. Newman followed with four straight free throws, and the Jayhawks' defense stiffened enough to knock the favored Blue Devils out of the tournament.

Trevon Duval scored 20 points, two shy of a career high, for Duke. Freshman star and future lottery pick Marvin Bagley added 16 points and 10 rebounds in what could have been his final game for the Blue Devils (29-8), who fell shy of their first Final Four trip since winning the national title in 2015.

Allen had 12 points for the Blue Devils, but the senior's try at the regulation buzzer went in and then out and then off the rim before spinning away to force overtime.

"I was trying to drive right, he cut me off. Went back left. Their big stepped into help. I had to get a shot up over him. I tried to bank it in and it about went in," said Allen, who finished his brilliant career with 1,996 points.

Pivotal moment: Duval was a revelation in the opening half, scoring 13 points to give the Blue Devils a 36-33 lead that at times felt like it could've been bigger. But the Jayhawks opened the second with a 13-3 run, forcing Duke to answer quickly. The Blue Devils did just that, time and

time again, until it had the lead in the final minute. But Kansas senior Svi Mykhailiuk drilled a three with 25.7 seconds left in the second half to knot the game at 72-all.

The numbers: Kansas outrebounded Duke 47-32, a staggering stat given that the Jayhawks barely outrebounded their opponents heading into the game. ...Lagerald Vick had 14 points, Devonte' Graham had 11 with six boards and six assists and Mykhailiuk had 11 points, 10 rebounds and five assists while helping defend Bagley. "Even though Malik scored a lot of points, I don't think that anybody had a better game than Svi did," Self said. ... The Blue Devils were 7-for-29 on threes.

Big picture: Kansas: This might be the unlikely of coach Bill Self's three Final Four squads. They are not stacked with obvious future NBA starters and they lost three times at home this season. But the Jayhawks banded together to win the Big 12's regular season and conference titles and now the Midwest Region. By doing so, they proved to their coach that they were hardly soft — a claim that Self had made often earlier in the season.

Duke: The Blue Devils could see four freshman stars bolt for the NBA Draft, an expected exodus led by Bagley, a likely top-five pick. Duke will also lose Allen, one of the best players in school history. Don't cry for Coach K, who has four five-star recruits committed to join the program next year. But this season will likely be remembered as a lost opportunity — and for Allen's agonizing miss.

Villanova holds off underdog Texas Tech

Associated Press

BOSTON — With all of the underdogs and upsets that have upended the NCAA Tournament, no one has managed to come close to Villanova.

The 2016 national champions are headed back to the Final Four, thanks to a fourth straight double-digit victory in a month of March where they've played every bit like the No. 1 seed they earned.

"This tournament's a crazy tournament. Anybody can beat anybody," guard Jalen Brunson said after the Wildcats beat Texas Tech 71-59 in a cold-shooting East regional championship on Sunday to send Villanova back to the Final Four for the second time in three years.

"The underdog mentally, they may have it. But, honestly, they believe they're good. That's why they're in that position. That's (also) why we're in that position," Brunson said. "We're a good team, and we believe we can keep getting better."

The Wildcats (34-4) will play fellow No. 1 seed Kansas, which beat Duke 85-81 in overtime later Sunday. They will join 11th-seeded Loyola-Chicago and its telegenic nun, along with No. 3 seed Michigan in the national semifinals Saturday in San Antonio.

Sister Jean, get ready for Father Rob.

"I very much look forward to meeting Sister Jean," said the Rev. Rob Hagan, the priest on the Villanova bench. "I was 12 years of Catholic School and taught by the nuns. I have great respect for the Nuns. Usually what Sister says is what goes."

But if these two Catholic schools meet in the national championship game, the Wildcats won't be without spiritual support of their own.

"He's our rock," said guard Donte DiVincenzo, who scored 8 points. "He keeps us level-headed to make sure we don't get too high or too low. So to be able to share that moment with him was actually real fun."

