

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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'China, China, China' Shanahan summarizes focus of US military budget for 2020 in 3 words

WASHINGTON — Chinese bombers. Chinese hypersonic missiles. Chinese cyberattacks. Chinese anti-satellite weapons.

To a remarkable degree, the 2020 Pentagon budget proposal is shaped by national security threats that acting Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan has summarized in three words: "China, China, China."

The U.S. is still fighting small wars against Islamic extremists, and Russia remains a serious concern, but Shanahan seeks to shift the military's main focus to what he considers the more pressing security problem of a rapidly growing Chinese military.

This theme, which Shanahan outlined Thursday in presenting the administration's proposed 2020 defense budget to the Senate Armed Services Committee, is competing for attention with narrower, more immediate problems such as President Donald Trump's effort to use the military to build

a border wall.

The hearing, for example, spent more time on the wall and prospects for using military funds to build parts of it than on any aspect of foreign policy, including the conflict in Syria or military competition with China, Russia or North Korea.

Shanahan is hardly the first defense chief to worry about China. Several predecessors pursued what the Obama administration called a "pivot" to the Pacific, with China in mind. But Shanahan sees it as an increasingly urgent problem that exceeds traditional measures of military strength and transcends partisan priorities.

"We've been ignoring the problem for too long," Shanahan told a senator.

"China is aggressively modernizing its military, systematically stealing science and technology, and seeking military advantage through a strategy of military-civil fusion," he wrote in prepared testimony to

the committee, which is considering a \$718 billion Pentagon budget designed in part to counter China's momentum.

The \$25 billion the Pentagon is proposing to spend on nuclear weapons in 2020, for example, is meant in part to stay ahead of China's nuclear arsenal, which is much smaller than America's but growing. Shanahan said China is developing a nuclear-capable long-range bomber that, if successful, would enable China to join the United States and Russia as the only nations with air-, sea- and land-based nuclear weapons.

Shanahan ticked off a list of other Chinese advancements — hypersonic missiles against which the U.S. has limited defenses; space launches and other space efforts that could enable it to fight wars in space; "systematically stealing" of U.S. and allied technology, and militarizing land features in the South China Sea.

Bonnie S. Glaser, director of

the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, says the U.S. has been lacking effective strategies for competing with China on a broad scale.

"It is overdue," she said of the Shanahan focus. "We have been somewhat slow in catching up" in such areas as denying China its regional ambitions, including efforts to fully control the South China Sea, which is contested by several other countries.

Some defense analysts think Shanahan and the Pentagon have inflated the China threat.

"I do think it's worth asking what exactly is threatening about China's behavior," said Christopher Preble, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. He doesn't discount China as a security issue, including in the South China Sea, but doubts the U.S. military is the institution best suited to deal with such nonmilitary problems as cyber-intrusions into American commercial networks.

US again sends B-52 bombers over South China Sea

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force flew a pair of strategic bombers over the South China Sea on Wednesday, marking the second time it sent the nuclear-capable aircraft to the region in just over a week.

"Two B-52H Stratofortress bombers took off from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, and conducted routine training in the vicinity of the South China Sea on March 13, 2019 (Hawaii Standard Time), before returning to base," Pacific Air Forces said in a statement Friday.

On March 4, one B-52 flew over the South China Sea while another circumnavigated Japan

in a joint military exercise with the Japan Air Self-Defense Force, PACAF said at the time.

That mission was the first reported B-52 flight over the South China Sea since November. However, not all are made public.

In the past, Beijing has deemed such flights "provocative," blaming the U.S. for tensions between the two countries.

The Air Force said the bomber flights March 4 and Wednesday were part of "routine training" in the South China Sea.

"U.S. aircraft regularly operate in the South China Sea in support of allies, partners and a free and open Indo-Pacific,"

the PACAF statement said. "U.S. Pacific Air Forces bombers have flown from Guam for more than a decade as part of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's continuous bomber presence operations."

The region is vital to the international economy, with about 80 percent of all trade by volume and 70 percent by value being shipped through the South China Sea, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

About 14 percent of U.S. trade transited the area in 2016, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies' China Power project. China sent about 64 percent of its trade and

Japan sent nearly 42 percent through the South China Sea the same year.

The missions follow the trend of freedom-of-navigation operations the Navy conducts in the region to challenge what the service calls China's "excessive maritime claims."

The U.S. disputes China's claim of authority over several islands and reefs in the oil-rich South and East China seas, including in the Spratly, Parcel and Senkaku islands, according to the CIA World Factbook.

China asserts authority over the 12 nautical miles around their claimed islands and reefs as well as over the airspace above them.

Lawyer: Iran sentences US vet to 10 years

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A U.S. Navy veteran from California has been sentenced to 10 years in prison in Iran, his lawyer said Saturday, becoming the first American known to be imprisoned there since President Donald Trump took office.

Though the case against Michael R. White remains unclear, it comes as Trump has taken a hard-line approach to Iran by pulling the U.S. out of Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers.

Iran, which in the past has used its detention of Westerners and dual nationals as leverage in negotiations, has yet to report on White's sentence in state-controlled media. Its mission to

the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"Obviously, the concern is that the Iranians are using this as a tool against the United States, given the other individuals who are in custody," Washington-based lawyer Mark Zaid told The Associated Press.

