

STARS AND STRIPES®

Monday, November 13, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Navy shows off air power during drills

By LEON COOK
AND TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

USS NIMITZ, Sea of Japan — The Navy put its air power on display as a rare, three-aircraft carrier exercise entered its final stretch Monday in waters east of the Korean Peninsula.

The four-day drills, which kicked off on Saturday, involved the USS Ronald Reagan, USS Theodore Roosevelt and USS Nimitz and are aimed at demonstrating the Navy's "unique capability to operate multiple carrier strike groups as a coordinated strike force effort," the service said last week.

The exercise — which is happening as President Donald Trump wraps up his lengthy tour of five Asian nations — includes air-defense drills, sea surveillance, defensive air combat training and close-in coordinated maneuvers.

The Nimitz's flight deck was a hive of activity Monday as crewmembers readied steam catapults that would send 23-ton F/A-18E and 18F Super Hornets soaring skyward. Moments later, the hook run-

ners would ready the arresting cable to catch another jet in the "controlled crash" of a carrier landing.

Elsewhere on the flight deck — and in hangars below — ground crewmen readied aircraft that would soon take to the skies above the sea to engage in mock dogfights, while others inspected jets that had recently landed.

"This is a unique opportunity. It's rare that you can aggregate a force the way we did here," Rear Adm. Greg Harris, commander of the Nimitz strike group, told Stars and Stripes on Monday from a hangar aboard the carrier. His group includes the Nimitz, Carrier Air Wing 11, Destroyer Squadron 9, and several other support ships.

The air wing has flown an average of 80 sorties per day since Saturday, according to its commander, Capt. Mike Spencer. The Theodore Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan strike groups have flown a similar number.

The last tri-carrier drills took place in 2007 off the coast of Guam during exercise Valiant Shield. The Navy has in recent years conducted dual-

carrier operations in the South China, East China and Philippine seas.

Navy officials told Stars and Stripes the drills are not part of a planned multinational exercise, although imagery released Sunday shows Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force and the South Korean warships sailing in formation alongside U.S. vessels.

The Japanese destroyers JS Inazuma, JS Makimise and JS Ise conducted a drill alongside the three U.S. carriers to "improve tactics and skills" and "strengthen cooperation" with the Navy," said a JMSDF statement issued Sunday.

Seven South Korean vessels, including two destroyers, trained alongside the carriers for the "purpose of coping with [North Korean] provocations and threats," according to a statement issued Monday by South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The drills will "restrain [North Korea] from doing nuclear and missile provocations," it added.

Navy officials told Stars and Stripes last week the exercise

"is just another example of the service's regular and routine presence" in the region and is not directed at North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's regime.

The communist state has test-fired dozens of ballistic missiles in recent months and conducted its sixth and most powerful underground nuclear blast on Sept. 3. However, Pyongyang has been unusually quiet since a Hwasong-12 missile launched on Sept. 15 flew over the Japanese island of Hokkaido and landed in the Pacific Ocean.

Trump has warned that the U.S. military is "locked and loaded" and has threatened to unleash "fire and fury" against North Korea if it continues to threaten the U.S.

Aboard his carrier on Monday, the Nimitz strike group commander suggested the exercise was aimed at reassuring America's allies in the tension-filled region.

"We want to very clearly show our allies and partners, 'We have been here for 70 years for you, and we are going to be here for 70 more,'" Harris said.

Pressured to recruit, Army expands medical waivers

USA Today

WASHINGTON — People with a history of "self-mutilation," bipolar disorder, depression and drug and alcohol abuse can now seek waivers to join the Army under an unannounced policy enacted in August, according to documents obtained by USA Today.

The decision to open Army recruiting to those with mental health conditions comes as the service faces the challenging goal of recruiting 80,000 new

soldiers through September 2018.

To meet last year's goal of 69,000, the Army accepted more recruits who fared poorly on aptitude tests, increased the number of waivers granted for marijuana use and offered hundreds of millions of dollars in bonuses.

Expanding the waivers for mental health is possible in part because the Army now has access to more medical information about each potential

recruit, Lt. Col. Randy Taylor, an Army spokesman, said in a statement. The Army issued the ban on waivers in 2009 amid an epidemic of suicides among troops.

"The decision was primarily due to the increased availability of medical records and other data which is now more readily available," Taylor's statement to USA Today said. "These records allow Army officials to better document applicant medical histories."

But accepting recruits with those mental health conditions in their past carries risks, according to Elspeth Ritchie, a psychiatrist who retired from the Army as a colonel in 2010 and is an expert on waivers for military service. People with a history of mental health problems are more likely to have those issues surface than those who do not, she said.

"It is a red flag," she said. "The question is, how much of a red flag is it?"

4 US troops injured in Kandahar suicide blast

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Four U.S. servicemembers were injured Monday when a suicide bomber struck a military convoy in Afghanistan's southern Kandahar province, officials said.

The incident occurred near Kandahar Air Field, where U.S. and coalition forces are based, said Qudratullah Khushbakht, a spokesman for the province's governor.

The U.S. troops were injured when a vehicle bomb exploded, NATO's mission in Afghanistan said in a statement. It said that all four casualties were in stable condition. There were no fatalities.

Taliban insurgents claimed responsibility for the bombing.

Also on Monday, an Afghan official said a Taliban attack in western Farah province killed eight police officers, The Associated Press reported. One policeman was slightly wounded in the attack and was subsequently arrested on suspicion of links with the insurgents.

