

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Questions raised about Jordan shootings

By TARA COPP

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Video footage of a shooting in Jordan that killed three U.S. soldiers has raised the possibility that it was a deliberate attack, U.S. officials said Friday.

Security camera footage of the Nov. 4 attack shows a lone Jordanian gunman at a checkpoint shooting at a convoy of

Green Berets who were there to conduct training at King Faisal Air Base in al-Jafr. Several news outlets have reported the military personnel were working for the CIA in Jordan.

A U.S. official on the condition of anonymity confirmed the video shows the Jordanian waved the first vehicle through the checkpoint and then opened fire on and ultimately killed two of the Americans in the second vehicle, which was first re-

ported by CBS. U.S. troops in a third vehicle returned fire and a third American was killed.

The U.S. official also confirmed the possibility that the Americans were specifically targeted. A second U.S. official said the investigation into the killings — including interviews with witnesses of the attack were not complete. The FBI is leading the investigation.

“We want to tell these families what it was and what it wasn’t,

instead of what it looks like,” the second U.S. official said on the condition of anonymity.

The Nov. 4 incident killed Staff Sgt. Matthew C. Lewellen, 27, of Lawrence, Kan.; Staff Sgt. Kevin J. McEnroe, 30, of Tucson, Ariz., and Staff Sgt. James F. Moriarty, 27, of Kerrville, Texas. They were members of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) at Fort Campbell in Kentucky.

Elderly gay Air Force vet seeks to upgrade ‘undesirable’ discharge

By NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — An ailing 91-year-old veteran who was kicked out of the Air Force in 1948 for being gay filed a lawsuit Friday against service Secretary Deborah Lee James, in part so he can have military honors at his funeral.

Edward Spires wants to have his discharge upgraded from “undesirable” to “honorable,” according to the lawsuit filed in Connecticut federal court.

“After being cast out of the Air Force for being a gay man, Ed rarely spoke of his military service or his discharge, humiliated by the Air Force’s labeling of his service as undesirable,” Spires’ husband David Rosenberg said Friday in a news release. “For the past decades, he has been made to feel ashamed.”

Spires has been barred from Department of Veterans Affairs benefits, which stops him from being buried at a VA cemetery or having military honors at his funeral service.

“Mr. Spires does not want to pass knowing that he will not be honored with a military burial and that the Air Force still refuses to acknowledge the sacrifices he made to serve his country with honor,” the lawsuit states.

Spires enlisted in the Air Force in 1946 and served as a chaplain’s assistant. While

stationed at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio in 1947, he was spotted by fellow servicemembers at an off-base Halloween party. One of the airmen mistook Spires’ costume as him dressing as a woman, the suit states.

He was taken to the Judge Advocate General shortly after, according to the suit, and went through a “horrific” and “unbearable” interrogation. Spires was taunted and verbally assaulted by fellow servicemembers. He was later court-martialed and discharged.

Many servicemembers — by some estimates about 100,000 — were other-than-honorably discharged for being gay from World War II to 2011, when the military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy was repealed. Since the repeal, some veterans have requested and received upgrades from the Defense Department.

When Spires applied for an upgrade through the Air Force Board of Corrections of Military Records in 2014, he was rejected, the suit states. In Spires’ case, his records are decades-old, and the board said they were lost in a 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis.

He applied again in 2016, though it wasn’t clear whether the Air Force would consider it.

Spires filed the lawsuit Friday with the help of the Yale Law School Veterans Legal Services Clinic.

Militants put up fierce resistance in eastern Mosul

Associated Press

MOSUL, Iraq — Iraqi troops faced stiff resistance Saturday from Islamic State militants as they pushed deeper into eastern Mosul, backed by aerial support from the U.S.-led international coalition, a senior military commander said.

At dawn, troops moved into the Muharabeh and Ulama neighborhoods after fully liberating the adjacent Tahrir neighborhood on Friday, said Maj. Gen. Sami al-Aridi, of the Iraqi special forces. Al-Aridi said Islamic State militants were fighting back with snipers, rocket-propelled grenades and mortar rounds.

Thick black columns of smoke were seen billowing from the two areas, while dozens of civilians were seen fleeing to government-controlled areas. Shortly before noon, a suicide bomber emerged from a house in the Tahrir neighborhood and attacked security forces, wounding four troops.

Late on Friday, a group of Islamic State militants attacked the village of Imam Gharbi, south of Mosul, controlling most of it for hours before airstrikes from the U.S.-led coalition were called in, an officer said. The clashes and multiple suicide bombings left three policemen dead, including an officer, and four others wounded, he said. Nine Islamic State fighters were killed. The officer spoke on condition of anonymity.

CIA nominee Pompeo known as hard-liner

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump's choice for CIA director is Mike Pompeo, a hard-line Republican congressman who criticized the Iran deal, blasted Hillary Clinton over the attack on a U.S. diplomatic outpost in Libya and believes Edward Snowden is a traitor.

Before starting the job, Pompeo would have to be confirmed by the Senate. One issue that could dominate a confirmation hearing is Pompeo's views on using harsh interrogation techniques on detainees. Trump has backed these techniques, saying: "We should go tougher than waterboarding," which simulates drowning.