White's arrest was first reported by IranWire, an online news service run by Iranian expatriates that interviewed a former Iranian prisoner who said he met White at Vakilabad Prison in the northeastern city of Mashhad in October.

In the time since, White has been convicted of insulting Iran's supreme leader and posting private information online, Zaid said. He said the informa-

tion surrounding the case remained vague.

He learned of the sentence from the U.S. State Department, which in turn learned of it from the Swiss government, which looks after American interests in Iran.

The State Department said late Saturday that it was "aware of the detention of a U.S. citizen in Iran."

"We have no higher priority than the safety and security of U.S. citizens abroad," it said, without elaborating on the case.

The New York Times first reported White's 10-year sentence.

White's mother, Joanne White, had told the Times that her son, who lives in Imperial Beach, Calif., went to Iran to

see a woman she described as his girlfriend and had booked a July 27 flight back home to San Diego via the United Arab Emirates.

She filed a missing person report with the State Department after he did not board the flight. She added that he had been undergoing treatment for a neck tumor and has asthma.

White worked as a cook in the U.S. Navy and left the service about a decade ago.

Zaid said Saturday that White apparently traveled to Mashhad without informing the woman in advance. It remains difficult for Americans to get visas to Iran, 40 years after the Islamic Revolution and the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis.

Taliban kill 22 Afghan troops at checkpoints

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — An overnight Taliban assault on checkpoints in northern Afghanistan killed 22 troops after some 100 Afghan forces fled a similar assault in the country's west last week and tried to cross into neighboring Turkmenistan, officials said Sunday.

The two battles mark the latest setbacks for the country's battered security forces, who come under daily attack by the insurgents and have suffered staggering casualties in recent years. The attacks have continued even as the Taliban have

been holding direct negotiations with the United States aimed at ending the 17-year war.

Mohammad Tahir Rahmani, head of the provincial council in the northern Faryab province, said the insurgents launched the attack late Saturday against checkpoints manned by police and pro-government militias, setting off a fierce gunbattle that lasted into Sunday morning. The army sent in reinforcements, who were among those killed. He said another 20 Afghan forces were wounded in the attack.

Last week, around 100 Afghan soldiers in the western Badghis

province fled their posts and tried to cross the border during a weeklong battle with the Taliban, officials said Sunday.

Mohammad Naser Nazari, a provincial council member in Badghis, said the soldiers weren't allowed to cross the border and their fate remains unknown. The Taliban have posted pictures of captured soldiers on social media.

Jamshid Shahabi, the provincial governor's spokesman, said 16 soldiers have been killed and 20 wounded during the ongoing battle in the Bala Murghab district, in which the military carried out airstrikes and dis-

patched reinforcements. He said a number of soldiers tried to flee, without providing an exact figure.

Shahabi said more than 40 insurgents were killed in the fighting. He said the provincial police chief and army commander are in the district and instructing the forces to root out insurgents and rescue soldiers. Officials said the fighting had largely subsided by Sunday, with sporadic clashes breaking out in remote areas.

Nazari provided a higher toll, saying 50 soldiers were killed and around 100 others were missing.

US-backed forces struggling to defeat ISIS militants

Associated Press

BAGHOUZ, Syria — U.S.-backed forces fighting to take back the last Islamic State outpost in Syria say they are facing difficulties defeating the group.

A spokesman said their effort is being slowed by mines,

tunnels and the possibility of harming women and children still in the village.

The SDF have been repeatedly surprised to discover just how many civilians were holed up in the area — a collection of tents covering foxholes and underground caves in the village

of Baghouz — alongside the ISIS fighters. In the last two weeks, many fighters appeared to be among those evacuating.

Dozens of men and women were seen walking around the besieged ISIS encampment in the village of Baghouz on Sunday as fighters from the

Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces watched from a hilltop close by.

SDF spokesman Kino Gabriel said the camp was approximately 250 km in size — much the same area it was five weeks ago when the SDF said it was going to finally conclude the battle.

Extreme floods in the Midwest

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Authorities were using boats and large vehicles on Saturday to rescue and evacuate residents in parts of the Midwest where a recent deluge of rainwater and snowmelt was sent pouring over frozen ground, overwhelming creeks and rivers and killing at least one person.

The scramble to move people out of harm's way was expected to subside going into this week as rivers and creeks in flooded eastern Nebraska and western Iowa were expected to crest Saturday and Sunday. That left officials downstream looking to prepare for likely flooding.

Missouri Gov. Mike Parson had already met with emergency management team members Friday to review and update flood-response plans, and the

Missouri Highway Patrol was preparing additional equipment and putting swift-water rescue personnel on standby.

The Missouri National Guard temporarily relocated the 139th Airlift Wing's C-130s from Rosecrans Air National Guard Base in St. Joseph as a precaution.

The National Weather Service said the Missouri River at St. Joseph reached nearly 26 feet on Saturday, about a foot below what's considered major flooding at the northwest Missouri city.

But it's expected to crest Wednesday or Thursday at 29.3 feet — more than 2 feet above major flooding level.

