

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Hundreds killed in Egypt mosque attack

Associated Press

EL-ARISH, Egypt — Militants attacked a crowded mosque during Friday prayers in the Sinai Peninsula, setting off explosives, spraying worshippers with gunfire and killing at least 235 people in the deadliest-ever attack by Islamic extremists in Egypt.

The attack targeted a mosque frequented by Sufis, members of Islam's mystical movement, in the north Sinai town of Bir al-Abd. Islamic militants, including the local affiliate of Islamic State, consider Sufis heretics because of their less literal interpretations of the faith.

The startling bloodshed, which also wounded at least 109, was the latest sign of how more than three years of fighting in Sinai hasn't crushed an insurgency waged by the ISIS affiliate. Seeking to spread the

violence, the militants the past year have carried out deadly bombings on churches in the capital, Cairo, and other cities, killing dozens of Christians.

The affiliate also is believed to have been behind the 2016 downing of a Russian passenger jet that killed 226 people.

But this was the first major militant attack on a Muslim mosque, and it eclipsed any past attacks of its kind, even dating back to a previous Islamic militant insurgency in the 1990s.

The militants opened fire from four off-road vehicles on the hundreds of worshippers attending the sermon in the mosque. They also blocked off escape routes from the area by blowing up cars and leaving the burning wrecks blocking the roads, three police officers on the scene said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized

to talk to the press.

Dozens of bloodied bodies wrapped in sheets were laid across the mosque floor, according to images circulating on social media. Relatives queued up outside the hospital as ambulances raced back and forth. The state news agency MENA put the death toll at 235.

Resident Ashraf el-Hefny said many of the victims were workers at a nearby salt factory who had come for Friday services at the mosque.

"Local people brought the wounded to hospital on their own cars and trucks," he said by telephone.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. But ISIS has targeted Sufis several times in the area in the past, notably beheading a leading Sufi religious figure, the blind sheikh Suleiman Abu Heraz, last year and posting

photos of the killing online.

Egypt's presidency declared a three-day mourning period, as President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi convened a high-level meeting of security officials.

In a statement afterward, el-Sissi said the attack "will not go unpunished" and that Egypt will persevere with its war on terrorism.

The suffering of the victims was not in vain, he added, and will only "add to our insistence" to combat extremists. Addressing the nation later on television, he repeated his view that Egypt is fighting a battle against militancy on behalf of the rest of the world.

Cairo's international airport boosted security following the attack, with more forces patrolling passenger halls, conducting searches and manning checkpoints at airport approaches.

'Fat Leonard' overshadows another Navy fraud case

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — More than four years ago in a San Diego hotel, federal investigators arrested Leonard Glenn "Fat Leonard" Francis in what was the opening step in a fraud-and-bribery scandal that continues to resonate through the Navy.

Francis soon pleaded guilty to a decade-long scheme in which he bribed Navy officers and officials and enlisted their help in defrauding the government out of at least \$35 million for his ship-servicing company, Glenn Defense Marine Asia.

While the Fat Leonard scandal has torn through the Navy, upending careers of nearly two dozen current and former Navy officers and officials who have pleaded guilty and hundreds

more who are under scrutiny, a second case alleging extensive fraud in ship servicing by a different company has cut a far narrower profile.

The case, a whistleblower lawsuit brought by three former employees of Inchcape Shipping Services, alleges the company defrauded the government of tens of millions of dollars between 2005 and 2014.

The former employees said they discovered a wide-ranging fraud scheme and brought it to the attention of senior executives, but nothing was done. They ended up leaving the company and began providing information to the government in 2009, the lawsuit says.

The fraud allegedly involved submitting invoices to the Navy

for services that either were bogus or inflated the cost of the work, and double-billed for other services. The suit also said the company kept two sets of books to conceal the fraud, and pocketed savings — such as rebates, discounts and credits — from subcontractors.

The suit was filed under seal in 2010 and remained secret for nearly five years, until November 2015. That's when the Department of Justice publicly announced it would join the suit — a key step in whistleblower suits because it indicates the government believes there is merit to the claims and will work to recoup money.

The company has denied wrongdoing and is contesting the case in court. In a state-

ment, the company said the lawsuit had nothing in common with the notorious Fat Leonard cases — other than both companies are involved in ship-servicing work.

But for government watchdogs, the similarities between the two are troubling and illuminate a longstanding problem of overseeing contractors in the service.

"This can't be dismissed as just 'one bad apple' theory or defense," said Scott Amey, the general counsel for the Project on Government Oversight and a longtime expert on government contracting.

"Inchcape shows this was more systemic, and the Navy wasn't doing a very good job of at contracting and avoiding corruption and ethics violations."

Navy calls off search for 3 missing sailors

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Search-and-rescue efforts have been called off for three sailors missing after a Navy aircraft went down Wednesday afternoon in the Philippine Sea.

A C-2A Greyhound carrying 11 crewmembers and passengers crashed in waters south-east of Okinawa on Wednesday afternoon while en route to the aircraft carrier USS Ronald

Reagan. The Navy announced the end of the search in a statement Friday morning, saying U.S. and Japanese ships and aircraft covered nearly 1,000 square nautical miles over two days searching for the missing sailors.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with our lost shipmates and their families,” said Rear Adm. Marc Dalton, the Task Force 70 commander, in a statement. “As difficult as this is, we are thankful for the rapid and effective response

that led to the rescue of eight of our shipmates, and I appreciate the professionalism and dedication shown by all who participated in the search efforts.”