During the campaign, Trump suggested he would push to change laws prohibiting waterboarding and other harsh techniques, saying banning them puts the U.S. at a strategic disadvantage against Islamic State militants.

Pompeo, 52, was elected to Congress in Kansas during the tea party wave of 2010. He was appointed to the House Select Benghazi Committee to probe the 2012 attack on the U.S. diplomatic outpost in Benghazi that killed U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans.

He also has been a fierce critic of Obama's nuclear deal with Iran, which granted Tehran sanctions relief for rolling back its nuclear weapons program.

National security pick Flynn a frequent critic of Islam

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Michael Flynn, the retired Army lieutenant general and intelligence officer who is Donald Trump's pick to serve as his national security adviser, is a harsh critic of Muslim extremism and the religion, itself, calling "radical Islam" an existential threat to the United States.

In strident speeches and public comments, Flynn has argued that Islamic State militants pose a global threat and demanded a far more aggressive U.S. military campaign against the group.

In a June interview, Flynn complained the U.S. needs to "discredit" radical Islam, but that "we're not allowed to do that right now." But his comments about Islam, a religion practiced by more than 1.5 billion people worldwide, at times have gone beyond condemning radicals inside the faith.

In August, he spoke at an event in Dallas hosted by the anti-Islamist group Act for America, calling Islam a "cancer" and a "political ideology" that "definitely hides behind being a religion."

Muslim Advocates, a civil rights group based in California, said in a statement that Flynn's appointment "signals support for anti-Muslim policies and sentiment that will undermine our nation's security and exacerbate an already unsafe climate for Muslims and all Americans."

The role of national security adviser has

varied by administration, but usually centers on coordinating the policy positions of the secretaries of state, defense, justice and other members of a president's national security team.

It is an especially powerful position because of the national security adviser's access to the president.

Flynn served for more than three decades in the Army following his commissioning in 1981 as a second lieutenant in military intelligence. His career included a stint as director of intelligence for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and intelligence chief for the U.S.-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

It ended when he was forced to resign from his post as head of the Defense Intelligence Agency in 2014.

Flynn has become a harsh critic of the Obama administration's prosecution of the fight against the Islamic State group and emerged as one of Trump's most vocal backers.

Yet while Flynn has publicly issued dark warnings about the risks of Islamic violence, his private consulting firm has lobbied for a company headed by a Turkish businessman tied to Turkey's authoritarian, Islamist-leaning government, which jailed thousands of opponents after a failed coup in July against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Racial issues could surface in hearing for Sessions

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate confirmation hearing of Sen. Jeff Sessions, President-elect Donald Trump's pick for attorney general, is likely to rehash racially charged allegations that derailed his nomination for a federal judgeship in 1986.

The expected focus on Sessions' record on race, policing and immigration comes as the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division has surged in prominence under the Obama administration. If confirmed, Sessions would have broad latitude to define how federal prosecutors wield their powers.

Lawmakers and advocates expressed concern Friday that Sessions could sideline or undo the Obama administration's civil rights efforts, which included inves-

tigations of police departments for unconstitutional practices and lawsuits meant to protect the rights of transgender individuals and black voters.

"Given some of his past statements and his staunch opposition to immigration reform, I am very concerned about what he would do with the Civil Rights Division at the Department of Justice and want to hear what he has to say," incoming Democratic Minority Leader Sen. Chuck Schumer said.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said he strongly supported Sessions, who he said "has worked tirelessly to safeguard the public and to improve the lives of Americans from all walks of life."

Sessions' peers on the Senate Judiciary Committee almost certainly will delve into the Alabama senator's past statements on

race. The panel's top Democrat, Sen. Patrick Leahy, of Vermont, hinted as much on Friday, saying the "American people deserve to learn about Senator Sessions' record."

Leahy voted against Sessions for a judgeship when he came before the Judiciary Committee in 1986.

During that hearing, Sessions was criticized for joking in the presence of a Civil Rights Division attorney that the Ku Klux Klan was "OK" until he learned they smoked marijuana. He was also said to have called a black assistant U.S. attorney "boy" and the NAACP "un-American" and "communist-inspired."

Sessions has said the racially charged allegations have been painful to him. He described the allegations as "false charges" in a 2009 CNN interview.

Trump's picks alarm minorities

Associated Press

Republican President-elect Donald Trump's choices for leadership posts threaten national unity and promise to turn back the clock on progress for racial, religious and sexual minorities, civil rights leaders and others said Friday after his selection of Alabama U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions for attorney general.

Comments attributed to Trump's picks, also including Stephen Bannon as senior adviser and chief strategist and former Army Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn as national security adviser, serve to embolden everyday Americans to lash out at members of minority groups, they said.

Sessions, a Republican, was denied a federal judgeship in 1986 after hearings in which he was accused of making racially charged remarks as a U.S. attorney. According to tran-

scripts, Sessions was accused, among other things, of joking that he thought the Ku Klux Klan "was OK" until he learned its members smoked marijuana and of calling a black assistant U.S. attorney "boy." During the hearing, Sessions denied making some of the comments and said others were jokes taken out of context.

Black Lives Matter activist and Campaign Zero co-founder DeRay Mckesson said Sessions' "documented racism and previous ineligibility for public office make him unfit to be the standard-bearer for the nation's justice system."