Evacuation efforts in eastern Nebraska and some spots in western Iowa on Saturday were hampered by reports of

levee breaches and washouts of bridges and roads, including part of Nebraska Highway 92, leading in and out of southwest Omaha. Authorities confirmed that a bridge on that highway that crosses the Elkhorn River had been washed out Saturday.

In Fremont, west of Omaha, the Dodge County Sheriff's Office issued a mandatory evacuation for some residents after floodwaters broke through a levee along the Platte River.

In Mills County, Iowa, authorities ordered people in some rural areas to evacuate after the Missouri River overtopped levees.

The family of farmer James Wilke, 50, of Columbus, Neb., said he was killed Thursday when a bridge collapsed as he was using his tractor to try to reach stranded motorists.

Gillibrand formally enters the 2020 race

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand formally joined the 2020 White House race on Sunday and previewed the hard line she will take against President Donald Trump by announcing a rally outside one of his signature Manhattan properties.

She had spent more than a month traveling around the country to gauge support for a run.

Her announcement that she was joining the dozen-plus candidates who want to challenge Trump came in a nearly three-minute video produced by her campaign and released early in the morning. She says the national anthem poses this question: "Will brave win?"

"Well, it hasn't always, and it isn't right now," she says. "Brave doesn't pit people against each other. Brave doesn't put money over lives. Brave doesn't spread hate. Cloud truth. Build a wall. That's what fear does."

In the video, Gillibrand says the country needs a leader who "makes bold, brave choices" and "someone who isn't afraid of progress. That's why I'm running for president."

She said her debut speech as a candidate will come next Sunday in front of the Trump International Hotel & Tower in New York.

Gillibrand has been one of the most forceful critics of the Trump administration. Using the backdrop of one of Trump's marquee properties is a clear challenge to the president.

She announced her exploratory committee in January in an appearance on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert."

Since then, she has visited a number of states to assess political support for a White House bid.

This week she plans to campaign in Michigan, Iowa and Nevada, leading up to her New York kickoff.

FAA, Boeing's close ties scrutinized

Associated Press

For more than six decades, the Federal Aviation Administration has relied on employees of airplane manufacturers to do government-required safety inspections as planes are being designed or assembled.

But critics say the system, dubbed the "designee program," is too cozy as company employees do work for an agency charged with keeping the skies safe while being paid by an industry that the FAA is regulating.

"There is a potential conflict of interest," said Todd Curtis, a former Boeing Co. safety engineer and creator of airsafe.com, a website that focuses on airline safety. "They (the FAA) don't have the money to do all of the oversight. It's a question of being practical."

The FAA's oversight duties are coming under greater scrutiny after deadly crashes involving Boeing 737 Max jets operated by airlines in Ethiopia and Indonesia, killing a total of 346 people. The U.S. was nearly alone in allowing the planes to keep flying until it relented

on Wednesday after getting satellite evidence showing the crashes may be linked.

The FAA concedes that it doesn't have resources to keep up with a growing aviation industry, and experts say it lacks the personnel to inspect every component, especially those made in other countries.

But the agency says the designee program's results speak for themselves. The U.S. has the safest skies in the world. Until April of last year, U.S. passenger airlines had not had a fatality since 2009, while carrying several billion passengers.

But safety experts say it's time to look into the agency's relationship with Boeing, based in Chicago.

The FAA's ties to the company were revealed when Boeing and the agency released similar messages shortly after the Indonesian airliner crashed in October and again last week, when the FAA announced that Boeing would upgrade the Max's flight control software, said Mary Schiavo, a former Transportation Department inspector general.

The agency needs more

people with technical skills to adequately monitor a company that makes machines as sophisticated as today's jets, she said, contending that it didn't understand the Max's flight control computer program.

"The FAA readily states they don't understand the 4 million lines of code and the 150 computers," Schiavo said. "What they do is see that Boeing followed the process, they checked the FAA boxes. The public thinks the FAA has more involvement."

Indeed, the agency's own website says that employees of manufacturers can approve design changes and aircraft repairs. "Using designees for routine certification tasks allows the FAA to focus its limited resources on safety-critical certification issues," it says.

Congress will examine the relationship between Boeing and the FAA. Rep. Peter A. DeFazio, D-Ore., chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said he would hold hearings on the FAA's process for approving the planes.

New Zealand suspect was steeped in online extremism

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The suspected New Zealand shooter carefully modeled his attack for an internet age. He live-streamed the massacre, shouted out a popular meme slogan and published a long, rambling manifesto replete with inside jokes geared for those steeped in underground internet culture.

All that makes Brenton Harrison Tarrant, the man charged with murder for the attack Friday on mosques in Christchurch, the latest person to allegedly commit mass slaughter alongside a targeted appeal to online communities that breed extremism.

Prior to killing six people in Isla Vista, Calif., in 2014, Elliott Rodger posted an online video and circulated a lengthy document full of grievances. He later was found to have ties to a misogynistic online group known as “incels,” or “involuntary celibates,” who sometimes call for violence against women. Last year, Robert Bow-

ers, the man charged with killing 11 people at a Pittsburgh synagogue, posted threats on Gab, a social media site popular with white supremacists.