The Navy has contacted the families of the lost sailors, but will withhold their names for 72 hours, as is its policy.

Shortly after Wednesday’s crash, eight people were rescued by Navy Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 12 and are in good condition aboard the Ronald Reagan, the Navy said.

The Greyhound was carrying passengers and cargo from Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni to the Ronald Reagan at the time of the accident. It is assigned to Carrier Air Wing 5, the aviation component of carrier’s strike group.

The crash’s cause is unknown. The Yokosuka-based Ronald Reagan was conducting an annual bilateral maritime field-training exercise with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force at the time.

Search for sub speeds up despite explosion

Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — The around-the-clock international search for a submarine that has been lost in the South Atlantic for nine days is accelerating amid growing fears for its 44 crewmembers.

The Argentine navy says an explosion occurred near the time and place where the sub went missing Nov. 15. That’s led some family members of the crew to give up hope of a rescue. Navy officials and outside experts worry that even if the ARA San Juan is intact but submerged, its crew may be running out of oxygen.

But spokesman Enrique Balbi said Fri-

day that Russia is sending an Antonov transport aircraft and a ship is being adapted in the southern Patagonian port of Comodoro Rivadavia to carry a U.S. Navy submarine rescue chamber to the area.

“Despite all the effort that has been carried out, we haven’t been able to find the San Juan submarine,” Balbi told reporters. “The search ends when we find the vessel.”

More than a dozen airplanes and ships have been participating in the multinational search despite stormy weather that has caused powerful waves.

Search teams are ranging across an area of some 185,000 square miles, which

is roughly the size of Spain.

The German-built diesel-electric TR-1700 class submarine was commissioned in 1985 and was refitted most recently in 2014.

Some relatives of the crew have lashed out at the navy for its response and for putting their loved ones at risk in a vessel that is more than 30 years old.

But Balbi has defended the Argentine navy, saying that “with respect to the maintenance and state of our naval and air units, no unit ever leaves port or takes off if it isn’t in operating conditions to navigate or fly with total security.”

Report: North Korea replaces guards on border

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea appears to have replaced all of its guards at a jointly patrolled border area where a North Korean soldier defected last week under a hail of gunfire, according to South Korean media. Military officials said Friday they could not confirm the report.

Yonhap news agency cited an unnamed intelligence source saying there were “signs” the North had replaced its entire security force of 35 to 40 men at the Joint Security Area. South Korea’s Defense Ministry and

the U.S.-led United Nations Command said they couldn’t confirm it.

The source also told Yonhap that the North seems to have temporarily closed a bridge over which the defector drove a military jeep to reach the border before his dramatic escape on foot Monday. The source said the North could be preparing to install a security gate at the bridge for strengthening its screening of personnel coming into and out of the area.

A photo posted on the Twitter account of the acting U.S. ambassador to South Korea, Marc Knapper, showed North

Korean workers using shovels to dig what Knapper said was a trench at the spot where the defector crossed the border.

According to South Korea’s military, four North Korean soldiers using handguns and AK-47 assault rifles fired about 40 rounds at the defector, who rushed across the line that divides the Koreas after getting his vehicle stuck in a ditch. He was shot five times and is now recovering at a hospital near Seoul where he was operated on twice to repair internal organ damage and other injuries.

South Korean soldiers did not fire back, but the incident

occurred amid animosity over North Korea’s accelerating nuclear-weapons and missile programs. While North Korea often reacts with intense anger over high-profile defections, the country’s state media have remained silent on the latest case as of Friday.

After investigating the incident, the U.N. Command said Wednesday it concluded that North Korea violated the armistice agreement ending the 1950-53 Korean War because its soldiers fired across and physically crossed the border in pursuit of the defector.

Syrian opposition to name delegation to Geneva talks

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Syrian opposition figures held meetings in the Saudi Arabian capital on Friday to name a unified delegation that will attend peace talks with the government as a Russian official said the issue of Syrian President Bashar Assad running for office in the future is still under discussion.

The meetings in Riyadh came a day after Syrian opposition officials called for direct, unconditional negotiations with the Syrian government over the more-than-6-year-old civil war. The talks would lead to the launch of a transition period.

The opposition didn't condition its participation in upcoming U.N.-based negotiations on the departure of President Bashar Assad from office, signaling a degree of flexibility. The issue always has been the sticking point in previous rounds of peace talks, deepening division among an already-fragmented Syrian opposition.

Syrian opposition official Ahmad Ramadan said the opposition likely will name an 11-member delegation later on Friday that will lead talks with the government in Geneva next week.

The delegation will include members of the Saudi-based opposition as well as groups based in Egypt and Russia.

"We have agreed with groups based here in Riyadh as well as those in Cairo and Moscow to form a unified delegation to participate in the di-

rect negotiations in Geneva in the coming few days," leading opposition figure Bassma Kodmani told reporters in Riyadh late Thursday.

In Moscow, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov said Friday that the issue of Assad running for office in the future is still under discussion. Assad was elected for a seven-year term in 2014.