Eric Paschall had 12 points and a career-

high 14 rebounds, Brunson scored 15, and DiVincenzo also had eight of the Wildcats' season-high 51 rebounds. After starting four guards, Texas Tech (27-10) grabbed just 33 boards and shot just 18 free throws compared to 35 for Villanova to miss a chance to play for a championship in its home state.

"We knew they were a great three-point shooting team and talented players, but we also knew how tough they were," Texas Tech coach Chris Beard said. "We knew the identity of their team was the toughness and physicality, and that proved to be true."

The teams matched each other with 33 percent shooting from the floor — Villanova's lowest since 2015 — and the Wildcats made just 4 of 24 from beyond the arc. One of the most prolific three-point shooting teams in NCAA history, they need seven to set a Division I single-season record.

They'll get that chance in the Final Four.

Mississippi State returning to Final Four

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Mississippi State's Vic Schaefer was in no hurry to talk about returning to the Final Four, instead spending the first few minutes on the dais quietly circling the highlights on the box score.

There were plenty of them.

Teaira McCowan had 23 points and 21 rebounds, Victoria Vivans added 24 points, and top-seeded Mississippi State held on after blowing most of its big lead to beat third-seeded UCLA 89-73 on Sunday night and earn a repeat trip to the semifinals of the NCAA Tournament.

The Bulldogs will meet another No. 1 seed in Louisville on Friday night in Columbus, Ohio.

"They've lived all year with a bulls-eye on their backs. That's hard to do, y'all," said Schaefer, who arrived at the post-game news conference with the net draped around his neck.

"These kids," their coach added, "are special."

Morgan William added 17 points, and Roshunda Johnson had 12 for the Bulldogs (36-1), who extended their school record for wins in a season. Now, the task is to go one step further than Mississippi State did last year, when it fell to South Carolina in the national title game.

"I just had a real confidence today,"

Schaefer said. "The TV crew made a comment, 'Coach, this is the most chill I've seen you.' I just had a real confidence."

Jordin Canada led the relentless Bruins (27-8) with 23 points, eight rebounds and five assists, despite playing much of the game with a sprained elbow. Japreece Dean had 16 points, and Monique Billings and Kennedy Burke had 12 apiece, most of it as the Bruins were rallying from a 50-32 hole.

They closed within 74-68 on Dean's three-pointer with 2:53 left, but they couldn't get a stop on the defensive end. Instead, the Bruins and Bulldogs traded basket-for-basket down the stretch.

Mississippi State finally pulled away from the foul line in the final minute.

"I wanted to have a chance to coach this group for another day, but the reality is they've had a historic season," UCLA coach Cori Close said. "I love them. I'm proud of them, and there is nothing that could happen today that would change that."

Early on, the Bulldogs followed the same formula they used in routing North Carolina State, dumping it into the much larger McCowan for easy baskets inside. The 6-foot-7 center, who had 24 points in that regional semifinal, scored six during an 11-0 run that gave her team the lead.

Vivians gave the Bulldogs control.

The senior forward from Carthage, Mississippi, converted a three-point play to

begin the second period, then added eight more later in the quarter. She finished with 16 points in the first half, and her spinning, driving layup helped the Bulldogs take a 42-26 lead into the locker room.

The only offense UCLA could muster came from Canada, and most of that was at the foul line.

"Mississippi State's game plan was to pressure us and try to get the ball out of my hands," Canada said, "so I thought in the beginning of the game we had a lull where we couldn't run anything."

The Bulldogs' lead eventually reached 18 points midway through the third quarter before the Bruins, fueled by defense, began to nip away at it. UCLA finally got it under 10 at 53-44 before Blair Schaefer hit a couple of deep three-pointers to give Mississippi State another boost.

UCLA made one final run, trimming a 67-52 deficit to 67-61 with 6:52 to go. But after the teams traded baskets, Schaefer knocked down her third three from the top of the key to silence the Bruins' bench.

Mississippi State kept finding answers until putting the game away.

"This is the hardest time to put into words what's in my heart," Close said. "It's really difficult to get through our disappointment because we really believed we expected to win, but at the same time there is no way to put into words the depth of pride I have in these women."