Recruitment with and proliferation of extremist ideals is nothing new — in person or online. People who want to discuss such ideas are bound to find each other, said Daniel Byman, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute. But whereas small groups once might have met up in real life, now people can go online to find large groups to reinforce and encourage their ideas almost instantly.

Online sleuths quickly connected the livestreamed video to posts made by the same user on 8chan, a dark corner of the web where those disaffected by mainstream social media sites often post extremist, racist and violent views.

Tarrant's manifesto spread quickly on 8chan Friday. The 74-page screed espouses white supremacist views even as it contradicts itself. Some saw similarities to the 1,500-page

manifesto written by Anders Behring Breivik, a Norwegian right-wing extremist who killed 77 people in 2011.

The act of livestreaming the attack was in itself a sign of how far internet culture has permeated the physical world. People regularly stream daily events now, said Byman, of the Brookings Institute, including their confrontations with law enforcement.

The shooter did his research, said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Jewish human rights organization.

“He found information online; he found validation; he found an ideology and a purpose in life that led directly to what he did,” Cooper said.

Social media is at the center of this increasing challenge, he said. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other sites that allow people to upload their own content have faced fierce backlash for letting violent and hate-filled posts and videos spread.

Official: Similarity between 2 crashes

Associated Press

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia — Preliminary data retrieved from the flight data recorder of the Ethiopian Airlines plane that crashed shows “a clear similarity” with an earlier disaster in Indonesia, Ethiopia's transport minister said Sunday.

Dagmawit Moges told reporters that the Ethiopian government intends to release detailed findings within one month.

“The black box has been found in a good condition that enabled us to extract almost all the data inside,” she told reporters Sunday evening.

Officials say 157 people from 35 different countries were killed when the Nairobi-bound plane crashed shortly after takeoff. The United States and many other countries then grounded the Boeing 737 Max 8 as it had also been used in the Lion Air crash in October in Indonesia.

Suspicious emerged that faulty sensors and software may have contributed to the two crashes in less than six months.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration already has said satellite-based tracking data showed that the movements of Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 were similar to those of Lion Air Flight 610, which crashed off Indonesia in October, killing 189 people.

The planes in both crashes flew with erratic altitude changes that could indicate the pilots struggled to control the aircraft. Shortly after their takeoffs, both crews tried to return to the airports but crashed.

Earlier Sunday, thousands in the capital, Addis Ababa, mourned the country's victims in the crash, accompanying 17 empty caskets draped in the national flag through the streets of the capital. Some victims' relatives fainted and fell to the ground.

Report: Former Putin adviser had broken neck

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Newly released documents show that a former adviser to Russia's president sustained a complete fracture of his neck “at or near the time of his death” in a Washington hotel room in 2015.

The documents from the city's medical examiner were released to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in response to a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit filed nearly two years ago.

In a report published Saturday, RFE said the finding offers no clear-cut evidence of foul play in the death of Mikhail Lesin, 57, who was a key adviser to Russian President Vladimir Putin during Putin's rise to

power.

But RFE said the documents provide “the most precise scientific description” yet of a death that's been shrouded in suspicion.

The official ruling was that Lesin, 57, died accidentally of blunt force trauma after falling repeatedly in his room while intoxicated.

Yet there is intrigue surrounding the case, fed by circumstantial evidence. It seems odd for someone Lesin's age to die of blunt force trauma while alone in a room. There is also a gap in security video footage for the hours after Lesin was last seen alive. The police report eventually released to the public has been heavily redacted.

Above all, there is a long his-

tory of high-profile Russians turning up dead or seriously ill in foreign countries.

RFE said the documents released by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner show that Lesin's hyoid bone had been completely fractured. An official, whose name was redacted, is quoted as saying such breaks “are commonly associated with hanging or manual strangulation,” but that it was also possible that the bone was damaged during the autopsy.

Lesin had amassed a fortune through a company he set up in the 1990s to sell television advertising. He then spent years as Putin's media czar, helping bring national television under Kremlin control during Putin's rise to power.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Road closes for spring migration of snakes

IL HARRISBURG — A stretch of road in southern Illinois is closed to allow snakes and amphibians the chance to migrate to their summer homes.

The Shawnee National Forest's "snake road" was closed Friday to allow the animals to move from the limestone bluffs where they hibernate during the winter to the nearby LaRue Swamp. The migration attracts spectators from across the country.

The (Carbonale) Southern Illinoisan reported that some of the species are considered threatened or endangered in Illinois. The migration takes about two months.

Bears in median shut down 4-lane highway

MA TEMPLETON — A portion of a highway was shut down while state wildlife officials moved a family of bears that had set up a den in the median.

State police shut down a stretch of Route 2 in Templeton on Thursday morning while state environmental police tranquilized the mother bear and relocated her and her cubs to a safer location in a nearby state forest.

Route 2, a four-lane highway, was shut down for about 45 minutes.

Thrift store sells 'haunted' furniture

NC SALISBURY — A North Carolina thrift store earned \$1,000 off a hand-carved bedroom suite that may just be haunted.