Asked about a possibility of an early presidential election in Syria and Assad running in it, Bogdanov said in an interview with RIA Novosti, "This is under the discussion now, the work is ongoing. There are no results yet."

Russia always has said that the fate of Assad will be decided by the Syrian people, while Syrian government officials have said they will not give the opposition in peace talks what they failed to achieve by war.

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has not ruled out possible contact with Assad in a sign that his stance may be softening toward the Syrian leader. Erdogan has been one of Assad's harshest critics and has been calling on him to step down since the early days of the conflict that began in March 2011.

Responding to a question about a possible contact or cooperation with Assad in view of both leaders' opposition to Syrian Kurdish fighters, Erdogan told journalists, "The political doors are always open until the last minute."

Official: Afghan airstrike kills Taliban commander

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — An Afghan official says a government airstrike has killed a Taliban commander and five of his family members in the north-eastern Kapisa province.

Qais Qaderi, a spokesman for the governor of Kapisa province, said Friday that the attack took place early morning in

Nijrab district, killing Taliban commander Dilawar Khan and two women and three children from his family.

Qaderi said authorities were also searching for Khan's brother who apparently escaped during the attack.

He added that Khan was shooting at the air force from his home before the airstrike.

Niger residents wary as US presence grows

The Washington Post

AGADEZ, Niger — Beyond the sign reading "Military Zone," beyond the olive-green Humvees patrolling near a security tower, rows of tan tents stretch across the desert. For nearly two years, the remote, barren site has been home to several hundred U.S. troops working around the clock to turn it into a high-tech, multimillion-dollar drone base.

Mohamed Seraji, 29, doesn't like what he sees.

Dust kicked up by the construction makes the vendor cough. At night, the noise keeps him awake. But his biggest worry is that the facility — as well as Nigeriens like him who live in this city, just minutes away — will become a target for Islamist extremists.

"The base is too close," Seraji said. "If there's an attack on it, the people are exposed."

Such concerns have escalated since an ambush last month by Islamist militants that killed four U.S. and five Nigerien soldiers in the village of Tongo Tongo, along the Niger-Mali border. Agadez is in north-central Niger, more than 600 miles from that attack site, but the militants also have targeted this region in recent years.

Now, the growing perils faced by U.S. troops here are intensifying questions about the decision to build a drone base near Agadez — the second such facility in Niger, an impoverished West African country twice the size of Texas.

Local officials and community leaders say unemployment is rising in the area, boosting crime and creating opportunities for Islamist militants to exploit the disaffected. Many Nigeriens already view U.S. and other Western forces in the country as occupiers, according to interviews here and in the capital, Niamey. At least one Western embassy recently warned its citizens about extremist groups operating in areas outside Agadez.

In April 2016, U.S. security forces here thwarted a suspected attack on their compound by a convoy of men in three pickups and a semitruck, according to a U.S. Air Force account recently made public. Air Force guards spotted the trucks racing toward the compound in the dark, stopping about 50 yards from the perimeter fence. The vehicles retreated after U.S. sharpshooters aimed lasers at them as a warning, according to the Air Force account.

"It's a magnet for the terrorists," said Anastafidan el Souleymane Mohamed, a tribal elder who heads the association of traditional chiefs in Agadez, referring to the U.S. base. "Who are they looking for? They are looking for Westerners."

The U.S. military began eyeing Agadez as a drone hub almost as soon as it persuaded Niger's government to permit it to fly drones from Niamey in 2013. A year later, the government approved construction of the second base.

Agadez, about 500 miles northwest of Niamey, is much closer to Saharan smuggling routes that Islamist militants use to transport arms and fighters from Libya to northern Mali. U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drones have a range of about 1,150 miles.

The Air Force initially budgeted \$50 million to build an airfield, living quarters and other facilities at the Agadez site, but the project has taken far longer than expected to finish. The cost has doubled to about \$100 million, according to a report last year by the Intercept, an investigative media website.

U.S. military officials originally hoped to begin flying from Agadez by the end of 2016, but the start date has been pushed back to the latter half of 2018. U.S. officials have attributed the delays to the inherent challenges of building a new airfield and military base in such a remote region.

Trump, Turkish leader discuss Syria over phone

Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Donald Trump spoke Friday with Turkey's president "about bringing peace to the mess that I inherited in the Middle East" before hitting the links with Tiger Woods and pro golfer Dustin Johnson.

In a series of morning tweets from Florida, Trump said he'd be calling Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to discuss the situation in the Middle East. "I will get it all done, but what a mistake, in lives and dollars (6 trillion), to be there in the first place!" he wrote.

Trump railed during his campaign about the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq but has boasted about progress under his watch in recent months. Trump has used the \$6 trillion figure to describe U.S. spending on Middle East conflicts, though fact-checkers have said the number is only partially accurate because it falls on the high end of analysts' estimates and includes future costs, such as future medical care and disability benefits, as well as nation-building costs.

Erdogan said they discussed the Syrian crisis and other regional issues during their phone call Friday and that they also discussed ties between Turkey and the U.S. Their talk came days after Erdogan attended a trilateral meeting with the Russian and Iranian leaders in Sochi, Russia, to promote a peaceful settlement in Syria.

The leaders also called on other countries to provide humanitarian aid, to clear Syrian territory of mines and to restore vital infrastructure destroyed by the war.

