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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Navy censures retired admiral over gifts

The Washington Post

The Navy announced Wednesday that it has censured a retired admiral for personal misbehavior and accepting illicit gifts in the “Fat Leonard” corruption case.

Kenneth Norton, who retired in December 2014, is the fourth admiral in the case to receive a letter of censure, or a formal rebuke. In a statement, the Navy said a review determined that Norton had “demonstrated exceedingly poor judgment and leadership” and had “brought ill-repute and disgrace upon the U.S. Navy.”

The Navy said Norton improperly accepted gifts from Glenn Defense Marine Asia, a Singapore-based contracting firm headed by Leonard Glenn Francis, known within maritime

circles as “Fat Leonard” because of his 6-foot 3-inch, 350-pound frame. Francis has pleaded guilty in a long-running corruption investigation to bribing scores of Navy personnel and overcharging the Navy by more than \$35 million to resupply U.S. vessels in Asia.

Two admirals in the case have been charged with federal crimes by the Justice Department. In addition, about 60 admirals have come under investigation for possible violations of military law or federal ethics rules in their dealings with Francis, who was legendary within the Navy for entertaining officers with wildly expensive dinners and all-night parties featuring high-end prostitutes.

Navy officials disclosed few details about Norton’s misconduct

but said it dated to his service as the commanding officer of the USS Ronald Reagan, an aircraft carrier, between 2008 and 2010.

“The Navy has a long tradition of holding leaders accountable and commanding officers are placed in unique positions of trust and responsibility,” Navy Secretary Richard Spencer said in a statement. “It is incumbent that they be held to the highest standards of both personal and professional behavior. “Censure was both necessary and appropriate.”

Under military law, the Navy has the authority to discipline retired officers, although it rarely happens in practice. A censure amounts to a public shaming.

The Navy said it also revoked its prior decision to award the Legion of Merit to Norton for his service as commander of the

Reagan. The Legion of Merit is a decoration for exceptionally meritorious conduct.

During his career, Norton also served as commander of the USS Camden, commander of the Naval Safety Center and chief of staff for naval forces in Europe and Africa. He did not respond Wednesday to a phone call or electronic message seeking comment.

Norton’s predecessor as commander of the Reagan, retired Rear Adm. Terry Kraft, likewise received a letter of censure from the Navy in 2015 for accepting gifts from Francis. Investigators found that Kraft and two other admirals assigned to the Reagan in 2005 and 2006 dined at “extravagant” banquets courtesy of Francis.

N. Korean missile launch, photos show big gains

The Washington Post

TOKYO — A day after its latest intercontinental ballistic missile launch, North Korea released photos of what it’s calling the “Hwasong-15.” The collective response from missile experts was — not to get too technical — whoa.

The missile and its launcher truck do, at first blush, appear to support North Korea’s claim that this missile is much more technologically advanced than previous iterations.

Although there is still much that can’t be gleaned from the photos and North Korea does have an inglorious record of exaggeration, analysts generally agree that the Hwasong-15 marks a significant leap forward in North Korea’s missile development.

“This is a really big missile, much larger than I expected,” said Scott LaFoy, an imagery analyst for the specialist website

NK News. “I believe one of my professors would have referred to it as a big honking missile.”

Several analysts noted that the missile looked like the American Titan II, which was initially an ICBM but was later used by the U.S. Air Force and NASA as a space launch vehicle. Here is what they determined:

The truck. The transporter erector launcher, or TEL, has nine axles, making it one axle longer than the TEL used to launch the previous iteration of the intercontinental ballistic missile. North Korea claims to have made these trucks itself but analysts believe they are modified versions or based on the Chinese lumber truck, the WS51200.

“We’ve seen heavy vehicle extensions before but this would be a very large step forward for their heavy vehicles industry,” said LaFoy, estimating that the truck was about twice as long as

an American school bus.

The nose cone. The nose cone of the Hwasong-15 is much blunter than of the previous iteration, the Hwasong-14. That is likely an effort to slow down the missile slightly as it screams through the atmosphere, which lowers the heat inside the missile and means that the warhead doesn’t have to withstand quite as much variation in temperature during flight.

That might be an effort to overcome issues with the re-entry vehicle — the part of the missile that protects the warhead during launch and brings it back into the Earth’s atmosphere. This is one of the parts of the missile that North Korea has not yet proved it has mastered.

The size of the nose cone and re-entry vehicle on the Hwasong-15 supports North Korea’s claim that the missile can carry a “super large heavy warhead.”

But experts think the missile tested this week was carrying a light, mock warhead.