"If Sessions were to become the attorney general, the freedom and liberty of the historically marginalized would be severely threatened," said Mckesson, who has protested in several cities demanding police reform to address bias against communities of color. "Sessions' nomination would also

confirm that Trump plans to govern as he campaigned — as a proponent of bigotry, racism and xenophobia."

Bannon led the Breitbart website, which has been widely condemned as racist, sexist and anti-Semitic. In a 2011 radio interview, Bannon said conservative women infuriated liberals because they "would be pro-family, they would have husbands, they would love their children," contrasting that against a slur for lesbians.

Trump campaign manager Kellyanne Conway has called the accusations against Bannon "very unfair."

Civil rights leaders are calling on Trump to rescind Sessions' nomination or for the Senate to reject him. Sessions requires Senate confirmation as attorney general, as does Republican Kansas U.S. Rep. Mike Pompeo for CIA director, but Bannon and Flynn do not.

'Hamilton' cast member gives Pence an earful

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President-elect Donald Trump on Saturday demanded an apology from the cast member who gave Mike Pence an onstage earful about equality.

After the curtain call, actor Brandon Victor Dixon told Pence, "We, sir, are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us, our planet, our children, our parents, or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights. We truly hope this show has inspired you to uphold our American values and work on behalf of all of us. All of us."

Dixon portrays Aaron Burr, the third U.S. vice president.

Pence ducked out before Dixon finished the message but heard the full remarks from the hallway outside.

"Our wonderful future V.P. Mike Pence was harassed last night at the theater by the cast of Hamilton, cameras blazing," Trump tweeted Saturday. "The theater must always be a safe and special place. The cast of Hamilton was very rude last night to a very good man, Mike Pence. Apologize!"

The atmosphere was tense from the time the vice president-elect arrived, triggering cheers and boos as he slipped into his seat.

Outside, many protesters jeered, including one woman who held up a sign with a line from the musical that always gets a cheer: "Immigrants, we get the job done."

"Hamilton," which won 11 Tony Awards, has been praised by politicians and rap stars alike, influenced the debate over the nation's currency and burst through the Broadway bubble like none other.

After Pence left, Jeffrey Seller, the show's lead producer, said he hopes the politician would share the show's message of empathy: "I hope that maybe it inspires him to feel for those not like him."

President-elect settles lawsuit for \$25M

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — For more than six years, Donald Trump fought hard against a lawsuit in which former customers of his now-defunct Trump University accused him of fraud. Less than two weeks after being elected president, he agreed to a \$25 million settlement.

"We definitely detected a change of tone and change of approach" after the election, plaintiffs' attorney Jason Forge said when the agreement was announced Friday.

About 7,000 students would be eligible for refunds if U.S. District Judge Gonzalo Curiel approves the settlement.

Under the terms, the Republican president-elect admits no wrongdoing in settling two federal class-action lawsuits in San Diego and a lawsuit brought by New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, a Democrat.

The agreement came 10 days before jury selection was sched-

uled to begin in San Diego in the oldest case, which was filed in April 2010. The complaint accused Trump University of defrauding students who paid up to \$35,000 per year to enroll in programs that promised to share Trump's real estate secrets.

Trump denied the allegations and said he would not settle. He told supporters at a May rally that he would come to San Diego to testify after winning the presidency.

The thousands of former students covered by the San Diego lawsuits will be eligible to receive at least half and possibly all their money back, as much as \$35,000, Forge said. The plaintiffs' attorneys waived their fees.

Trump's attorneys said the settlement allows the president-elect to focus full attention on his transition to the White House.

The lawsuits allege Trump University gave seminars that were like infomercials, con-

stantly pressuring people to spend more and, in the end, failing to deliver on its promises. The San Diego trial would have been pinned on whether a jury believed Trump misled customers by calling the business a university and by advertising that he hand-picked instructors.

The settlement came a day after watchdog groups and ethics experts who served in both Republican and Democratic administrations sent a letter to Trump urging him to make a clean break from his business to avoid "embroiling the presidency in litigation."

One of the authors, Richard Painter, an ethics lawyer at the White House under Republican President George W. Bush, said the Trump University settlement might backfire if lawyers think Trump is eager to settle to avoid court cases while president.

"The plaintiffs' lawyers," he said, "are going to smell blood in the water."

Obama races to regulate before Trump takes reins

Bloomberg

At federal agencies across Washington, regulators are rushing to finalize rules before President Barack Obama leaves the White House.

Where the administration has issued an average of 2.2 rules per day this year, 10 were pushed out the door on Tuesday and Wednesday, according to a count by the American Action Forum.

“We’re running — not walking — through the finish line of President Obama’s presidency,” U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy said to agency staff in a post-election email.

The Federal Register, the dense tome where the government publishes new agency rules, swelled to 1,465 pages on Friday — the thickest volume yet this year. Since the Nov. 8 election of Donald Trump, who has vowed to fight “radical regulations,” the White House has finished reviews of nine economically significant rules — compared with eight during all of September.

One reason for the speed: The later a regulation is released by an outgoing administration, the easier it can be killed by the next one. Repub-

lican lawmakers are on track to adjourn early to take advantage of a measure intended to guard against so-called midnight rule-making that permits them to void regulations put into place in the last 60 days of the legislative session.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., wryly noted that “Congress has many tools” with which it can rescind rules.