Flynn's attorneys stop talking to Trump's team

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a move that could signal cooperation with the government, lawyers for former national security adviser Michael Flynn have told President Donald Trump's legal team they are no longer communicating with them about special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian election interference.

Flynn's legal team communicated the decision this week, said a person familiar with the move who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation.

The decision could be a sign that Flynn is moving to cooperate with Mueller's investigation or negotiate a deal for himself. In large criminal investigations, defense lawyers routinely share information with each other. But it can become unethical to continue such communication if one of the potential targets is looking to negotiate a deal with prosecutors.

Robert Kelner, a lawyer for Flynn, didn't respond to a request for comment Thursday. A lawyer for Flynn's son, Michael Flynn Jr., who also has come under investigation from Mueller's team of prosecutors, declined to comment.

The New York Times first reported the decision.

Flynn was forced to resign as national security adviser in February after White House officials concluded he had misled them about the nature of his contacts during the transition period with the Russian ambassador to the United States.

He was interviewed by the FBI in January about his communications with the ambassador, Sergey Kislyak. The deputy attorney general at the time, Sally Yates, soon advised White House officials that their public assertions that Flynn had not discussed sanctions with Kislyak were incorrect and that Flynn was therefore in a compromised position.

Flynn was facing a Justice Department investigation over his foreign business dealings even before Mueller was appointed as special counsel in May to look into potential coordination between the Trump campaign and Russia to influence the 2016 presidential election. Mueller has since inherited that investigation.

Flynn, a prominent Trump backer on the campaign trail, has been a key figure in Mueller's probe and of particular interest to Trump. Former FBI Director James Comey, for instance, said Trump encouraged him to end an FBI investigation into Flynn during a private Oval Office meeting in February.

San Francisco decision on sex-slavery statue irks Japan

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan expressed strong regret Friday over San Francisco's decision to give city property status to a statue commemorating Asian women who worked in military brothels for Japanese troops during World War II, with Osaka declaring it will terminate its 60-year-old sister-city ties.

The signing of legislation making the memorial public property "destroyed trust," said Osaka Mayor Hirofumi Yoshimura. "We will scrap our sister-city relationship with San Francisco." He said Osaka will no longer contribute public money to privately organized

cultural exchanges between the two cities.

The statue was erected by California's Korean, Chinese and Filipino communities.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said San Francisco's decision challenges Japan's position and was "extremely regrettable." He said similar statues that have been built in various countries interfere with a 2015 agreement between Japan and South Korea to resolve the historical dispute.

Historians say tens of thousands of women around Asia were sent to work in Japanese military brothels, often through coercion and deception.

Japan apologized in 1993 but the issue has remained an open rift with its neighbors — particularly South Korea, which has strong memories of Japan's brutal colonization from 1910 to 1945.

After a gradual pullback from the apology, Japan's government now denies that the women, called "comfort women" in Japanese, were forced into sexual slavery, citing a lack of official documentary proof, and says the statue wrongfully blames Japan.

In the 2015 deal, Japan and South Korea agreed that Tokyo would pay \$9 million to support the surviving South Korean

victims, and both sides pledged to avoid actions that would antagonize the other.

Suga also criticized the South Korean parliament's passage on Friday of legislation designating Aug. 14 as a day to commemorate the suffering of the Korean "comfort women," saying it violated the spirit of the 2015 agreement and that Japan has lodged a protest. The date is when a victim, the late Kim Hak-soon, became the first to publicly speak out about her ordeal in 1991. She was followed by hundreds of others.

The agreement calls for efforts by both sides to build a "future-oriented" relationship.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Inmate caught after 2nd escape in 3 weeks

GA DECATUR — Authorities said a fugitive has been captured near Atlanta after escaping from the same county jail in Alabama twice within a three-week span.

The Coosa County Sheriff's Office in Alabama said early Wednesday that Shane Anthony Vernon, 27, was taken into custody late Tuesday in DeKalb County, Ga., just east of Atlanta.

Coosa County Sheriff Terry Wilson said the inmate's most recent escape happened Sunday, when he "physically circumvented the security of the jail."

Authorities said Vernon previously had escaped Oct. 29 by forcibly removing his restraints and running while being booked into the county jail. He was recaptured the next day after that escape.

Vernon was being held in Alabama on multiple felony charges, including burglary and auto theft.

Driver with cat in lap collides with school bus

ME NEW CANADA — Maine State Police say a driver with a cat on her lap got distracted and collided with a school bus carrying 58 students, injuring some of them and the bus driver.

Police said Alicia Fiordellisi, 19, also suffered injuries to her head and leg in the Tuesday afternoon crash in New Canada. Her cat was killed.

Police said Fiordellisi was traveling south on Route 161 with the cat on her lap. She said she felt a wet spot on her pants from the cat and looked down. When she looked up, she had swerved into the northbound lane and collided with the bus.

The bus driver and some stu-

dents suffered minor injuries. Police said charges are pending.

Police: Armed robber wears white paper mask

CA LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles police are searching for an armed robber suspected of holding up at least six businesses while wearing a white, paper mask.

Investigators said the half-dozen crimes have occurred since Nov. 7 at restaurants and other establishments in the Highland Park and Eagle Rock neighborhoods.