Syrians now facing US-backed Kurds after militants' collapse

Associated Press

BEIRUT — With the fall of Islamic State's last significant stronghold in Syria, Iranian and Russia-backed Syrian troops now turn to face off with their main rival, the U.S.-backed forces holding large oil fields and strategic territory in the country's north and east.

The complicated map puts U.S. and Iranian forces at close proximity, standing just across the Euphrates River from each other, amid multiple hot spots that could turn violent, particularly in the absence of a clear American policy.

There are already signs. Iran threatened recently that Syrian troops will advance toward Raqqa, the former ISIS capital, which fell to the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces in October — raising the potential for a clash there. The Kurdish-led SDF also controls some of Syria's largest oil fields in the oil-rich eastern Deir el-Zour province, an essential resource the Syrian government also

says it will take back.

The SDF also faces restlessness in an Arab-majority town it liberated last year, a possible sign of things to come in other areas that the Kurdish-dominated forces control in their self-rule area in northern Syria, now about 25 percent of the country's territory.

The question now is whether the U.S. is willing to confront the troops of Syrian President Bashar Assad and Iran-backed militiamen. The Kurds are seeking a clear U.S. commitment to help them defend their gains. American officials have said little of their plans and objectives in Syria beyond general statements about continuing to deny ISIS safe havens and continuing to train and equip allies. While meeting with Ali Akbar Velayati, adviser of Iran's supreme leader, Assad said his war was against terrorism and against plans to partition Syria, a reference to Kurdish aspirations for a recognized autonomous zone in the north. He repeated that his government plans to regain

control of all of Syria.

With its collapse in Boukamal on Thursday, ISIS has no major territory left in Syria or Iraq. Its militants are believed to have pulled back into the desert, east and west of the Euphrates River. The group has a small presence near the capital, Damascus.

The Euphrates stands as the dividing line between Syrian government troops and the SDF in much of Deir el-Zour province. Government forces and their allies, including Iranian troops and fighters from the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, control the western bank. They hold the provincial capital and several small oil fields. The Kurdish-led force, along with U.S. troops advising them, is on the eastern bank. They hold two of Syria's largest oil fields, nearly a dozen smaller ones, one of the largest gas fields and large parts of the border with Iraq. They say they are determined to keep the government from crossing the river.

Growing ISIS could be a 'significant threat' in Somalia

Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia — Islamic State's growing presence in Somalia could become a "significant threat" if it attracts fighters fleeing collapsing strongholds in Syria and Iraq, experts say,

ANALYSIS and already it seems to be influencing

local al-Shabab extremists to adopt tactics like beheadings.

The U.S. military this month carried out its first drone strikes against ISIS fighters in Somalia, raising questions about the strength of the group that emerged just two years ago. A second strike targeted

the fighters on Sunday, with the U.S. saying "some terrorists" were killed.

ISIS burst into public view in Somalia late last year as dozens of armed men seized the port town of Qandala in the northern Puntland region, calling it the seat of the "Islamic Caliphate in Somalia." They beheaded a number of civilians, prompting more than 20,000 residents to flee, and held the town for weeks until they were forced out by Somali troops, who were backed by U.S. military advisers.

Since then, ISIS fighters have stormed a hotel popular with government officials in

Puntland's commercial hub of Bossaso and have claimed their first suicide attack, at a Bossaso security checkpoint.

This long-fractured Horn of Africa nation with its weak central government already struggles to combat al-Shabab, an ally of al-Qaida that is blamed for last month's truck bombing in the capital, Mogadishu, that killed more than 350 in the country's deadliest attack.

The Trump administration early this year approved expanded military operations in Somalia as it puts counterterrorism at the top of its Africa agenda. The U.S. military on Sunday told The Associated

Press it had carried out 26 airstrikes this year against al-Shabab and now ISIS.

For more than a decade, al-Shabab has sought a Somalia ruled by Islamic law. Two years ago, some of its fighters began to split away to join ISIS. Some small pro-ISIS cells have been reported in al-Shabab's southern Somalia stronghold, but the most prominent one and the target of U.S. airstrikes is in the north in Puntland, a hotbed of arms smuggling and a short sail from Yemen.

For now, no one but al-Shabab has the ability to carry out the kind of massive bombing that rocked Mogadishu last month.

N. Korean soldier defecting at DMZ is shot

BY KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — A North Korean soldier was shot by his comrades as he defected to the South on Monday in an extremely rare crossing via the truce village in the Demilitarized Zone, military officials said.

The defection came less than a week after President Donald Trump traveled to South Korea to pledge solidarity with the longtime U.S. ally amid soaring tensions over the growing nuclear and missile threat from

the North.

The soldier fled from his guard post in the jointly controlled area where the two sides face each other across the line that divides the peninsula, according to South Korea's military.

Other North Korean forces opened fire, wounding the soldier as he advanced toward the South Korean side's reception building known as the Freedom House, an official said, reading a statement from the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

More than 30,000 North Koreans have defected to the South, but it's unusual for

soldiers to flee across the so-called DMZ, a 2.5-mile-wide, 150-mile-long buffer zone lined with barbed wire and dotted with land mines.

It's rarer for them to leave their posts in the Joint Security Area, which is controlled on the southern side by the U.S.-led United Nations Command. South Korea's Unification Ministry, which oversees defectors, said the last time it happened was in 2007.