Recent entries in the Federal Register include an Interior Department rule cracking down on methane emissions from oil wells and measures aiming to help highly skilled immigrant workers get green cards. On the horizon: a stream protection rule for coal mining, limits on the use of hydrofluorocarbons, new leak-detection requirements for oil wells and quotas for boosting biofuel use in gasoline.

What’s the hurry? Blame the human tendency toward procrastination — as well as a clamor to get new rules into place in hopes they will endure long after Trump is sworn in on Jan. 20. From corner offices to cubicles, the agency leaders and staff who have been toiling on rules sometimes for years are eager to get them across the finish line, said Susan Dudley,

director of the Regulatory Studies Center at George Washington University.

Even if Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton had won the presidency, “we would be seeing an uptick in regulatory activity,” she said, because staff members don’t want to leave their work unfinished. Delays are inevitable whenever a new administration moves in — even one with a similar mindset — because of staff turnover and subtle shifts in approach.

Even after new rules are published in the Federal Register, there’s typically a 60-day lag before they go into effect. And while Trump can work with Republicans on Capitol Hill to swiftly repeal rules imposed since late May — and employ a time-consuming administrative process to rewrite older measures — it’s much easier to spike those that haven’t yet gone into effect.

It’s expected that moments after Trump is sworn in, his administration will place a moratorium on new regulations and pull back any others that are on their way to the Federal Register but haven’t yet been published, Dudley said.

Wildfires causing breathing problems

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Asthma sufferers and others with breathing problems are turning up at hospitals and doctors’ waiting rooms, wheezing and hacking. Schoolchildren are being kept inside at recess. And people whose lungs are easily irritated are being told to close the windows and run the air conditioner if they have one.

Dozens of wildfires that have burned an estimated 190 square miles across the Southeast have thrown a shroud of smoke over the region in the past week or so, even in distant metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, leaving cities big and small smelling like a campfire jamboree, but without the fun.

The murk has veiled mountaintops, obscured Atlanta skyscrapers and intermittently turned the sun into a pale golden smudge over the city. At times, the flames have also cast a haze over Nashville and Chattanooga, Tenn., and Charlotte, N.C.

Federal authorities said 50 large fires of 100 acres or more are burning across the Southeast. Some are deep in the woods, while others threaten homes and highways.

The flames have not caused any widespread property damage. But the curtain of smoke has contributed to auto accidents, including a series of wrecks in Kentucky that killed one person and injured 14 others.

Daily air-quality reports from the Environmental Protection Agency and other agencies show pollutants have reached unhealthy levels — meaning people may feel ill even if they don’t have respiratory ailments — across much of Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee as well as portions of Alabama, North Carolina, Kentucky and Virginia.

The elderly and people with asthma or other lung problems are being warned to limit their time outdoors.

Dem’s lead widens in NC governor’s race

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Hardly anyone in North Carolina is willing to guess when their excruciatingly close governor’s race will be resolved. A Friday deadline came and went with Democratic Attorney General Roy Cooper’s unofficial advantage growing to about 6,600 votes over Republican Gov. Pat McCrory, from nearly 4.7 million cast.

McCrory is fighting for his

political life in a battleground state that Donald Trump and Republican Sen. Richard Burr won by relatively comfortable margins.

After endless legal battles over how, when and where people can vote, they’re fighting now over whether to count 60,000 provisional ballots and thousands more absentee ballots that have remained sealed since Election Day.

Still more delays are in store as McCrory’s campaign

supports allegations of hard-knuckled fraud lodged by voters in more than half the state’s 100 counties.

If Cooper’s margin remains below 10,000 votes, McCrory can call for a statewide recount, and with the possibility of other legal challenges and conceivably even legislative intervention to decide a contested result, few outside Cooper’s campaign are ready to put a date on the naming of the next governor.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

School bus, empty tanker truck crash

VA RICHMOND — Twelve students were checked out after a low-speed bus accident involving an empty tanker truck in Richmond.

Police said the crash happened Friday morning at the intersection of Cool Lane and Mechanicsville Turnpike. Police said the tanker clipped the rear bumper of the bus.

Richmond Public Schools officials said the bus holding 45 student was heading to Franklin Military Academy. Twelve students complained of neck and back pain. The rest of the students were taken to school on another bus.

Man fined \$11K for poaching trophy elk

CO CRAIG — A Denver man has been fined \$11,000 for illegally killing a trophy elk.

The Craig Daily Press reported that the man was sentenced Monday in Moffat County Court after pleading guilty to shooting the six-point bull elk in 2015. The man may lose hunting privileges in Colorado pending a review of the case by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

The usual fine for the charge is \$1,000, but the man was fined an additional \$10,000 because he poached an elk with at least six points on one of its antler beam.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife Officer Mike Swaro said Game Management Unit 2, where the poaching took place, is managed for trophy elk and it can take more than 20 years to legally draw a tag to hunt in the area.

30 cases of mumps; officials seek source

IA DUBUQUE—Health officials are puzzled by an outbreak of the mumps among Dubuque County students that has now climbed to 30 cases, which is more than one-third of all cases statewide.