In each robbery, officials said, the man has entered the business wearing a black, hooded sweatshirt and a white, paper mask with holes for the eyes, nose and mouth — similar to masks used in cosmetic facials. He flashed a small revolver and demanded money before fleeing in a silver Nissan Sentra or similar vehicle.

The Los Angeles Times reported Wednesday that police describe him as a Latino man in his late 20s or early 30s, about 5-foot-5 and 200 pounds.

Vandal uses ax to ruin 300 gallons of syrup

VT BRISTOL — Vermont State Police are investigating a case of vandalism in which someone used an ax to cut holes into eight barrels of maple syrup, causing about 300 gallons to leak onto the floor of the sugar house where it was being stored.

Alan Mayer, of Mayer Maple Products, told police another 12 gallons of syrup was stolen sometime between Monday and Tuesday.

Cindy Mayer told the Burlington Free Press there is nearly a season's worth of syrup on the floor of their sugarhouse.

Cindy Mayer said she and her

husband had been preparing their products for an upcoming craft fair.

She said the damage appeared to have been made with an ax.

High winds topple 9 semitrucks on highway

WY CHEYENNE — Officials said high wind speeds tipped over nine semitrucks on a highway near the border of Wyoming and Colorado.

The Wyoming Tribune Eagle newspaper reported that 60 mph winds toppled the vehicles Monday on Interstate 25 near Cheyenne.

The Wyoming Department of Transportation said the interstate was closed for an hour to clean up the crashes.

A wind advisory was issued throughout most of the day, warning high-profile vehicles of the conditions. Semitrucks also blew over on other highways.

Drivers who ignore such advisories could face \$750 fines or face 30 days in jail.

House falls off trailer and blocks rural road

NC STATESVILLE — Some house movers in North Carolina thought they were getting a jump on the day. Instead, their day got longer when the house they were moving fell off a trailer and onto a road.

The North Carolina Highway Patrol told local media outlets the house was being moved on a rural road in Iredell County just north of Statesville about 4 a.m. Wednesday when the rear wheels on the trailer slipped into a hole. When the trailer came out of the hole, the house bounced off the trailer and landed on the road.

Officials said the house had traveled about 25 miles from

Troutman and was just a mile away from its destination. The Department of Transportation said cleanup would take several hours.

Teacher gets book donations after Irma

FL SARASOTA — A Florida teacher whose classroom books went missing after her school was used as a hurricane shelter during Hurricane Irma has received hundreds of donated books and cash to buy even more.

The Herald-Tribune reported eighth grade language arts teacher Danielle Forbes was upset when she walked into her school after the hurricane and found the 200 books on her shelves missing.

Staff members who were present during Irma told Forbes that two families had stayed in her classrooms. They were so frightened by the impending storm that they took all the books off the shelves for fear that they could fly around the room during the height of the hurricane. Somehow, in all the confusion, Forbes concluded, the books went missing.

So Forbes did what most anyone would do these days, and posted her experience on Facebook.

Shortly after she posted the status, two of Forbes' friends from her middle school years asked if they could republish the post. Within days, their respective statuses had more than 300 shares on Facebook collectively. At that point, boxes of books started pouring in.

Now, Forbes' class has received donations of more than 560 novels. A Facebook fundraiser has garnered almost \$600 for Forbes to buy more books. One school in Georgia sent a box of 50 books as part of a class project.

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Ole Miss upends Mississippi State

Associated Press

STARKVILLE, Miss. — A.J. Brown thought the ball was overthrown, but kept sprinting and stuck his arms out as far as they would go. The Mississippi receiver was astonished when the ball stuck right in his hands and he ran for a crucial touchdown.

After a year of bad news, things were finally going the Rebels' way in the Egg Bowl.

Ole Miss stunned No. 16 Mississippi State 31-28 on Thursday night, jumping out to a big second-half lead and holding on in the final minutes to win the rivalry game for the fourth time in six seasons.

The Rebels (6-6, 3-5 Southeastern Conference) had a 10-6 lead at halftime and then broke the game open in the third quarter with Brown's 77-yard touchdown catch and another 63-yard touchdown pass to D.K. Metcalf.

"I'm just so happy for our players and our fans," Ole Miss interim coach Matt Luke said. "This means so much to them. It hasn't always been easy this year. We've been on some better teams with better records, but they'll always remember this year and how they fought through adversity."

It's a sweet ending to a rough season for the Rebels. Ole Miss isn't eligible for a bowl game because of a self-imposed post-season ban related to an NCAA infractions case that continues to hover over the program. The Rebels also lost head coach Hugh Freeze when he resigned during the summer after a school investigation into his phone records.

"The record wasn't what we wanted it to be," running back Jordan Wilkins said. "But we kept fighting as a team ... There's no better feeling than to finish it off like this."

Jordan Ta'amu threw for 247 yards and the two touchdowns to Brown and Metcalf. Wilkins

added 110 yards rushing and two touchdowns.

Brown, the SEC's leader in yards receiving, had six catches for 167 yards. The sophomore went to high school a few miles away from Mississippi State's campus at Starkville High School and had a big game in his return.

Mississippi State (8-4, 4-4) was a two-touchdown favorite, but had to play most of the game without starting quarterback Nick Fitzgerald. He was carted off the field in the first quarter with a right leg injury.