The North Korean soldier, who was shot in the shoulder and the elbow, was airlifted to a hospital by a United Nations Command helicopter, another

military official said, speaking on condition of anonymity in exchange for providing the details.

The South Korean military found him bleeding about 25 minutes after several rounds of gunfire were heard, the official said, adding the North Korean soldier was unarmed and was wearing a combat uniform indicating a low rank.

The military said the two sides did not trade gunfire, but it has raised its alert level and is maintaining a full readiness posture against the possibility of provocations from North Korea.

S. Korean police detain US man in restricted border area near North

BY KIM GAMEL AND YOO
KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korean police have arrested a U.S. citizen who allegedly entered a restricted border area near North Korea without permission.

A 58-year-old man from Louisiana identified only as "A" was detained Monday after crossing the Civilian Control Line near the heavily fortified frontier, according to South Korea's Defense Ministry.

People must have permits to enter the area, which is just south of the Demilitarized Zone, a 2.5-mile-wide, 150-mile-long no man's land that divides the peninsula. It's also the site of several tourist attractions.

Military officials initially said they believed the man traveled to South Korea planning to enter the North for political purposes. But investigators, who have turned the case over to local police, later said they had determined he had no communist connections.

The U.S. Embassy is aware

of the report and is looking into it, an official told Stars and Stripes on condition of anonymity in order to discuss the case.

"If it is determined that a U.S. citizen has been detained, the embassy will provide appropriate consular services," the official said. "Privacy concerns prevent us from sharing information on individual cases."

A local resident in Yeoncheon County, about 40 miles north of Seoul, discovered the American and reported him to the South Korean army, a military official said. The man was captured about an hour later in an area controlled by the 28th Infantry Division.

A police officer in the area said the man had traveled to South Korea on Nov. 3, contradicting a report that he had arrived three days ago.

The two Koreas remain technically at war after their 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice instead of a peace treaty. About 28,500 U.S. servicemembers are based in the South.

Trump, allies meet as Asia trip winds down

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines—President Donald Trump is winding down his lengthy Asia trip with an international summit and a series of meetings with Pacific Rim allies, including his host in the Philippines who is overseeing a bloody drug war.

Trump jointly met Monday with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, with whom he had a contentious phone call last winter, and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who hosted the president in Tokyo earlier in the trip. Trump raved about his accomplishments on his five-nation journey, including on trade and North Korea, but said he would wait until his return to Washington on Wednesday to elaborate with a "major statement."

"We've made some very big steps with regard to trade — far bigger than anything you know," Trump told reporters at the beginning of the meeting in Manila.

The opening ceremonies of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations conference began with pageantry, including a group photo of the leaders and the summit's traditional handshake. That cross-body handshake,

during which each leader shakes the opposite hands of those next to him or her, briefly baffled Trump, who then laughed as he figured out where to place his arms.

One of the leaders on his flank was Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, who has overseen a bloody drug war that has featured extrajudicial killings. The two men held longer, formal talks on Monday, and White House aides signaled that Trump was not expected to publicly bring up human rights in their discussions.

Swirling questions about Russia followed Trump halfway across the globe.

He tried to have it both ways on the issue of Russian interference in last year's presidential race, saying he believes both the U.S. intelligence agencies when they say Russia meddled and Putin's sincerity in claiming that his country did not.

"I believe that he feels that he and Russia did not meddle in the election," Trump said Sunday in Hanoi, Vietnam.

"As to whether I believe it, I'm with our agencies," Trump said. "As currently led by fine people, I believe very much in our intelligence agencies."

Hundreds killed by temblor in Iraq, Iran

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — A powerful magnitude-7.3 earthquake that struck the Iraq-Iran border region killed more than 400 people across both countries, sent people fleeing their homes into the night and was felt as far away as the Mediterranean coast, authorities reported on Monday.

Iran's western Kermanshah province bore the brunt of the temblor, with Iran's state-run news agency reporting the quake killed more than 400 people in the country and injured over 6,700. It is a rural, mountainous region where residents rely mainly on farming to make a living.

In Iraq, the earthquake killed at least seven people and injured 535, all in the country's north-

ern, semi-autonomous Kurdish region, according to Iraq's Interior Ministry.

The quake was centered 19 miles outside the eastern Iraqi city of Halabja, according to the most recent measurements from the U.S. Geological Survey.

The earthquake struck 14.4 miles below the surface, a shallow depth that can have broader damage. Magnitude-7 earthquakes on their own are capable of widespread, heavy damage.

Iranian social media and news agencies showed images and videos of people fleeing their homes into the night. More than 100 aftershocks followed.

The quake's worst damage appeared to be in the town of Sarpol-e-Zahab in Kermanshah province, which sits in the Zagros Mountains that di-

vide Iran and Iraq.

Kokab Fard, 49, a housewife in Sarpol-e-Zahab, said she had to flee empty-handed when her apartment complex collapsed.

"Immediately after I managed to get out, the building collapsed," Fard said. "I have no access to my belongings."

Reza Mohammadi, 51, said he and his family ran out into the alley following the first shock. "I tried to get back to pick (up) some stuff, but it totally collapsed in the second wave," Mohammadi said.

Those in Sarpol-e-Zahab also said the power and water were out in the town, and telephone and cellphone service was spotty.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei offered his condolences on Monday morning and urged rescuers and all

government agencies to do all they could to help those affected, state media reported. President Hassan Rouhani is scheduled to tour quake-damaged areas Tuesday.