According to Dubuque County Health Department executive director Patrice Lambert, the source of the outbreak has not yet been determined. Lambert said this is the worst outbreak in 10 years in the county.

Dubuque Community School District' health services coordinator, Rhonda Ramler, said officials haven't seen a pattern to the students who have been affected.

The Telegraph Herald reported that precautions are being taken to try and halt the spread of the disease, which can cause fever, headaches and swollen salivary glands.

Zoo seeks public input on lion cub's name

CA FRESNO — The Fresno Chaffee Zoo is showing off a new lion cub and asking zoogoers to choose his name.

The Fresno Bee reported that the 5-week-old lion cub made his public debut Thursday when local media was invited to visit the enclosure he shares with his mom, Kiki.

The cub's name will be determined by a contest now underway. Zoo visitors can purchase a wooden token and place the token in a collection box corresponding to the name they like best. Zoo staff has selected six Swahili names to choose from: Enzi (powerful), Kijani (warrior), Asani (rebellious), Erevu (clever), Mansa (king) and Bwani (gentleman).

Voting on the name will run through Nov. 27 and the little lion will likely be presented for public viewing a month or so after that

Man pleads guilty to cutting down trees

VT MONTPELIER — A Vermont man has pleaded guilty to charges that he cut down two large trees in a state forest.

The Rutland Herald reported Matthew Wyman, 31, pleaded guilty to cutting down the sugar maple and birch trees in Proctor Piper State Forest in Cavendish, and selling the logs.

He was ordered to pay nearly \$670 in restitution and a \$500 criminal fine. Wyman also was ordered to complete 29 to 30 days on a state work crew.

His brother, Joey Wyman, 33, of Cavendish, also faces charges in the case. A trial is scheduled for next month.

Woman calls 911 while bear attacks her

MD FREDERICK — A 63-year-old woman has survived after she was attacked by a bear in Maryland.

The woman was attacked Wednesday night in the driveway of a home located in a wooded area of Frederick County.

Maryland Department of Natural Resources spokesman Paul Peditto said the woman dropped into a fetal position during the attack and called 911 as she was lying on the ground. The bear eventually stopped and left.

The woman was taken to the hospital for treatment. She suffered a broken arm, cuts to her head and puncture wounds to both arms. Her injuries are not considered life-threatening.

Authorities were using a

tracking device to locate the bear.

Train, truck collide; driver escapes unhurt

GA NORCROSS — A truck driver and his wife were able to escape unharmed as a freight train slammed into their vehicle, which had become stuck on the tracks in downtown Norcross.

WSB-TV reported that Eli Mercado, the driver of the tractor-trailer, was moving a family from Norcross to Florida when he got stuck Tuesday evening. His wife fled from the cab while Mercado tried to save the vehicle. At the urging of his wife and police, Mercado escaped seconds before the train collided with the vehicle, scattering the family's possessions everywhere.

Mercado says he didn't see the signs prohibiting trucks until it was too late.

Roads were closed in the area as crews worked for hours to clean up the debris.

Lawmaker re-elected, arrested on same day

NH HOOKSETT — A New Hampshire lawmaker wanted by police for failing to show up for a court hearing was re-elected and arrested on the same day.

New Hampshire Public Radio reported that Republican state Rep. Dick Marple was sitting outside a polling place with his campaign signs on Election Day when an officer recognized him. Marple was charged with driving without a valid license in December 2014.

Police say Marple drove himself to the police station and was arrested.

He also was re-elected to a fifth term.

From wire reports

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NFL returns to Mexico, large fan base

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — Dressed in their classic silver and black uniforms, the Raiders players huddle before kickoff. After words of encouragement and a prayer, the teenagers finish with head butts, shoulder slaps and a battle cry: “Uno, dos, tres... vamos!”

This is, after all, south of the border, where football has a century-old tradition, rivals soccer in popularity and millions of kids like the “Raiders de Arboleda” play “futbol americano” — American football — every weekend.

The NFL returns to Mexico after an 11-year absence when the Texans face the Raiders in a regular-season game Monday in sold-out Azteca Stadium. For the “Mexican” Raiders and others across the country, football is part of Mexican sports tradition as much as soccer, boxing and lucha libre.

“Football gives you the chance to take your passion to the field, to hit people and not get fined,” said Raiders quarterback Gabriel Anaya, 16. “Maybe that’s why it’s so popular.”

The NFL has around 25 million fans in Mexico, the biggest number outside of the U.S., and its base “is still growing,” said Arturo Olive, director of the NFL office in Mexico. The league sponsors 6,500 teams in youth programs in 27 of 32 Mexican states, and estimates 2.5 million kids play flag football in elementary schools.

“Eight years ago, we played in only six states and had 120 teams,” Olive said. “The growth has been exponential.”

In a country steeped in soccer culture, and one that has hosted two FIFA World Cups, the love affair with football might be surprising. But Mexico has two popular college leagues with 36 teams, a six-team professional league, and up to 10 NFL games are on basic cable each week.

The local soccer league has nine games each week, and not all of them are on TV.

Fans can even watch the Thursday and Monday night games at the movie theater. Soccer gets the big-screen treatment only for World Cup matches.

“I also used to play soccer,” Anaya said, “but preferred this sport.”