Engines. The first stage of the Hwasong-15 — the bottom part that propels it off the launcher, sometimes called the “booster” — has two engines. “We’re trying to figure out what those may be and how powerful they are,” said David Wright, of the Union of Concerned Scientists.

But the second stage looks like it can carry more than twice as much propellant as the Hwasong-14, since it is longer and has a larger diameter, Wright said.

Steering. The Hwasong-14 had only one nozzle and it used four vernier engines to steer the missile. The newly unveiled Hwasong-15 has two nozzles and no verniers. That suggests the missile is steered by gimballing, a more advanced way to control the missile.

Alcohol rules are relaxed for troops in Japan

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — U.S. Forces Japan has loosened alcohol restrictions imposed after a fatal Nov. 19 vehicle accident involving a 21-year-old Marine on Okinawa.

The revised rules, which took effect at 4:30 p.m. Thursday local time, allow servicemembers to purchase alcoholic beverages on base and drink them in their on- or off-base homes, Maj. George Tobias, a 5th Air Force spokesman, told Stars and Stripes.

"The purchase or consumption of alcohol off-base is still not permitted with the exception of one's own off-base residence," he said.

Alcohol sales are still prohibited at some U.S. facilities in Japan, such as at the New Sanno Hotel and Hardy Barracks in Tokyo and Kadena Marina on Okinawa, Tobias said.

A midnight-to-5 a.m. curfew for Japan-based servicemembers of all ranks is still in force, he added.

Under normal circumstances, USFJ's Japanwide curfew applies only to lower enlisted servicemembers and runs from 1 to 5 a.m.

Lt. Gen. Jerry Martinez, who commands U.S. Forces Japan and the 5th Air Force, banned his troops from purchasing alcohol and drinking it on or off base after police on the southern island prefecture arrested Lance Cpl. Nicholas James-McLean on suspicion of negligent driving resulting in death and driving under the influence of alcohol.

James-McLean, who was off duty at the time, was driving a government-owned vehicle about 5:30 a.m. when it collided with a minitruck driven by Japanese national Hidemasa Taira, 61, at an intersection, officials said.

Taira was killed in the crash, which is still under investigation.

A breath test indicated that James-McLean had a blood-alcohol level that was three times Japan's legal limit of 0.03 percent, a Naha police spokesman said.

All 50 U.S. states have set 0.08 as the legal limit for driving under the influence or driving while impaired.

1st USMC recruiting station outside US to open in 2018

BY WILL MORRIS
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — The Marine Corps is opening its first full-time recruiting station outside the United States at Kleber Kaserne in Germany, the Corps said.

The Marines are establishing the new station — located in an area with about 50,000 U.S. personnel and family members — in response to increased demand from potential enlistees.

"Germany is kind of an untapped market for the Marines," said Capt. Patrick Deane, executive officer of Recruiting Station Portsmouth. "We've been getting a lot of requests from people."

The Marines are receiving interest mostly from children of soldiers and airmen in the Kaiserslautern area who want to follow in a parent's footsteps and join the military but are looking for something different, Deane said.

The Marines will be able to conduct pre-enlistment physicals at military medical clinics in Germany. Currently, prospective Marines must fly back to the United

States for physicals and other pre-enlistment responsibilities.

Gunnery Sgt. Christopher Nieves, a career recruiter, will open the office Feb. 15 at Kleber, a small Army base on Kaiserslautern's eastern edge.

The challenge of being posted on a U.S. Army base in Europe to recruit Marines isn't lost on Nieves. Still, he said he is looking forward to it.

"To me it's just like being anywhere else," Nieves said. "I kind of enjoy that it's different."

Deane said that for many dependents from other services, becoming a Marine seems like an abstract idea and an option that isn't realistic. Nieves' presence may change that.

Nieves acknowledged that much of what is offered by the different services is the same, including pay and benefits. But it's a sense of the intangibles in the Marines — a smaller service with intense pride and camaraderie — that may get potential recruits in Germany interested in joining.

"It all comes down to what type of branch are you looking for," Nieves said.

AF removes Thunderbirds commander

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Air Force has removed the commander of the high-profile Thunderbirds demonstration team due to a loss of confidence in his abilities to lead the touring squadron of F-16 fighter jets, the service announced Wednesday in a statement.

Lt. Col. Jason Heard was dismissed Nov. 20 as commander of the Thunderbirds — officially known as the U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron — and pilot of the team's No. 1 jet. Brig. Gen. Jeannie Leavitt, commander of the service's 57th Wing, dismissed Heard, citing a loss of confidence in his "leadership and risk management style."

"This was an incredibly difficult decision to make, but one that is ultimately in the best interests of the Thunderbird team," she said in the statement. "I am personally grateful for Jason's dedication to the 2017 season."