In Iraq, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi issued a directive for the country's civil defense teams and "related institutions" to respond to the natural disaster. The quake could be felt across Iraq, shaking buildings and homes from Irbil to Baghdad.

Amina Mohammed, who survived the quake in Darbandikhan, Iraq, said she and her sons escaped their home as it collapsed around them.

"I think it was only God that saved us," she said. "I screamed to God, and it must have been him to stop the stairs from entirely collapsing on us."

EU launches new era of cooperation on defense

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — European Union countries on Monday officially launched a new era in defense cooperation with a program of joint military investment and project development aimed at helping the EU confront its security challenges.

Twenty-three of the EU's 28 member nations signed up to the process, known as permanent structured cooperation, or PESCO. Britain, which is leaving the EU in 2019, and Denmark, with a defense opt-out, were among those not taking part.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini described it as a "historic moment in European defense" and added that "23 member states engaging both on capabilities and on operational steps is something big." Those who didn't sign up can join later.

Mogherini said countries already have submitted more than 50 joint projects in the fields of defense capabilities and military operations. Brit-

ain can take part in some if they are of benefit to the entire EU.

She said PESCO, backed by the EU defense fund, "will enable member states to use the economy of scale of Europe and, in this manner, to fulfill the gap of output that we have."

Their signatures are a sign of political will, but the program will enter force only after it's been legally endorsed, probably in December.

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel lauded the agreement as "a great step toward self-sufficiency and strengthening the European Union's security and defense policy — really a milestone in European development."

Under the agreement, member countries will submit an action plan outlining their defense aims. Mogherini, EU military chiefs and the European Defence Agency will then evaluate whether the plans are being respected. Those not living up to their commitments could be kicked out of the group.

Yemeni rebels vow escalation; Saudis look to relax blockade

Associated Press

SANAA, Yemen — Saudi Arabia announced Monday that the Saudi-led coalition fighting Shiite rebels in Yemen will begin reopening airports and seaports in the Arab world's poorest country days after closing them over a rebel ballistic missile attack on Riyadh.

The announcement from the Saudi mission at the United Nations came after the coalition fighting Yemen's rebels, known as Houthis, faced widespread international criticism over the closure, with the U.N. and more than 20 aid groups saying it could bring millions of people closer to "starvation and death."

"The first step in this process will be taken within 24 hours and involves reopening all the ports in areas controlled by" Yemen's internationally recognized government, which the coalition backs, read the mission's statement.

Those ports are in Yemeni cities of Aden, Mocha and Mukalla. For ports in rebel-held or disputed territories, such as

Hodeida, the mission said it has asked the U.N. to send a team of experts to discuss ways to make sure weapons can't be smuggled in. The Saudi-led coalition hopes that will prevent "the smuggling of weapons, ammunitions, missile parts and cash that are regularly being supplied by Iran and Iranian accomplices to the Houthi rebels," the statement said.

Despite the Saudi announcement, a top leader of Yemen's Shiite rebels on Monday vowed retaliation against the oil-rich kingdom over its blockade of his war-torn country. The war has killed more than 10,000 civilians, has displaced 3 million people and has left much of the infrastructure in ruins. The fiery comments by Saleh al-Sammad, the head of the Presidency Council of the Houthis, came during a rally of thousands of rebel supporters marching down a main boulevard in the capital, Sanaa.

Saudi Arabia announced it shut down all ports after a Houthi ballistic missile attack near Riyadh's airport. The missile was intercepted.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Dine-and-dash 'sushi bandit' cited

ID POCATELLO — A man authorities say is the dine-and-dash "sushi bandit" has been cited in eastern Idaho on suspicion of petit theft.

The Bannock County Sheriff's Office told KPVI-TV that a deputy took Trevor Bello into custody Friday after Bello was alleged to have tried to leave Chang's Garden restaurant in Pocatello without paying.

Officials said that earlier this month, someone dined and dashed from a \$126 bill at Sumisu Sushi & Asian Fusion restaurant in Pocatello. Officials said a waitress at Chang's alerted authorities.

Woman gets refund; iPad box held flour

WA VANCOUVER — Walmart has refunded money to a western Washington state woman who says she bought an iPad but found a bag of flour in the box instead.

Walmart on Friday returned \$400 to Sharleen Nelson, of Vancouver, and said in a statement it appreciates customers notifying them of problems so they can be resolved quickly.

Nelson told KING-TV that she bought the device last weekend from a Walmart store in Portland, Ore., and said the salesman used a key to unlock a cabinet to get it. Nelson said it looked like someone cut into the packaging.

Officer accused of stealing evidence

MD ABERDEEN — Investigators said a longtime Maryland police officer repeatedly stole painkillers from a police evidence room and a police-maintained pre-

scription drop box.

State Prosecutor Emmet C. Davitt said in a news release Wednesday that Aberdeen police Lt. Daniel E. Gosnell, 38, an 18-year veteran of the department, has been charged with misconduct in office and possession of a controlled dangerous substance.

State police allege Gosnell consumed various drugs he stole including oxycodone, heroin, fentanyl and cocaine.

Relatives sought for unclaimed cremains

MI ATHENS — Officials are still trying to find relatives to claim more than two dozen cremated remains discovered in southern Michigan after the death of a funeral director.