Football was introduced in the country in 1896 by Mexican students returning home from U.S. colleges. They brought back “an oval shaped ball,” said Alejandro Morales, a local football historian and founder of Mexico’s football hall of fame. He said the first official match was played that year in the city of Jalapa in the Gulf state of Veracruz, where the students and their friends faced a team of American sailors from a U.S. ship anchored in the nearby port.

Soon after, several teams were created in Veracruz and eventually the sport spread to Mexico City and local colleges. UNAM, the national state university with over 200,000 students, started playing in the 1920s, and by the ’50s most of the Mexican colleges where playing the game that, at the time, rivaled soccer in popularity. UNAM’s famed Estadio Olimpico, site of the 1968 Summer Olympics, was used mainly for football in the first decade after its inauguration in 1950.

“Back then, football used to share the spotlight with soccer,” Morales said. “Eventually that faded, because football

was not seen as a business. It was played in college and they just wanted to help the students, while soccer was run by professionals.”

The first regular-season game was played in 2005, when the Arizona Cardinals played the San Francisco 49ers in front of 103,467 fans in Azteca Stadium, then an NFL record. Since 2007, the league has held games annually in Great Britain — including three each season since 2014 — but never returned to Mexico, until now.

“We were ready when the opportunity presented itself,” said Olive, who has run the NFL Mexico office since 2008. “Now we have a commitment to be successful with a game of this magnitude.”

Azteca Stadium, built in 1966 and home to the popular soccer club America, underwent several renovations to meet NFL standards, including new locker rooms exclusive for the football teams, new ramps and improved communication systems. The size decreased from 100,000 to 84,000 to improve seating, and all tickets were sold out in less than two hours, Olive said.

Cards visit Vikings in pivotal matchup of contenders

Associated Press

The Minnesota Vikings will return to the comfort of their new NFL stadium this weekend, lugging some heavy baggage with them.

Four straight losses can weigh on a team that was undefeated before the streak started, dampening Super Bowl aspirations.

There’s been awful blocking, injuries, and cracks opening in a defense that looked impenetrable earlier this season. The kicking game has been woeful, and yet the Vikings are tied with Detroit atop the NFC North.

The Arizona Cardinals won’t be the ideal visitors on Sunday. Though they’ve been one of the

NFC’s many underperformers and have yet to win a game outside of the Pacific time zone, the Cardinals are dangerous on both sides of the ball. They have their own urgency to catch up in the conference playoff race while closing their regular schedule with five of seven games on the road.

David Johnson leads the NFL in yards from scrimmage, with at least 100 in each game, and a defense that was dominant before Minnesota’s momentum-killing bye week has been vulnerable against pass-catching running backs. The Vikings will also be breaking in a new kicker, Kai Forbath, after releasing Blair Walsh.

“A lot of people are doubting right now, and that’s fine, but as

long as everyone in this locker room believes, we’re going to be OK,” Vikings left guard Alex Boone said.

Seahawks coach Pete Carroll could get his 100th NFL win when the Philadelphia Eagles go to Seattle.

The past two weeks have indicated another second-half surge could be on the horizon for Seattle. After holding off Buffalo in a Monday night victory, the Seahawks went across the country on a short week and won at New England, stopping the Patriots at the 1-yard line in the final seconds. They kept a two-game lead over Arizona in the NFC West.

It ranked among the more impressive regular-season wins since Carroll arrived in

Seattle and showed flashes that a plodding offense could be on the verge of a breakout.

Philadelphia was also coming off an impressive win, against Atlanta, for its fourth straight at home. But the Eagles are 1-4 on the road. Rookie quarterback Carson Wentz has been up and down, though the team has scored at least 20 points in 11 straight games, the longest streak in the league. Defense and special teams have been solid for the Eagles.

Neither the Buffalo Bills nor the Cincinnati Bengals can afford another loss. Buffalo has dropped three straight and comes off a bye. The Bengals have won only one of their past five, against inept Cleveland.

No. 5 UNC struggles to get by Hawaii

Associated Press

HONOLULU — North Carolina coach Roy Williams did not mince words after his fifth-ranked Tar Heels struggled in the first half before pulling out their latest win.

Isaiah Hicks scored 10 of his 16 points after halftime to lead five players in double-figures as North Carolina (4-0) beat Hawaii 83-68 Friday night.

"It's one of the ugliest games I've ever coached in my entire life," Williams said, "but we made some shots during a stretch in the second half that gave us the lead."

North Carolina never trailed outside of the opening minutes and held a 35-27 lead at halftime despite shooting just 35.1 percent from the field. The Tar Heels had shot better than 50 percent from the field in each of their first three games.

Hicks said Williams' message to the team at halftime emphasized defense.

"He said that shots were going to fall, but we've got to be better on the defensive end, continue to rebound, get to the board and try to get them out

of what they do early on," said Hicks, who shot 7-for-8 from the field.

No. 3 Villnova 96, Wake Forest 77: At Charleston, S.C., Josh Hart scored a career-high 30 points with six three-pointers and the Wildcats powered past the Demon Deacons to reach the finals of the Charleston Classic.

Hart, a preseason All-American, made five of his team's first six baskets to open a 16-8 lead and Villanova (4-0) kept going. The Wildcats will face UCF or College of Charleston for the tournament title on Sunday night.