News outlets reported Habitat for Humanity Rowan County's ReStore warned would-be

customers that the previous owner reported he and his wife had "continuous nightmares" while the furniture was in their bedroom. Their dogs were also suspicious of the 1950s highboy chest of drawers and canopy bed, as they "would not stop barking at it."

The store's director of operations, Elizabeth Brady, said two customers were intrigued and paid full price but didn't believe the furniture was haunted.

Court: Middle finger is protected speech

MI TAYLOR — A federal appeals court said a Michigan woman's constitutional rights were violated when she was handed a speeding ticket after giving the finger to a suburban Detroit officer in 2017.

The 3-0 decision means a lawsuit by Debra Cruise-Gulyas can proceed.

Officer Matthew Minard stopped Cruise-Gulyas and wrote her a ticket for a lesser violation. When that stop was over, Cruise-Gulyas raised her middle finger.

Minard pulled her over again and changed the ticket to a more serious speeding offense.

Cruise-Gulyas sued and said her free speech rights and her rights against unreasonable seizure were violated.

Pipe tomahawk is returned on loan

NY SALAMANCA — A long-missing peace pipe tomahawk President George Washington gave to a Seneca leader in the late 18th century has been returned to the tribe in western New York.

Washington gave the combination tobacco-smoking pipe and weapon to Cornplanter as the United States negotiated a peace treaty with the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy.

The artifact eventually wound up at the State Museum in Albany, where it remained until being stolen in the late 1940s.

Last year, an anonymous collector returned the artifact to the museum. Officials there decided to loan it to the Senecas.

Police: Drunken man rode on school bus

PA AMBLER — Police said an intoxicated man got on a school bus hoping to be dropped off closer to his home but instead rode to a suburban Philadelphia high school and went inside.

Lower Gwynedd police said a student reported the unknown man at 7:25 a.m. Friday.

The man was dropped off and entered Wissahickon Senior High School. After he was confronted by the school's resource officer and administrators, the man ran outside but was apprehended following a brief foot chase.

Dominic Herder, 20, faces trespassing and public drunkenness charges.

Teacher resigns over taping kids' mouths

OH CINCINNATI — A Cincinnati Public Schools teacher who acknowledged putting duct tape over students' mouths to discipline them resigned.

District spokeswoman Lauren Worley said Charles Igwekala-Nweke resigned in January.

Igwekala-Nweke taught math at Clark Montessori High School and Hughes STEM High School and had worked for the district since 2015.

The Cincinnati Enquirer reported Friday that school records show a student told another teacher Igwekala-Nweke put tape over his mouth in December.

Igwekala-Nweke wrote in

an email to Hughes Principal Kathy Wright that he taped students' mouths shut instead of reprimanding them for talking during an exam.

Man finds iguana in toilet and calls 911

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — A Florida man called 911 after going to the bathroom and finding a bright green iguana swimming in his toilet.

Fort Lauderdale Battalion Chief Stephan Gollan told the Miami Herald the man "freaked out and didn't know what to do."

He said firefighter Jeff Kurus put on a sterile glove, reached in and grabbed the iguana. He took it outside and released it into the wild.

Dead man ID'd as suspect in crimes

MD ROCKVILLE — Police said a man who died in West Virginia in 2017 has been identified as the suspect in the killing of a woman and the rape of another in Maryland more than two decades ago.

The Montgomery County, Md., police department said in a news release Friday that DNA evidence connected Kenneth Earl Day to the 1994 rape and killing of Le Bich-Thuy, 42, whose strangled body was found beside her Rockville home. Investigators also used DNA to tie Day to the 1989 rape of a woman who was attacked while walking down a street in Rockville.

Police said Day was 52 when he died in March 2017 in Upshur County, W.Va. Officer Rick Goodale, a department spokesman, said Day was identified as a suspect earlier this year.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Iowa State stops Kansas in Big 12 final

BY DAVE SKRETTA
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Lindell Wigginton found his way to Iowa State from Canada, Marial Shayok took a detour through the University of Virginia, and Michael Jacobson started his career at the University of Nebraska.

Three players from three very different backgrounds now have something in common: a title.

The trio helped the fifth-seeded Cyclones race to a big early lead against No. 17 Kansas on Saturday night, then contributed to enough crucial stops down the stretch, preserving a 78-66 victory over the Jayhawks in the Big 12 Tournament finale at Sprint Center.

“When you do something special, you win a championship, you got a connection for the rest of your life,” said Cyclones coach Steve Prohm.

“Hopefully this is just step one. We’ll enjoy this for a while, figure out where

we’re going for the NCAA Tournament and then we’ll focus on that.”

Wigginton finished with 17 points, Shayok had 15 on his way to winning tournament MVP, and Jacobson finished with 14 for the Cyclones (23-11), who became the lowest-seeded team to win the conference tournament. They also improved to 2-0 against Kansas (25-9) in the finals.

“I think it was our best team win of the year because it was gritty,” said Shayok, who like Jacobson sat out last season after transferring. “Everybody stepped up.”

Dedric Lawson had 18 points and Devon Dotson added 17 for the third-seeded Jayhawks, whose last chance to win some hardware will be the NCAA Tournament. Their run of 14 consecutive regular-season crowns ended last weekend, and they failed to defend their Big 12 Tournament title.