The work by the Calhoun County's medical examiner began when the family of Joy Spencer Spoor found the cremains in storage after her death Oct. 14. Spoor was a former owner of Spencer Family Funeral Home in Athens.

Chief investigator Joanne Catania told the Battle Creek Enquirer she's resolved at least seven cases by finding relatives or determining there are no family members.

Reopening of probe in wolf's death sought

OR PORTLAND — More than a dozen conservation groups have asked, via letter, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's office to reopen an investigation into the Oct. 27 killing of a wolf by a hunter who claimed self-defense.

Brian Scott was hunting elk in Union County when he shot and killed a gray wolf he claimed was running at him. Oregon State Police investigated and agreed he shot in self-defense.

The letter claims that police

misinterpreted the evidence. The groups say a public records request revealed photographic evidence that contradicts the official report by police.

Man who shot sister, 3, with BB gun freed

IA SIOUX CITY — A Sioux City man has been released from prison less than two months into his seven-year sentence for shooting his 3-year-old sister in the face with a BB gun.

The Sioux City Journal reported that District Judge Steven Andreasen reconsidered Adrian White's sentence last week and suspended the remainder of his prison term. White, 18, is now on three years' probation.

White was sentenced after pleading guilty Sept. 11 to assault and child endangerment.

Prosecutors said White was 17 in May when he shot the preschooler twice in the face. One BB fractured the girl's jaw and the other entered her eye and lodged next to her brain. Surgery was required to remove one of the BBs, but doctors determined the other was too risky to remove.

'Confederate Lives Matter' posts probed

MD HARWOOD — Police in Maryland are investigating a complaint that high school students harassed another student by posting threatening language under the name "Confederate Lives Matter."

The Capital Gazette reported that Anne Arundel police began their investigation Friday into messages posted on Snapchat with obscene and violent language aimed at a transgender student. The messages are suspected to have been posted

by students at Southern High School.

Principal Kathryn Feuerherd sent an email to students and their families, saying disciplinary action has been taken against the students involved.

Cooker left at subway station not a bomb

NY NEW YORK — A New York City subway station was reopened after police determined that a pressure cooker left at the station was not a bomb.

The 33rd Street station on the No. 6 line was closed shortly after 6 p.m. Saturday while the bomb squad investigated a report of a suspicious package.

The station reopened just before 9 p.m. when police determined the device was not a bomb.

Officials considering closing nude beach

VT WESTMORE — Town officials in Vermont are considering banning nude sunbathing at a popular beach following complaints from women who say they were harassed by naked sunbathing men last summer.

The Westmore Select Board has met with the town attorney to consider a draft public indecency ordinance that would put an end to the clothing-optional beach. The Caledonian-Record reported the secluded beach will be likely addressed in a letter from town selectmen.

Select board Chairman Bill Perkins said the ban will be discussed at the annual meeting in early March. He said all three selectmen believe it's time for a public indecency ordinance, but ultimately it will be up to the voters.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

NFL roundup

Brady, Patriots crush Broncos

Associated Press

DENVER — Tom Brady threw three touchdown passes and the New England Patriots matched their own AFC record with their 12th consecutive road victory, pummeling the Denver Broncos 41-16 on Sunday night.

These teams have represented the AFC in the last four Super Bowls, and the Broncos (3-6) were hoping a visit from their rivals would help shake them from their funk.

Instead, the Broncos fizzled.

They saw their losing streak reach five games, their longest skid in seven seasons, and they lost back-to-back games to the Patriots (7-2) in Denver for the first time since 1966.

Avoiding Von Miller all night and throwing for 266 yards on 25-of-34 passing, Brady improved to 8-9 against the Broncos, the only team he has a losing record against, and won for just the fourth time in 11 trips to Denver. His 86th regular-season road win broke a tie with Peyton Manning for most all-time.

49ers 31, Giants 21: C.J. Beathard threw for 288 yards and two touchdowns and ran for a third score to lead host San Francisco to its first victory over the season.

Beathard connected on an 83-yard TD to Marquise Goodwin and a 47-yarder to Garrett Celek in the second quarter as the 49ers (1-9) took advantage of another listless effort by the Giants (1-8) to win for the first time under coach Kyle Shanahan.

Rams 33, Texans 7: Robert Woods caught two of Jared Goff's three touchdown passes during a dominant third quarter, and surging host Los Angeles returned after a month away from home for their fourth straight victory.

After struggling to a 9-7 lead during a quiet first half for the NFL's highest-scoring team, the Rams (7-2) ran away with a series of big throws by Goff, who passed for a career-high 355 yards.

Bills 47, Saints 10: Mark Ingram scored a career-best three touchdowns and visiting New Orleans won its seventh straight game by plowing through a porous Buffalo defense.

Alvin Kamara also had a 3-yard touchdown rushing as the Saints blew the game open by scoring five times on their first six possessions, not including a one-play series to close the first half. Ingram finished with 131 yards rushing. He scored twice from 3 yards and again on a 1-yard plunge.

Steelers 20, Colts 17: Ben Roethlisberger's 32-yard completion to Antonio Brown with 35 seconds set up a 33-yard field goal from Chris Boswell as time expired.

The visiting Steelers (7-2) have won four straight overall and five in a row in the series.

But it sure wasn't easy as the Colts (3-7) held Roethlisberger, Brown and Le'Veon Bell in check. Pittsburgh needed two second-half TD passes from Roethlisberger to fight its way out of a 17-3 third-quarter deficit.