No. 7 Kansas 86, Siena 65: Frank Mason III scored 18 points to lead a late-game charge, Carlton Bragg added a career-high 15 points and 11 rebounds as the host Jayhawks beat the pesky Saints.

The Saints never made it easy.

Marquis Wright hit three straight three-pointers midway through the second half, and the gritty senior guard's three-point play got coach Jimmy Patsos' team within 63-58 with about 7½ minutes left.

Vick answered with back-to-back baskets for the Jayhawks, kicking off the game-defining 16-2 run that put the game away. Mason added a three-pointer and a couple foul shots, Graham got into the act, and the Jayhawks — so accustomed to dominating inside — leaned on their guard play to seal the win.

No. 10 Arizona 95, Sacred Heart 65: Lauri Markkanen scored 22 points to lead six Arizona players in double figures and the host Wildcats routed the Pioneers.

No. 11 Xavier 83, Clemson 77: At Lake Buena Vista, Fla., J.P. Macura scored a career-high 28 points and Trevon Bluiett contributed 21 as the Musketeers defeated the Tigers in the second round of the Tire Pros Invitational.

No. 13 Michigan State 100, Mississippi Valley State 53: Miles Bridges scored 21 of his 24 points in the first half, grabbed 11 rebounds and had six assists in his home debut for the Spartans in a win over the Delta Devils.

No. 14 Gonzaga 109, Bryant 70: Przemek Karnowski

scored 22 points and Johnathan Williams added 20 to help the host Zags beat the Bulldogs.

No. 18 Syracuse 71, Monmouth 50: Andrew White scored 18 points, Taurean Thompson added 12 and the Orange routed the visiting Hawks.

No. 15 Purdue 64, Georgia State 56: At West Lafayette, Ind., Caleb Swanigan scored 18 points and the Boilermakers scored the final 20 points of the game to rally and beat the Panthers in the Cancun Challenge opener.

No. 22 Creighton 103, Washington State 77: At St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, Cole Huff scored 19 points, and the Bluejays put the Cougars away early en route to a victory in the Paradise Jam tournament.

North Dakota State 66, Navy 59: At High Point, N.C., Dexter Werner scored 14 points and the Bison beat the Midshipmen in the High Point University Tournament.

Hasan Abdullah was 4-for-8 from three-point range and scored 12 points for the Midshipmen (1-2).

McNichols powers No. 22 Boise State to 10th victory

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — Boise State running back Jeremy McNichols admitted that last season he didn't spend as much time in the film room or with his offensive line. He's changed that this year and it's paying big dividends.

McNichols rushed for 206 yards and a career-high four touchdowns to power No. 22 Boise State past UNLV 42-25 on Friday night.

Boise State (10-1, 6-1) kept its Mountain West title hopes alive and reached 10 victories for the second time in three seasons under head coach Bryan Harsin. After passing Western Michigan in the College Football Playoff rankings this week, the Broncos also remained in

contention for a Cotton Bowl berth.

McNichols set a school record for the most 200-yard rushing games in a single season with his third.

"You have to know your offensive line well," McNichols said. "And last year I didn't watch as much film with them or spend as much time around them. But I changed that this year."

"Now even at our walk throughs, I'll go over and see what they're talking about. Having a good relationship with your offensive line is huge. When they mean something and you show them they mean something, they feel like they scored a touchdown with you. They run down the field to try

and catch me. It's fun."

The Rebels (4-7, 3-4), who lost for the fifth time in five tries at Boise State, didn't have much fun trying to stop McNichols, who entered the game as the nation's fifth-leading rusher.

"(McNichols) did a good job of bouncing to the outside and breaking contain," UNLV coach Tony Sanchez said. "We had him dead to rights a few times, but just weren't able to tackle in space. And that killed us."

UNLV's offense, which was missing leading receiver Devonte Boyd due to a broken hand suffered last week, didn't have any better luck, either, managing only 302 yards of total offense — their second-lowest output of the season.

Harsin said he planned on

emphasizing the ground game against UNLV, but things went better than expected.

"We came in here with the game plan to run the ball," Harsin said, "But the way Jeremy was just running it, when he's hot like that, you want to keep getting it to him."

McNichols, a junior who could follow in the footsteps of former teammate and Miami Dolphins running back Jay Ajayi and enter the draft after the season, said his last regular-season game at home seemed different.

"I said before the game that something felt special about tonight," McNichols said. "When you get in that groove, you feel like every touch could go the distance. And it felt like that tonight."

Aldridge, Leonard help Spurs top Lakers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — LaMarcus Aldridge scored 23 points, Kawhi Leonard added 23 points and 12 rebounds, and the Spurs beat the Lakers 116-107 for their fifth straight victory.

Tony Parker had 16 points and seven assists for the Spurs, who improved to 7-0 on the road this season with their sixth consecutive win over the Lakers.

Los Angeles still kept it close until the final minutes, when Aldridge and Leonard took turns hitting big shots before Parker buried a clinching 17-footer with 33.6 seconds left.

Pau Gasol scored 16 points in his first trip to Staples Center with the Spurs.

Thunder 124, Nets 105: Russell Westbrook had 30 points, 13 assists and 11 rebounds in his fourth triple-double of the

season, leading Oklahoma City past visiting Brooklyn.