Durr helps Louisville rout Oregon State

Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Louisville players proudly strutted around the court in championship T-shirts and hats, some adorned with a little piece of the net.

Cardinals coach Jeff Walz brushed off confetti dumped on him during an interview to climb the ladder and clip the rest of the nylon, happily twirling it to celebrate his top-seeded team's dominant run through the NCAA Tournament Lexington regional.

"It's a great feeling," Walz said. "I'm going to go home, and my 4½ year-old and my 2½ year-old (daughters), all they're going to talk about is the confetti on the floor. That's all they care about. To them, if we win, there's confetti on the floor that I get to play on."

Louisville's next quest is collecting another net and more confetti in next weekend's women's Final Four in Columbus, Ohio.

Asia Durr scored 18 points, Myisha Hines-Allen added 16 and Louisville

earned its first Final Four berth since 2013 with a 76-43 rout of No. 6 seed Oregon State on Sunday in the Lexington Region final.

Playing its first regional final in four years and for the first time in school history as an NCAA No. 1 seed, the Cardinals (36-2) thoroughly ran the table while playing close to home. They never trailed in rolling to their 11th consecutive victory.

They outscored the Beavers 28-12 in the third quarter to break the game open and complete their four-game run through the regional by an average margin of victory of 27.5 points. Louisville controlled the paint 32-18 and scored 24 points off 17 turnovers against an Oregon State squad that succeeded with precise passing.

"If we were able to get stops and go in transition, we were going to be confident," Hines-Allen said. "Our shots were falling in the second half, and it all came down to defense. If we wanted to win, we had to stop them."

Even more impressive for Louisville: the Cardinals committed just three turnovers

to tie an NCAA Tournament record. This, despite playing a frenetic pace for much of the game. It worked in getting good shots that fell for the final three quarters.

"That was huge," said Durr, who made 4 of 9 three-pointers and 7 of 14 overall. "We love to sprint the ball up the floor, pass the ball up the floor, so that's pretty much what we try to do."

Sam Fuehring had 14 points and Arica Carter 10 for Louisville, which shot 48 percent. Players celebrated on the court before its red-clad following that traveled just under 80 miles east and hung around to watch them cut down the nets.

The Beavers (26-8) struggled in their bid of adding Louisville to their remarkable run of NCAA upsets after previously ousting No. 3 seed Tennessee and No. 2 Baylor last week. Oregon State outrebounded Louisville 32-28 behind 6-foot-5 Marie Gulich (14 points, eight rebounds), but shot 35 percent in losing just their second game in the past 12.

Briefly

Former Indians All-Star OF Belle arrested

Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Former Cleveland Indians All-Star outfielder Albert Belle has been arrested on charges of indecent exposure and extreme driving under the influence following a spring training game in Arizona.

KSAZ-TV in Phoenix reports Belle was taken into custody Sunday and charged with two counts of indecent exposure during a spring training game near Scottsdale. He also faces one count each of driving under the influence and extreme driving under the influence.

The 51-year-old and five-time All-Star played 12 years in the major leagues for the Indians, the Chicago White Sox and the Baltimore Orioles.

Watson beats Kisner for Match Play title

AUSTIN, Texas — Bubba Watson made the final of the Dell Technologies Match Play look as though he were on vacation all along.

Watson won his second World Golf Championships title Sunday with the biggest blowout since the championship match switched to 18 holes in 2011, a 7-and-6 victory over Kevin Kisner.

Kerr rules Curry out for playoffs' 1st round

OAKLAND, Calif. — Optimistic as always, Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry is ready to prove his coach, Steve Kerr, wrong and return from a left knee injury for the first round of the playoffs.

Not that it's entirely up to him. Kerr on Sunday ruled out the two-time MVP for the best-of-seven Western Conference first round.

"There's no way he's playing in the first round," Kerr said.

An MRI exam Saturday showed a Grade 2 sprain of his medial collateral ligament.

NHL roundup

Winnipeg clinches playoff berth

Associated Press

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Captain Blake Wheeler wasn't certain at the beginning of the season if his Winnipeg Jets would contend for a playoff spot. Now he has his answer.