Fitzgerald came into the game with 968 yards rushing this season, which was the most for a quarterback in the SEC. Without him, the Bulldogs turned to freshman Keytaon Thompson, but the offense wasn't nearly as effective until the fourth quarter.

The Bulldogs trailed 31-13 with 8:23 remaining, but scored two touchdowns to pull to 31-28 with 1:05 left. Ole Miss recovered an onside kick to seal the victory.

"We just ran out of time there at the end," Mississippi State coach Dan Mullen said.

The Takeaway

Ole Miss: Ole Miss has an eventful offseason ahead of it — the program is still awaiting word on its full punishment from the NCAA in its rules infractions case against the school. The Rebels will also decide if they'll keep Luke or turn to someone else to lead the program.

After the game, players chanted "We want Luke!" in the locker room and Brown said he thought Luke should be the coach going forward.

"I really love that guy and I want him to be the head coach," Brown said.

Mississippi State: The Bulldogs had all the momentum coming into Thursday's game, but Fitzgerald's injury changed all that in a hurry.

Vikings top Lions, forge three-game lead in division

Associated Press

DETROIT — Case Keenum and the Minnesota Vikings are breezing through this difficult stretch on their schedule.

Now they can lose a game or two and still win the NFC North.

Keenum threw for 282 yards and two touchdowns, and the Vikings never trailed in a 30-23 victory over Detroit on Thursday.

Minnesota extended its lead atop the division to three games over the Lions, and the Vikings have won seven straight since a 14-7 loss to Detroit on Oct. 1.

"We knew how important it was to win this game, especially after they beat us at home," tight end Kyle Rudolph said. "This means that every goal we had at the start of the season is still on the table."

Minnesota won at Washington and beat the Los Angeles Rams before coming to Detroit and winning. The Vikings (9-2) now have road games against Atlanta and Carolina.

But they're sitting pretty compared to the Lions (6-5), who are now probably going to need a wild card to make the playoffs. Another slow start cost Detroit, and quarterback Matthew Stafford appeared to hurt his ankle in the fourth quarter.

Stafford came back into the game, but the Lions couldn't complete another comeback after rallying from double-digit deficits against Chicago and Cleveland the previous two weeks.

"Dug a little bit too much of a hole, and we just didn't perform well there at the onset, and any time you do that against a good team, it's going to be tough," Detroit coach Jim Caldwell said. "Some of those holes are a little bit too big to dig out of."

Marvin Jones had a terrific game for the Lions, catching

six passes for 109 yards and two touchdowns, but as usual, Detroit struggled to show any balance on offense, and Stafford wasn't especially sharp even before his injury.

Here are a few things we learned from Minnesota's victory over the Lions:

Case closed?

Teddy Bridgewater is back from a knee injury, but the Vikings don't seem to need him the way Keenum is playing. Keenum went 21-for-30, did not throw an interception and also ran for a TD.

"Case is playing outstanding. He's a great competitor, studies his rear end off, works extremely hard I think. And today, he seemed like he was more settled," Minnesota coach Mike Zimmer said.

"There's times when he gets a little bit excitable and kind of goes off the reservation a little bit. But today, even throughout the course of the game, he seemed like he was in a pretty good mindset."

Heavy pressure

Minnesota's Everson Griffen celebrated the birth of his son with two sacks and got the better of Detroit tackle Taylor Decker throughout the game. The Vikings had six sacks against the Lions last month. Stafford was sacked three times Thursday in the Thanksgiving rematch.

Balance

The Lions rushed for only 53 yards. Minnesota had more than that just on the opening drive of the second half. The Vikings marched 75 yards in four plays — runs of 46 yards by Latavius Murray, 16 by Jerick McKinnon, 11 by McKinnon and 2 by Murray. The short run by Murray was for a touchdown, giving Minnesota a 27-10 lead.

Redskins optimistic after beating Giants

Associated Press

LANDOVER, Md. — No matter how many injuries they accumulate, no matter how slender their playoff hopes might be, the Washington Redskins at least have this on their side: Each opponent the rest of the way currently owns a losing record.

It starts next week with the NFC East rival Dallas Cowboys.

With a victory against another division foe Thursday night, 20-10 over the New York Giants, the Redskins (5-6) hope they took a step in the right direction after dropping four of their preceding five games.

"Defensively our mentality was to come out here and win this game. It's like a playoff series for us. We're trying to stay alive, so every game is a

must-win for us," cornerback Bashaud Breeland said. "It's that time of year. Crunch-time football. That's when people remember you."

Washington's defense was coming off consecutive losses in which it allowed more than 30 points each time.

But against the Giants (2-9) — a team dealing with as many key injuries as the Redskins — Washington was more stout.

Next is another Thursday game, this one at Dallas, which dropped to 5-6 by losing 28-6 to the Los Angeles Chargers. The Cowboys have two TDs in three games without suspended star running back Ezekiel Elliott, who will sit out another three games.

Washington's schedule after that: Chargers (5-6), Cardinals (4-6), Broncos (3-7), Giants.

Here is what else we learned

from Washington's win against New York:

Crowder-sourcing: With their top two running backs done for the season, along with wideout Terrelle Pryor, and No. 1 tight end Jordan Reed sidelined for the past month with a hamstring injury, the Redskins are going to need to count on third-year receiver Jamison Crowder. He had a game-high seven catches for a career-high 141 yards, including a 15-yard TD pass from Kirk Cousins in the third quarter — the wideout's first score this season. It's part of a trend in the right direction: After having 19 catches for 149 yards in the season's first half-dozen games, he has 27 catches for 412 yards in the past four.