Vikings 38, Redskins 30: Case Keenum threw touchdowns to four different receivers to build a big lead, and the NFC North-leading Vikings won their fifth in a row.

With Teddy Bridgewater active for the first time since January 2016 after a devastating knee injury, Keenum was 21-for-29 for 304 yards and TD passes to Stefon Diggs, Adam Thielen, David Morgan and Jarius Wright. He was picked off on consecutive throws by D.J. Swearinger. Thielen had eight catches for a season-high 166 yards.

Packers 23, Bears 16: Brett Hundley threw for 212 yards and a touchdown, Nick Perry had three sacks and the visiting Packers snapped a three-game losing streak.

Hundley, starting his third game for an injured Aaron Rodgers, threw a 17-yard touchdown to Davante Adams to make it 23-13 with 5:29 to play, and the Packers (5-4) hung on to beat the Bears (3-6) for the eighth time in nine games.

It was the first victory for a Packers QB not named Rodgers or Brett Favre since 1989.

Titans 24, Bengals 20: Marcus Mariota tossed a 7-yard touchdown pass to DeMarco Murray with 36 seconds left, and the host Titans rallied for their fourth consecutive victory.

It's the longest winning streak for the Titans (6-3) since taken five straight in 2009, and it's their best start to a season since 2008 when the Titans last reached the playoffs as the AFC's No. 1 seed.

Jaguars 20, Chargers 17 (OT): Josh Lambo kicked a 30-yard field goal with 3:12 remaining in overtime, lifting the Jaguars in a wild game.

Lambo's kick got tipped at the line of scrimmage and still cleared the crossbar. The former soccer player and one-time Charger ran the other way and slid on both knees near midfield before getting mobbed by teammates.

The game ended up in overtime after a wacky final two minutes of regulation that included a fumble, two interceptions, a taunting penalty and a costly flag for roughing the passer.

Lions 38, Browns 24: Matthew Stafford lofted a 29-yard, tiebreaking touchdown to Eric Ebron early in the fourth quarter and the host Lions went on to beat the winless Browns.

The Lions (5-4) rallied from first- and second-half deficits to earn consecutive victories for the first time since winning the first two games this season. The Browns, who fell to 0-9 on the season, led 10-0 early in the game for their first double-digit lead of the season, and were up 24-17 in the third after Deshaun Kizer led two consecutive touchdown drives.

Buccaneers 15, Jets 10: Ryan Fitzpatrick led two long scoring drives and host Tampa Bay limited the Jets to less than 200 yards of offense until late in the fourth quarter to snap a five-game losing streak.

Falcons dominate Cowboys

Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Dallas Cowboys knew it would be tough to get by without Ezekiel Elliott.

Turns out, they missed Tyron Smith even more.

With their starting left tackle sidelined by back and groin injuries, the Cowboys surrendered six sacks to Adrian Clayborn in one of the greatest pass rushing performances in NFL history.

The result: an ugly 27-7 loss to the Atlanta Falcons on Sunday.

"The next man up has to be ready on a moment's notice," Cowboys coach Jason Garrett said. "We didn't handle the adversity of the day."

After three legal reprieves, Elliott finally began serving a six-game suspension for allegations of domestic abuse. There was certainly no replacing a dynamic back who led the league in rushing as a rookie.

Alfred Morris started in Elliott's place and broke off a 20-yard run, but the former Pro Bowler really didn't have much of an impact. He finished with 11 carries for 53 yards.

Rod Smith carried three times for 14 yards, while Darren McFadden was stuffed for a 2-yard loss on his lone run.

"We became one-dimensional," Morris said. "We got behind. I take full ownership of that. We'll learn from this game."

Chaz Green certainly has a lot to learn.

The third-year lineman stepped in for Smith — and spent most of the game grasping at air.

Clayborn was simply too quick off the edge, blowing by Smith time after time.

"It was more me not sticking to what I know," Green said. "A lot of my issues were self-inflicted. It just hurts because I feel I let the team down."

Truex favorite as NASCAR field finalized

Associated Press

AVONDALE, Ariz. — Kevin Harvick wasted zero time in leveling the first volley in NASCAR's championship race.

In Harvick's opinion, he's playing with house money when he races Martin Truex Jr., Kyle Busch and Brad Keselowski next Sunday at Homestead-Miami Speedway for the title. It's Truex, Harvick believes, who faces all the pressure.

"Martin has won a lot of races this year," Harvick said. "Those guys have dominated the year, and I feel like if they don't win at this point, they would probably feel like they've had a letdown."

"It's a lot of fun coming from behind and playing catch up and kind of playing that underdog role is much easier than being expected to go down there and win. We expect to win."

When told that Harvick has picked Truex as the favorite, Truex cut off the question before waiting to hear what Harvick even said.

"That sounds like Harvick," joked Truex.

But Truex won't be rattled. He's won seven races this year, been the most dominant driver all season and has three wins in these playoffs. So if Harvick is trying to lean on Truex, he's got the wrong guy.

"It doesn't work on me,"

Truex said. "If I'm the favorite, perfect, I like that. I think it's a better position to be in. I was the underdog before and I finished fourth, so yeah, bring it on."

The field was finalized Sunday when Keselowski earned the final spot in the championship on points. He finished 16th at Phoenix Raceway and had to sweat it out because he was never in contention for the victory. Had one of four other drivers won the race, Keselowski would have been out. And, had Chase Elliott and Denny Hamlin not been feuding, Hamlin might have claimed the final spot over Keselowski on points.