“The way we competed, we showed some signs where we really wanted to win this game,” Dotson said. “But they hit some tough shots. We were missing some of our easy shots we usually make.”

Meanwhile, the Cyclones made a tremendous about-face during their stay in Kansas City.

They arrived having lost five of their last six regular-season games, and looked rudderless in losses to Texas and lowly West Virginia. But beginning with a blowout of Baylor and continuing with a quarterfinal win over regular-season champ Kansas State, the Cyclones found their stride.

The Jayhawks, still looking for their own, were fortunate to trail 32-22 at halftime.

Lawson, who had 24 points in the semifinals, was 2-for-11 from the field. Marcus Garrett was 0-for-6 from the floor and 1-for-4 from the foul line. Quentin Grimes was 0-for-4 from beyond the arc after hitting five three-pointers in his team’s win over the Mountaineers on Friday night.

All told, the Jayhawks shot 27.8 percent from the field and missed all nine of their three-point attempts in the first half. They also were just 2-for-8 from the free-throw line.

Villanova sneaks past Seton Hall in Big East

BY RALPH D. RUSSO
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Phil Booth entered the New York Knicks’ locker room — only the best for the defending champs at Madison Square Garden — wearing a net around his neck. The senior guard stopped at every locker to give each Villanova teammate a hand clap and a bro hug.

Booth has been at Villanova for five years and won two national titles. The Wildcats have played in the last five Big East Tournament championship games, winning four, and Booth has been around for all of it.

This certainly isn’t the best team he’s been a part of, but it can boast an unprecedented accomplishment.

With Booth (16 points) and fellow senior Eric Paschall (17 points) leading the way, the 25th-ranked and top-seeded Wildcats became the first school to win three consecutive

Big East Tournaments, holding off Seton Hall 74-72 on Saturday night.

Seton Hall star Myles Powell, guarded closely by Booth, missed a three-pointer in the closing seconds that could have won it. Booth was called for traveling as he tried to corral the rebound, however, and the Pirates got one more chance with 0.4 seconds left. Anthony Nelson’s long inbounds lob bounced off the backboard and was slapped away by the Wildcats (25-9), who got to party at the Garden yet again.

“This one is special, very special. This team has taught me so much,” Booth said during the postgame ceremonies at center court. “These young dudes are like a fresh breath of air for me, being around them.”

Powell scored 25 points to cap a spectacular three days in Manhattan for the high-scoring guard. He totaled 78 points, but needed three more.

Williamson leads Duke past FSU for ACC title

BY AARON BEARD
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Zion Williamson remembers crying in his mother’s arms after suffering a knee sprain that would sideline him for nearly six full games and threaten fifth-ranked Duke’s title potential.

Less than a month later, Williamson was standing amid fallen confetti, raising an Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament championship trophy and cutting down a strand of net while sporting the widest of smiles.

Williamson had 21 points in Duke’s 73-63 victory over No. 12 Florida State on Saturday night in the championship game to complete his dominating three-game show. And with Williamson back and healthy, the Blue Devils are charging into the NCAA Tournament.

“For people who said I shouldn’t return,” Williamson said during the trophy pre-

sentation, “I couldn’t abandon my brothers and coaches like that.”

The Blue Devils (29-5) won their 21st tournament title for yet another trophy in an already-record haul. Williamson became only the sixth freshman in the event’s 66-year history to win MVP honors and the first in a dozen years after averaging 27 points and 10 rebounds while making 33 of 43 shots in the three games.

“My teammates and my coaches, they never rushed me back,” Williamson said. “I could’ve come back a few games ago, but I wouldn’t have been myself. So they sat me down and said ‘Get in better condition.’ That’s what I did. ... I feel like I’m back to normal.”

All four of Duke’s top-tier freshmen hit double figures. RJ Barrett added 17 points and nine rebounds, while Tre Jones had his own strong outing with 18 points and six assists.

Oregon takes Pac-12 with 4 wins in 4 days

BY JOHN MARSHALL

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Oregon was the Pac-12's preseason favorite, yet did not play like it through most of the season. The Ducks were inconsistent, lost their star freshman, had some ugly losses.

After four days of dominating defense, the Ducks are going dancing again.

Sparked by do-everything point guard Payton Pritchard,

Oregon shut down Washington 68-48 Saturday night to become the second team to win four games in four days at the Pac-12 tournament.

"In my 39 years in coaching, I've never seen a team grow up that much that fast," Oregon coach Dana Altman said.

The Ducks (23-12) had some dark days during the regular season, notably a home loss to Texas Southern and an epic meltdown at home against UCLA. Freshman Bol Bol also

went down with a season-ending foot injury, leaving Oregon without one of its best players.

Instead of playing as the favorites, the Ducks arrived in Las Vegas needing to win four games in four days to clinch an NCAA Tournament berth.

Sparked by a lineup change late in the regular season, Oregon was clearly the best team on the floor all four days in Sin City.

The Ducks (23-12) capped it by holding Washington to the

lowest point total in championship game history and join Colorado in 2012 as the only teams to win four Pac-12 tournament games in four days.