Kerrigan can: Consistent pressure from Redskins LB

Ryan Kerrigan could help mask the fact that the team has two inside linebackers on injured reserve and a third (Martrell Spaight) missed Thursday's game with an injury. Kerrigan took advantage of New York's problems along the offensive line to get two sacks and raise his season total to a team-high nine. It was Kerrigan's 11th career game with more than one sack.

Rookie runner: With RBs Rob Kelley and Chris Thompson among the 15 Redskins on IR, it falls to rookie Samaje Perine to make Washington's ground game go. And so far, so good: He has run for at least 100 yards in each of the past two games. Against the Giants, he finished with 100 yards on 24 carries, plus another 30 yards on three catches.

Allen, Chargers feast on Cowboys on Thanksgiving

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Keenan Allen looked a little overweight to new Los Angeles Chargers coach Anthony Lynn coming off a knee injury that sidelined him for all but one game in 2016.

The fifth-year receiver didn't look heavy to the five Dallas defenders he evaded on a nifty catch-and-run touchdown that helped the Chargers boost their playoff hopes in a 28-6 victory over the Cowboys on Thursday.

Now Allen can start looking at a career best in yards receiving for a season after getting his most in a game — 172 including that 42-yard score. He also had 11 catches a week after getting 12 grabs for 159 yards and two touchdowns in a 54-24 victory over Buffalo.

Allen, who had career highs of 1,046 yards and eight touchdowns as a rookie in 2013, is at 927 yards with four scores after getting two of the three highest yardage totals of his career in consecutive weeks. He's likely to be in the top five in the NFL by the end of Week 12.

"I felt Keenan's been good all along," Lynn said after Allen's fourth 100-yard game of the season. "He's got his weight down, he's catching balls, run after catch is good. The more reps you get, sometimes the better you get. I've been impressed with Keenan coming out of the gate."

On the third-quarter touchdown, Allen caught a pass along the sideline, escaped cornerback Orlando Scandrick's arms and made safety Jeff Heath miss. After slipping between safeties Xavier Woods and Byron Jones, Allen cut inside cornerback Anthony Brown to put the Chargers up 22-6.

"I used to be a running back," said Allen, who has back-to-back 100-yard games for the fourth time in his career. "I had to get up the field really fast. After that, it was a matter of making those guys miss."

Philip Rivers had his ninth career 400-yard game, throwing for 434 yards and three touchdowns in his first Thanksgiving appearance in his 14th season. The six-time Pro Bowl-

er has the Chargers rolling with two home games coming, starting with winless Cleveland on Dec. 3.

The Chargers (5-6) are a half-game out of the wild-card picture and 1½ games behind AFC West-leading Kansas City. Los Angeles started 0-4 while the Chiefs won their first five.

Kick in the pants: For the second straight game, the Dallas opponent comes off an easy win mostly without its kicker and wondering what will happen at that position.

Philadelphia lost Jake Elliott to a head injury and went without a kicker for the rest of a 37-9 victory, going on fourth downs and 2-point conversions. LA's Nick Novak came back to make a 22-yard field goal after leaving with a back injury, but left for good after missing an extra point. He had an earlier 35-yard miss.

Lynn decided against going for 2, and punter Drew Kaser made one of three PAT attempts.

Novak was listed on the injury report, but was a full prac-

tice participant all week.

"He kicked half the reps that he normally kicks and he was fine," Lynn said. "I know we need a healthy kicker and if he can get back to healthy, we'd love to have him. But if not, we'll see."

Gloom and doom in Dallas: The Cowboys (5-6) face three more games without star running back Ezekiel Elliott, suspended six games over alleged domestic violence.

They have two touchdowns in three games without him, and have been outscored 72-6 in the second half, when Dallas has often taken control thanks to the bruising style of last year's NFL rushing leader. Oh, and the Cowboys won three straight with Elliott before the suspension.

"I do believe we have enough playmakers," tight end Jason Witten said. "We have to look at ourselves and we have to strain and climb out of this together. Certainly it's easy to say 'execute better' but it's more than that."

Rhode Island upsets No. 20 Seton Hall

Associated Press

NEW YORK — There was no masking the importance of what had transpired, of what the moment meant, of the opportunity grasped.

Dan Hurley and his Rhode Island Rams entered Brooklyn's Barclays Center for the Preseason NIT with a guaranteed date against No. 20 Seton Hall. Atlantic 10 versus Big East. Mid-major against major conference. National television. Thanksgiving Day.

"It's big for us," Hurley said after Rhode Island's 75-74 upset of No. 20 Seton Hall on Thursday night in the second game of the Preseason NIT. "We only get 'X' amount of these chances. In our non-conference it's hard to get people to play us, home-and-home series. So any time we can get high level teams on a neutral court like Cincinnati last year or Seton Hall this year

we've got to take advantage of it."

Jared Terrell's running layup with 5.2 seconds left was the game-winning basket. He finished with 32 points to help the Rams improve to 3-1. Stanford Robinson added 15 points.