Matt Kenseth passed Elliott with 10 laps remaining to win

Phoenix and deny Elliott the final berth in the championship race. Had Elliott hung on for the win, he would have qualified for the championship finale.

Hamlin and Elliott were racing for position and Elliott gave Hamlin several taps as he tried to get past him for position, and when he finally was able to pull alongside Hamlin, the two cars made contact. Hamlin grazed the wall and immediately began losing positions on the track.

Just a few laps later, his tire blew, Hamlin hit the wall and his race was over. Elliott admitted he raced Hamlin aggressively, same as Hamlin did when he wrecked Elliott from the lead at Martinsville.

Top 25 roundup

No. 5 Kentucky holds off Catamounts

Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Kentucky coach John Calipari didn't mind a closer-than-expected 73-69 win over Vermont on Sunday.

"You cannot play Popcorn State and learn anything," Calipari said. "You've got to play good teams. I didn't realize how good [Vermont] was until I watched the tape. Then I was like, 'Who scheduled this game? This is ridiculous.' They just do an unbelievable job."

The Wildcats, playing their second game in three days to open the season, missed seven of their last eight field goals and held off a late surge by the Catamounts. Trailing 72-69, Vermont missed two three-pointers in the final 30 seconds. Washington made one of two free throws with less than a second left for the final margin.

The Wildcats (2-0) will take on the Jayhawks (1-0) in the Champions Classic on Tuesday in Chicago. Kansas opened the season with a 92-56 rout of Tennessee State Friday night. The Wildcats defeated Utah Valley

73-63 Friday night in their season opener.

Kentucky trailed by 12 in a season-opening win over Utah Valley in the first half, but the Wildcats got off to a better start against the Catamounts and made five of their first nine shots and never trailed after Vermont scored the first basket of the contest.

Vermont, which finished 29-6 last season and hadn't lost a regular-season game since an 81-69 setback to Butler last December, was led by Trae Bell-Haynes with 16 points. Anthony Lamb scored 15, Drew Urquhart had 13 and Ernie Duncan added 10.

No. 3 Arizona 103, UMBC 78: Allonzo Trier scored 30 points and host Arizona overpowered Maryland-Baltimore County.

DeAndre Ayton added 19 points and 13 rebounds for the Wildcats (2-0), who scored over 100 points for the second time in two games this season.

Arizona pulled away with Trier's three-pointer, one of five for the junior guard, for an 86-68 lead, then freshman Alex Barcello drilled back-to-back

threes to put the game away.

The Wildcats made 61 percent of their shots for the game and 15 of 28 threes.

No. 12 Miami 89, Navy 55: D.J. Vasiljevic scored 16 points to lead host Miami.

The Hurricanes (2-0) never trailed and opened the game with a 9-0 run in the first 4:27. Jacquan Newton's two layups and Vasiljevic's three-pointer keyed Miami's early surge.

Newton finished with 14 points on 6-for-10 shooting. Dewan Huell had a double 14 points and 10 rebounds for Miami.

The Hurricanes wore down the Midshipmen (1-1) in transition. Miami scored 29 points on fast break opportunities.

Hasan Abdullah scored 13 points to lead Navy.

No. 16 Louisville 72, George Mason 61: Deng Adel had 20 points, and freshmen Darius Perry and Jordan Nwora combined to score 22 in the second half to rally host Louisville and win David Padgett's debut as the Cardinals' interim coach.

The Cardinals trailed for much of the game before their newcomers stepped to make all

six combined shots, with many in clutch moments. Louisville shot 70 percent after halftime to win its first regular season contest since longtime coach Rick Pitino was fired last month in the wake of a national federal investigation of corruption in college basketball.

No. 23 Seton Hall 75, Monmouth 65: Myles Powell scored 18 points and Angel Delgado added 17 points and grabbed 11 rebounds, leading Seton Hall to an easy victory over Monmouth.

Four Seton Hall players reached double figures in scoring, including Khadeen Carrington (14) and Michael Nzei (10).

No. 20 Purdue 111, Chicago State 42: Carsen Edwards scored a career-high 25 points, Vince Edwards added 15 points and 12 rebounds, and host Purdue routed Chicago State.

After defeating Southern Illinois-Edwardsville 105-74 in its season-opener Friday, the Boilermakers have now scored 100 or more points in consecutive games for the first time since February of 1974.

NHL roundup

Oshie lifts Caps in SO

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Usually, when the Washington Capitals and Edmonton Oilers meet, Alex Ovechkin or Connor McDavid would be expected to figure in the win. This time, it was the goalies who stood out until T.J. Oshie came through in the shootout.

Oshie scored the only goal of the tiebreaker to lift the Capitals to a 2-1 victory over the Oilers on Sunday night. Braden Holtby stopped 29 shots through overtime — including a flurry late in the second period — and all three Edmonton attempts in the shootout.

“It was a pretty dead game up to then, kind of both sides,” Holtby said. “We knew they were going to come with a push somehow with their talent offensively.”

Dmitry Orlov scored in regulation for the Capitals.

Holtby stopped the only shot in overtime, and he admitted that he would have liked some more action in the five-minute scramble.

“That was probably the most boring 3-on-3 I’ve played,” Holtby said. “Everyone was just winding back and winding back. There was barely anything. It was kind of disappointing.”