"Everyone kind of came together at the right time," said Oregon's Louis King, who had 15 points.

Showing no signs of fatigue after three games in three days, sixth-seeded Ducks clamped down on Washington in the second half turning a close game into a 16-point lead.

Conference tournament roundup

Vermont denies UMBC chance at repeat

Associated Press

BURLINGTON, Vt. — Vermont learned from its loss last year on its home floor to Maryland-Baltimore County in the America East Tournament title game — a result that paved the way for an even bigger win by UMBC.

Anthony Lamb scored 28 points, and Vermont beat UMBC 66-49 on Saturday to win the America East championship and earn an NCAA Tournament bid.

It was the seventh conference title overall and second in three years for the Catamounts (27-6), who got their revenge on the anniversary of 16th-seeded UMBC's shocking upset of top-seeded Virginia in last year's NCAA Tournament.

Stef Smith added 17 points for Vermont and Ben Shungu scored nine, all in the second half. K.J. Jackson led UMBC (21-13) with 15 points, and Arkel Lamar had eight points and 11 rebounds.

N.C. Central 50, Norfolk State 47: Zacarry Douglas scored all 10 of his points during a 25-6 second-half run and the Eagles won their third consecutive Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference tournament with a win against the top-seeded host Spartans.

North Carolina Central (18-15) earned another trip to the NCAA Tournament despite missing nine of their last 10 shots and not scoring for the final 4:03.

Mastadi Pitt scored 14 points and C.J. Kelly 13 for Norfolk State (21-13). The Spartans had a last chance to tie, but after taking a timeout with 8.8 seconds left, they had to settle for a heavily contested desperation heave by Pitt at the buzzer.

Prairie View A&M 92, Texas Southern 86: Gary Blackston and Dennis Jones scored 17 points apiece to lead six Prairie

View A&M players in double figures and the Panthers beat Texas Southern in the Southwestern Athletic Conference Tournament championship game at Birmingham, Ala.

Prairie View earned its second NCAA Tournament berth and first since 1998.

Gerard Andrus had 12 points, Taishaun Johnson and Darius Williams scored 11 apiece and Devonte Patterson added 10 for the top-seeded Panthers (22-12), who have won 11 games in a row.

Utah State 64, San Diego State 57: Sam Merrill scored 24 points, going 11-for-12 from the free throw line and earning tournament MVP honors, as the Aggies won their first Mountain West Conference championship at Las Vegas.

Utah State (28-6) scored the first 13 points of the second half to pull away after leading 34-32 at halftime. The Aggies, who joined the conference in 2013-14, were the No. 2 seed after sharing the regular-season title with No. 14 Nevada.

No. 18 Buffalo 87, Bowling Green 73: Jeremy Harris scored 31 points, C.J. Massinburg added 17 and Buffalo won its fourth Mid-American Conference title in five years — and further stamped itself as a team capable of doing major damage in March.

The top-seeded Bulls (31-3), who dominated the MAC during the regular season, withstood a strong effort by the Falcons (22-12), one of three schools to beat them during the regular season.

Montana 68, Eastern Washington 62: Montana's Ahmaad Rorie, who hit several key shots late to finish with 11 points, played gritty defense down the stretch and earned tourney MVP honors. He scored a season-high 28 points in the semifinals

against Weber State and 17 against Sacramento State in the quarterfinals.

The Grizzlies (26-8), who lost to Michigan 61-47 in last year's NCAA Tournament, were led offensively by Sayeed Pridgett with 18 points. Donaven Dorsey and Michael Oguine each scored 12 points for the Grizzlies.

Old Dominion 62, Western Kentucky 56: Xavier Green and Ahmad Caver wore winners' basketball nets as necklaces in Frisco, Texas.

Green scored 14 of his 16 points in the second half to lead Old Dominion in the Conference USA Tournament championship.

Top-seeded Old Dominion (26-8), the eighth-stingiest scoring defense in the latest NCAA statistics (61.2 points per game), won three tournament games by a total of nine points to earn its first NCAA Tournament berth since 2011.

New Mexico State 89, Grand Canyon 57: New Mexico State junior Trevelin Queen, who said the Aggies were all gas and no brakes, fueled the Aggies' offense by scoring 27 points to lead New Mexico State to its third straight Western Athletic Conference Tournament championship and NCAA Tournament berth.

Abilene Christian 77, New Orleans 60: Jaren Lewis had 20 points and six rebounds, Franklin added 16 points and six assists, and the Wildcats won the Southland Conference championship.

UC Irvine 92, CS Fullerton 64: The Anteaters (30-5) are headed to the NCAA Tournament for the second time in school history. Their previous trip was in 2015.

Max Hazzard and Collin Welp led UC Irvine with 23 points apiece as it made 61.8 percent of its shots from the field.

NBA roundup

Spurs extend their winning streak to 8

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Three weeks after hitting a low point with a “pathetic” performance on Broadway, the Spurs hit a high note against the New York Knicks.

LaMarcus Aldridge had 18 points and 11 rebounds, and San Antonio beat the Knicks 109-83 on Friday night to extend its season-best winning streak to seven games.