Raptors 113, Nuggets 111 (OT): DeMar DeRozan scored 30 points, including four in overtime, and Toronto held off host Denver.

Clippers 121, Kings 115: Blake Griffin had 29 points, seven rebounds and six assists to lead visiting Los Angeles over Sacramento.

Hornets 100, Hawks 96: Nic Batum had 24 points and 10 rebounds, Cody Zeller matched his career high with 23 points and Charlotte rallied to snap visiting Atlanta's six-game winning streak.

Warriors 104, Celtics 88: Klay Thompson scored 28 points, Kevin Durant had 23 points and 10 rebounds against the team he spurned this summer and Golden State scored 18 points in a row in the third quarter to pull away and beat host Boston.

Cavaliers 104, Pistons 81: Kyrie Irving scored 25 points and LeBron James, returning to the lineup after sitting out a game, added 21 to help Cleveland rout visiting Detroit.

Pelicans 113, Trail Blazers 101: Anthony Davis had 38 points, nine rebounds and four blocks, Jrue Holiday added 21 points in his first action this year, and host New Orleans beat Portland.

Grizzlies 80, Mavericks 64: Chandler Parsons scored 12 points in his return to Dallas, helping Memphis beat the injury-plagued Mavericks, who flirted with franchise worsts for scoring and shooting percentage.

Suns 116, Pacers 96: Brandon Knight scored 17 points and Phoenix beat host Indiana.

Beagle's late goal lifts Capitals over Red Wings

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Before the first period was over, Washington lost three forwards.

It didn't stop the Capitals, who managed a 1-0 win over the Detroit Red Wings on Friday night thanks to Jay Beagle's goal with 5:11 remaining in the third period.

Washington coach Barry Trotz noted that besides the injuries to Andre Burakovsky, Lars Ellis and T.J. Oshie, a couple of players had equipment problems.

"I was like, 'OK, we're down to like five or six guys,'" Trotz said. "I thought it was a real gutsy effort. We got a lot of commitment in a lot of areas. They tried to grind us down pretty good with their numbers. I thought we were resilient. When it was time to be committed, we were fully in."

Washington was coming off a seven-goal outburst against Pittsburgh on Wednesday after scoring just five goals in its previous four games.

The Capitals had played the season's early weeks without major injuries, something that Trotz wryly noted.

"I got a flu shot today with one of our doctors. I said, 'knock on wood, we haven't had any injuries,' and we were talking about that, and how fortunate that was, and I should have just kept my mouth shut," Trotz said.

Braden Holtby had 25 saves for his first shutout this season and the 24th of his career.

"On any given night we know he's going to show up. We know he's going to be one of

the best players on the ice if not the best," Capitals forward Tom Wilson said. "He's always there for us to bail us out, and it's nice to get him the shutout."

Beagle tapped in a rebound of Dmitry Orlov's shot, which was stopped by Detroit goalie Jimmy Howard. It was Beagle's fourth this season.

"I just kind of spun around and saw a wide open net so I just tried to get it as I was falling," Beagle said. "I don't think I've even been a part of a game where three guys go down kind of all within the first 10 minutes of the game."

Howard finished with 27 saves for the Red Wings, who have lost three straight for the first time this season.

"Somehow, the puck had eyes, got through, went off my left skate, went right back out in front," Howard said.

Detroit coach Jeff Blashill was unhappy with his team's power play. The Red Wings failed to score on four opportunities.

Penguins 3, Islanders 2 (OT): Kris Letang scored 1:24 into overtime, lifting visiting Pittsburgh past last-place New York to rebound from a blowout loss.

Sidney Crosby set up the winner by faking a shot and then passing to Letang, who fired in his second of the season.

Pittsburgh was beaten 7-1 by the Washington Capitals on Wednesday night, its biggest defeat during coach Mike Sullivan's nearly year-long tenure.

Blue Jackets 4, Rangers 2: Matt Calvert returned from taking a slap shot to his forehead that required about 30 stitches and scored a short-handed, tiebreaking

goal in the third period to lift Columbus to its franchise-record seventh straight home win.

William Karlsson had a goal and an assist, and Sam Gagner and Boone Jenner also scored for Columbus, which led 2-0 in the second period before the Rangers tied it in the third. The Blue Jackets have won three in a row overall and seven of nine. Sergei Bobrovksy had 25 saves.

Michael Grabner and Mika Zibanejad scored for New York, which lost for the third time in 14 games. Henrik Lundqvist made 20 saves for the Rangers.

Hurricanes 3, Canadiens 2: Victor Rask had a goal and an assist in his team's three-goal third period as host Carolina rallied past Montreal.

Jeff Skinner and Teuvo Teravainen also scored for the Hurricanes during their outburst over a 5-minute, 50-second span of third period. Ron Hainsey had two assists and Cam Ward stopped 31 shots.

Blackhawks 3, Flames 2: Marian Hossa's controversial goal with 2:23 left in the third period lifted visiting Chicago past Calgary.

Artemi Panarin's hard shot was deflected by Chad Johnson's glove high in the air and as the puck came down behind him, Hossa knocked it in. While replays showed it might have been a high stick by Hossa, Flames coach Glen Gulutzan had used his timeout earlier in the period and was unable to challenge the call.