While the adrenaline junkie goalie wanted some more to do, his teammates are delighted that they have him.

“Holts is the best player every night for us,” right winger Tom Wilson said. “He made some huge saves, obviously, but at this point that’s a pleasure that we have — him showing up every night. We got to do our best to kind of keep the shots to the perimeter, but he does a good job when they do have a scoring chance. As a team, I thought we did a good job. Holding that squad to one goal is pretty good.”

Juhar Khaira scored for the Oilers, who finished 2-1-1 on a four-game trip after winning the first two in overtime. Laurent Brossoit, starting just his

second game of the season and 12th in four NHL seasons, finished with 18 saves.

Brossoit thought he played well, but obviously wasn’t pleased about Orlov’s goal or the one that Oshie managed to get by him.

“I was prepared for it and he still snuck it through,” Brossoit said.

Washington coach Barry Trotz hadn’t seen the Oilers’ backup play before.

“I don’t think we tested him enough early,” Trotz said. “We didn’t make the shots hard enough. We didn’t get in front of him enough. We had some really good looks.”

Edmonton coach Todd McLellan said he was satisfied with how his team performed on its first four-game trip of the season.

“We’ll take the five of eight (points),” McLellan said. “We wish we could have got more, but now we’ve got a real test ahead of us going home where we haven’t performed well.”

Devils 7, Blackhawks 5: Miles Wood had his first career hat trick and added an assist to help visiting New Jersey rally.

Rookie Nico Hischier had a goal and two assists, and Andy Green, Taylor Hall and Brian Gibbons also scored, and Keith Kinkaid stopped 39 shots for the Metropolitan Division-leading Devils.

Lightning 2, Ducks 1: J.T. Brown scored the tiebreaking goal in the third period, leading Tampa Bay past host Anaheim for its fourth straight win.

Vladislav Namestnikov also scored and Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 28 shots to help the Lightning avenge one of their only two regulation losses this season.

Sharks 2, Kings 1: Joel Ward scored the tiebreaking goal on a long deflection off his skate with 7:10 to play, and visiting San Jose rallied from a third-period deficit.

NBA roundup

Celtics edge Raptors

Associated Press

BOSTON — Al Horford turned back the clock in his return from a two-game absence with a concussion.

Horford scored 21 points on 8-of-9 shooting to help the Boston Celtics hang on to beat the Toronto Raptors 95-94 on Sunday for their 12th straight victory.

“He’s playing young again,” teammate Terry Rozier said.

Horford had 15 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists against his former team in Atlanta on Monday night, the same day an elbow to the head from Kent Bazemore sent him into the NBA’s concussion protocol. Horford also missed nine games last season with a concussion.

Horford disagreed with Rozier’s assessment, thinking he’s playing even better.

“I don’t know if young Al Horford played like this, to be honest,” the former four-time All-Star said. “You know, it’s been years of just working on my game and try to play this new way.”

Boston (12-2) was playing without Kyrie Irving after he took an inadvertent elbow to the face from teammate Aron Baynes on Friday night against Charlotte. Irving has a minor facial fracture but has not been diagnosed with a concussion as initially feared.

Jaylen Brown added 18 points, and Rozier helped fill in for Irving with 16 points off the bench. Boston shot just 40.2 percent from the field.

DeMar DeRozan scored 24 points, and Kyle Lowry had 19 points and seven assists for Toronto. The Raptors dropped to 7-5 after winning two straight.

“They are the best team in the NBA right now, 12 in a row,” Lowry said. “They’re playing unbelievable, everyone is picking up slack.”

Jayson Tatum’s acrobatic layup with 1:26 remaining in the fourth quarter put the Celtics up 95-90.

DeRozan missed a potential go-ahead stepback jumper with 19 seconds remaining. Tatum

got the rebound, but elbowed Fred VanVleet in the face for an offensive foul that was confirmed by video review.

DeRozan had another look to give Toronto the win, but missed a turnaround jumper with 2 seconds left. Serge Ibaka scooped up the rebound, but lost the ball as time expired.

Thunder 112, Mavericks 99: Paul George scored 37 points, Russell Westbrook added 27 and Oklahoma City overcame the absence of two regular starters to beat visiting Dallas.

Carmelo Anthony was ruled out about an hour before tipoff because of a sore lower back, and starting center Steven Adams sat out with a right calf contusion.

Without Anthony, the Thunder’s other two superstars carried the offensive load, fueling a 26-10 run in the third quarter that broke open what had been a tight game.

Harrison Barnes had 22 points and 13 rebounds for the Mavericks. They have dropped nine of their last 10 games to fall to 2-12.

Rockets 118, Pacers 95: James Harden had 26 points and 15 assists and Houston beat host Indiana.

Eric Gordon had 21 points for Houston, and Clint Capela had 20 points and 17 rebounds. The Rockets overwhelmed the Pacers from the start, jumping out to a 13-2 lead. Houston continued to pile it on early and often, outscoring the Pacers 24-9 during the first 6 minutes.

Pistons 112, Heat 103: Tobias Harris scored 25 points and Avery Bradley added 24 points in Detroit’s victory over visiting Miami.

Reggie Jackson scored 17 points, rookie Luke Kennard had 14 and Andre Drummond added eight points and 17 rebounds for the Pistons. At 10-3, they are second behind Boston in the Eastern Conference and off to their best start since going 10-2 in 2005-06.