“It’s more of a focus and them understanding that when we play good defense, we’re a darn good team,” Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said.

DeMar DeRozan and Bryn Forbes each added 13 points for the Spurs, whose previous season high was five straight victories.

New York, which was without injured point guard Dennis Smith Jr., lost its eighth straight. Damyean Dotson had 21 points and DeAndre Jordan added 11 points, 13 rebounds and matched a career high with nine assists.

The Spurs hold the league’s longest active winning streak and have won nine straight and 16 of 18 at the AT&T Center.

“It just feels good,” San Antonio forward Rudy Gay said. “Things are clicking. Playing defense. Even when the ball is not going in like we want it to, we’re still getting wins, and that’s how you know we’re getting better as a team.”

Gay had 12 points in 19 minutes after missing two games and losing 10 pounds because of the flu.

The Spurs dominated defensively, which was in stark contrast to what Popovich deemed a “pathetic performance defensively” in their previous meeting with the Knicks.

New York snapped an 18-game skid at home, routing the Spurs 130-118 on Feb. 24 as part of San Antonio’s worst Rodeo Road Trip ever. The Spurs have had a greater sense of urgency since going 1-7 on that road trip and it continued against the team with the league’s worst record (13-66).

New York had 16 turnovers and shot 41 percent from the field.

“When we beat them at our place, we limited our mistakes, our turnovers and stuff like that,” Knicks forward Kevin Knox said. “So, they came in with a little bit of a chip and we just didn’t respond.”

Warriors 110, Thunder 88: Stephen Curry scored 33 points to help Golden State roll past host Oklahoma City and clinch a playoff berth.

Klay Thompson scored 23 points and DeMarcus Cousins added 12 points, eight rebounds and six assists for the Warriors, who played without Kevin Durant for a second straight game because of a sprained right ankle.

Suns 138, Pelicans 136 (OT): Josh Jackson hit a tying three-pointer with 2 seconds left in overtime, New Orleans was assessed a technical foul when it called a timeout it didn’t have and Devin Booker hit the free throw to give visiting Phoenix the lead for good.

Mavericks 121, Cavaliers 116: At Dallas, Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 22 points, Dirk Nowitzki closed within three points of Wilt Chamberlain on the NBA scoring list and the Mavericks ended a seven-game losing streak.

Nuggets 102, Pacers 100: Paul Millsap hit a left-handed layup with 7 seconds remaining, Nikola Jokic scored 26 points before being ejected in the fourth quarter for arguing and host Denver moved to the verge of its first playoff spot since 2012-13.

Jazz 114, Nets 98: Donovan Mitchell scored 24 points, Rudy Gobert added 23 points and 17 rebounds, and Utah beat Brooklyn in Salt Lake City.

Celtics 129, Hawks 120: Jaylen Brown scored 23 points with a key three-pointer and Boston held off visiting Atlanta.

Wizards 135, Grizzlies 128: Bradley Beal scored 40 points for the second straight night and host Washington beat Memphis.

NHL roundup

Killorn’s hat trick helps Tampa down DC

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Alex Killorn scored three goals for his first career hat trick, and the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Washington Capitals 6-3 Saturday night in the teams’ first meeting since last year’s Eastern Conference finals.

Tampa Bay set team records for wins (55) and points (114) in a season, becoming the 12th team in league history to get at least 55 victories in a season.

Erik Cernak, Yanni Gourde and Tyler Johnson also scored for the Lightning, and Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 30 shots.

Bruins 2, Blue Jackets 1 (OT): Brad Marchand scored 3:30 into overtime and host Boston snapped a three-game losing streak.

Blues 5, Penguins 1: Vince Dunn scored twice, Pat Maroon had a goal and

an assist and St. Louis ended a three-game losing streak on the road.

Panthers 4, Kings 3: Jonathan Huberdeau scored with 1:56 remaining and Florida won at Los Angeles for its fourth straight victory.

Senators 6, Maple Leafs 2: Magnus Paajarvi scored twice to lead last-place Ottawa to a win at slumping Toronto.

Red Wings 2, Islanders 1: Andreas Athanasiou scored twice and Jonathan Bernier stopped 41 shots in host Detroit’s victory.

Hurricanes 4, Sabres 2: Andrei Svechnikov and Justin Williams each scored goals, and host Carolina won for the third time in four games. Jordan Staal scored a late goal for his 500th career point.

Jets 2, Flames 1: Mark Scheifele scored his 34th goal of the season, Mathieu Per-

reault had the winner and host Winnipeg ended Calgary’s three-game winning streak.

Blackhawks 2, Canadiens 0: Corey Crawford stopped 48 shots for his second shutout of the season and visiting Chicago won its fifth straight.

Wild 5, Rangers 2: Ryan Donato scored two goals and Devan Dubnyk had 26 saves as host Minnesota remained in the thick of the playoff race.

Predators 4, Sharks 2: Filip Forsberg scored the tiebreaking goal with 12:58 left in the third period and Viktor Arvidsson added his second of the game into an empty net to help Nashville won at San Jose.

Oilers 3, Coyotes 2 (OT): Connor McDavid scored two goals, including the winner in overtime, to lead Edmonton to a win at Arizona.