"My teammates were definitely able to find me when I was open. I was able to knock down shots but I was also being aggressive," Terrell said. "These guys know that I just want to win and they're right behind me. So I'm just confident going into every game (because) I know I have a lot of support."

Myles Powell led the Pirates (4-1) with 21 points. Angel Delgado had 18 points and 14 rebounds, and Khadeen Carrington and Desi Rodriguez had 12 points each.

Following Terrell's layup, Seton Hall inbounded the ball to Carrington, who raced up the court but lost his dribble

and the Pirates were unable to recover the loose ball before the buzzer sounded.

"You have a player you trust in Khadeen, you let him go make a play," Kevin Willard said. "Sometimes you have to let your senior guard try to go make a play towards the end of the game."

Trailing by nine at halftime, Seton Hall outscored Rhode Island 27-17 in a 14:06 span to take the lead at 72-71. Carrington made two free throws with 5:54 left to give the Pirates their first lead since his jumper 5:09 into the game.

Defense was both the cause and effect for Seton Hall's turnaround. Specifically, the Pirates played defense in the second half after surrendering 60.7 percent (17-for-28) shooting from the field — including 77.8 percent (7-for-9) from three-point range — in the first 20 minutes.

"For us it's a little bit more of a defensive mentality," Willard said. "We were really flat defensively in the first half. I can't figure it out. We've never given up 60 percent (shooting from the field). ... For us I didn't like our defensive intensity whatsoever."

The Rams regained the lead, 73-72, on Andre Berry's layup with 4:05 left. The lead lasted for 2:02 until Ismael Sanogo's layup gave Seton Hall a one-point advantage.

"We wanted to get a quick throw-in a little bit closer to the key for Jared," Hurley said of the game-deciding basket. "Usually at the end of the game if you kind of watch these game situations, it's usually a guy getting downhill making a shot, making a play. We just wanted to make sure we had the ball in Jared's hands. It was as good a performance I think as you have probably seen this year."

College basketball roundup

SMU hands No. 2 Arizona its second straight loss

Associated Press

PARADISE ISLAND, Bahamas — SMU attacked the glass and kept scoring off turnovers to offset a bad shooting performance. It was enough to hand No. 2 Arizona a second stunning loss to an unranked opponent in two nights.

Ben Emelogu scored 20 points and the Mustangs upset the Wildcats 66-60 in Thursday's consolation round at the Battle 4 Atlantis, a jarring start for an Arizona team that began the season as a Final Four favorite with a preseason Associated Press All-American in Allonzo Trier.

Arizona (3-2) lost to North Carolina State 90-84 in Wednesday's first round. It's the first time the Wildcats have dropped back-to-back games against nonconference opponents since losing to Mississippi State and San Diego State in November 2011.

"This is a different feeling," coach Sean Miller said. "It might be healthy for our team because instead of everybody telling you how good you are and you're going to get to a Final Four and you're awesome, it's going to go opposite now."

No. 1 Duke 99, Portland State 91: Trevon Duval had 22 points and the visiting Blue Devils (6-0) pulled away to beat the surprisingly tenacious Vikings (4-1) to open the Phil Knight Invitational.

No. 4 Michigan State 73, DePaul 51: At Portland, Ore., Matt McQuaid hit six three-pointers and scored a career-high 20 points and the Spartans (3-1) shook the Blue Demons (1-3) in the second half during the opening round of the PK80 Invitational.

No. 5 Villanova 85, Tennessee 76: At Paradise Island, Bahamas, Jalen Brunson scored

25 points and the Wildcats (5-0) overcame a 15-point deficit to beat the Volunteers (3-1) in the Battle 4 Atlantis semifinals.

No. 7 Florida 108, Stanford 87: At Portland, Ore., Egor Koulechov had 26 points and the Gators (4-0) routed the Cardinal (3-3) in the Phil Knight Invitational.

No. 9 North Carolina 102, Portland 78: Luke Maye had 20 points and 10 rebounds, Joel Berry II added 18 points and the Tar Heels (4-0) overwhelmed the host Pilots (2-2) to open the PK80 Invitational.

No. 15 Xavier 83, George Washington 64: Trevon Bluiett scored 20 points to help the Musketeers (5-0) beat the Colonials (2-3) in the Las Vegas Invitational.

No. 17 Gonzaga 86, Ohio State 59: At Portland, Ore., Johnathan Williams had 21 points and the Bulldogs (4-1) were boosted by an enthusi-

astic crowd during their victory over the Buckeyes (4-1) in the Phil Knight Invitational tournament.

Western Kentucky 77, No. 18 Purdue 73: At Paradise Island, Bahamas, Darius Thompson scored 12 points and hit two free throws with 5.1 seconds left to help the Hilltoppers (3-2) beat the Boilermakers (4-2) in the consolation round at the Battle 4 Atlantis.

No. 21 Saint Mary's 89, Harvard 71: At Fullerton, Calif., Jock Landale scored 26 points and the Gaels (5-0) beat the Crimson (2-3) in the opening game of the Wooden Legacy.

No. 23 West Virginia 84, Marist 78: At Lake Buena Vista, Fla., Jevon Carter had 20 points, Sagaba Konate added 14 and the Mountaineers (4-1) beat the Red Foxes (0-4) in the opening round of the Advacare Invitational.