Mark Scheifele scored the only goal in a shootout and the Winnipeg Jets clinched a playoff spot with a 5-4 win over the Nashville Predators on Sunday night.

The Jets are in the postseason for the first time since 2014-15 and just the second time since their move from Atlanta before the 2011-12 season. The franchise hasn't won a playoff series since 2007.

"A lot of uncertainty coming into the year, where we were going to be," said Wheeler, who has been with Winnipeg since the relocation. "I don't think many people thought we were going to be where we are at, a playoff team. Every single guy in here has had a huge part in that. It's a big moment for our team and for our organization."

Jets rookie Kyle Connor scored a power-play goal and had two assists, giving him seven goals in six games. That includes a pair of overtime goals in Winnipeg's previous two games and gives him 29 on the season. That's tied with Vancouver's Brock Boeser for the rookie goal scoring lead. Boeser's season ended March 5 with a fracture in his lower back.

Penguins 5, Flyers 4 (OT): Bryan Rust redirected a pass from Sidney Crosby 2:25 into overtime and host Pittsburgh finished off a season sweep of Philadelphia.

The Flyers tied it on Sean Couturier's goal with 43 seconds left in regulation, but the Penguins controlled the extra period. Rust ended it when he got his stick down in time to get a piece of Crosby's pass from the top of the left circle and knock it by Petr Mrazek to give the Penguins their first sweep of Philadelphia since the 2006-07 season.

Bruins 2, Wild 1 (OT): Brad Marchand scored 28 seconds into overtime to lift Boston over host Minnesota.

Tuukka Rask made 24 saves and David Pastrnak also scored for the Bruins, who improved to 47-17-10.

Canucks 4, Stars 1: Reid Boucher and Nic Dowd scored rare goals on the power play, and Vancouver rallied to beat reeling host Dallas.

The Stars are on an 0-6-2 skid and have all but fallen out of playoff contention.

Ducks 5, Oilers 4 (OT): Hampus Lindholm scored 1:21 into overtime to lift Anaheim over host Edmonton.

Anaheim has 91 points and is two up on the Los Angeles Kings (89) for third in the Pacific Division.

NBA roundup

James, Cavs win fifth straight

Associated Press

NEW YORK — LeBron James had 37 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists, and the Cleveland Cavaliers beat the Brooklyn Nets 121-114 for their fifth straight victory.

James kept up his latest sensational stretch by going 14-for-19 from the floor. He reached 2,000 points in a season for the 10th time, joining Karl Malone and Michael Jordan as the only players in NBA history to do so.

Kevin Love added 20 points and 15 rebounds for the Cavaliers, who came in averaging 122.5 points during the streak and just about reached that even with a slow start.

Rockets 119, Hawks 99: James Harden had a triple-double with 18 points, 15 as-

sists and 10 rebounds in three quarters and Houston rolled to its 60th victory, beating visiting Atlanta.

Bucks 106, Spurs 103: Giannis Antetokounmpo returned from an ankle injury to score 25 points, and host Milwaukee held on in the final few minutes against San Antonio.

Celtics 104, Kings 93: Terry Rozier scored a season-high 33 points and nearly matched the Celtics' franchise record for three-pointers, Jaylen Brown made consecutive buckets to break open a close game in the fourth quarter, and visiting Boston held on to beat Sacramento.

Jazz 110, Warriors 91: Rudy Gobert had 17 points and 15 rebounds and Utah pulled away from undermanned, in-

jury-plagued host Golden State in the third quarter.

Pacers 113, Heat 107 (OT): Victor Oladipo had 23 points and five assists to help host Indiana clinch a playoff berth.

Knicks 101, Wizards 97: Trey Burke scored 19 points in his first start in exactly three years, leading eight players in double figures as visiting New York defeated wavering Washington.

Clippers 117, Raptors 106: Lou Williams scored 26 points against his former team, Tobias Harris had 20 and Los Angeles overcame an 18-point first-quarter deficit to beat host Toronto.

Trail Blazers 108, Thunder 105: C.J. McCollum scored 34 points to help visiting Portland edge Oklahoma City.