On Nov. 4, the Thunderbirds, based at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, completed their 2017 season, which included more than 70 air shows. The team pulled out of a scheduled air show in June following the crash of one of its

jets during training prior to a two-day performance at the Dayton Air Show in Ohio.

An Air Force investigation determined the June 23 crash was avoidable. The F-16 was traveling too fast and had insufficient stopping distance as it landed on a rain-soaked runway before it overturned, destroying the \$29 million aircraft, according to the Air Force Accident Investigation Board's report released last month.

The board found the pilot failed to follow proper braking procedures and his vision was impaired by rainwater on the cockpit's canopy. The pilot suffered minor injuries.

However, Tech. Sgt. Christopher Boitz, a Thunderbirds spokesman, said the crash was not the reason Leavitt dismissed Heard.

He said Leavitt had concerns that Heard's leadership style was resulting in unnecessary risk within the Thunderbirds' demonstrations, "which eroded the team dynamic."

"We are on the road together more than 200 days per year, executing flying operations with absolutely no margin for error," Boitz said. "As a result, absolute trust and teamwork in both our professional and personal dynamics are foundational to our mission."

Pelosi calls on Conyers to resign

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The top Democrat in the House on Thursday called on Michigan Rep. John Conyers to resign in the face of multiple accusations of sexual misconduct.

"The allegations against Congressman Conyers, as we have learned more since Sunday, are serious, disappointing and very credible," Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., told reporters.

Pelosi said she prayed for the 88-year-old Democratic lawmaker, who was hospitalized in Detroit, and his family. "However," she said, "Congressman Conyers should resign."

House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., addressing reporters minutes later, echoed Pelosi and said Conyers "should resign immediately."

The dramatic call from Pelosi came just hours after a former aide publicly accused him of sexual harassment, telling NBC's "Today" show that she was fired for rejecting advances from Conyers.

Marion Brown, 61, said the congressman propositioned her for sex multiple times over more than a decade. Brown initially told her story to BuzzFeed News on condition of anonymity, saying she'd settled a complaint in 2015 with Conyers over the allegations, according to her attorney.

"It was sexual harassment ... violating my body," Brown said Thursday. "Propositioning me. Inviting me to hotels with the guise of discussing business and then propositioning me ... for sex."

Conyers has faced growing demands from other House Democrats to step down, but he has insisted on his innocence.

Pelosi on Sunday had called Conyers an icon and argued for due process of an Ethics Committee investigation. On Thursday, she said, "zero tolerance means consequences — for everyone. No matter how great the legacy, it's not licensed to harass or discriminate. In fact, it makes it even more disappointing."

Conyers, meanwhile, was in a Detroit hospital, political consultant and family friend Sam Riddle told The Associated Press. Riddle said the information came from Conyers' wife, Monica. He said he didn't know Conyers' medical condition or why he went to the hospital.

Brown broke a confidentiality agreement to tell her story to "Today," saying she stayed on the job because she needed to support her family and found the work rewarding. The Associated Press left messages seeking comment from Conyers' lawyer, who has said the congressman will fight the misconduct allegations.

Trump considering replacing Tillerson

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House is discussing a plan to oust Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and replace him with CIA Director Mike Pompeo in a major shake-up of President Donald Trump's national security team, administration officials said Thursday.

The move would put Pompeo, a former congressman who has grown close to Trump during his tenure atop the CIA, in charge of U.S. diplomacy. Tillerson, the former Exxon Mobil CEO, has had a rough first year characterized by tensions with Trump in several foreign policy areas and overwhelmingly negative publicity over Tillerson's planned overhaul of the State Department.

Putting Pompeo at the State Department would create a vacancy at the CIA, which U.S. officials and other individuals familiar with White House thinking said could be filled by Republican Sen. Tom Cotton, of Arkansas, one of Trump's staunchest defenders on foreign policy in Congress. Cotton's office wouldn't comment other than to say, "Senator Cotton's focus is on serving Arkansans in the Senate."

Tillerson's likely ouster loomed awkwardly over an Oval Office meeting Thursday between Trump and the visiting

crown prince of Bahrain. Asked by a reporter whether he wanted Tillerson to stay on the job, Trump was coy, merely pointing out that Tillerson was in fact in the room for the meeting.

A White House official said it was unclear how soon Tillerson might be replaced, and word of the plan appeared to catch Tillerson and his staff off guard. Tillerson aides and the State Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The New York Times, which first reported the potential shake-up, said it was likely to happen within several weeks.

Nor was it clear whether either Pompeo or Cotton had been formally approached by the White House about the potential new roles.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said there were no staffing changes to announce and hinted that Tillerson would likely remain at least until year's end.

The White House started telling people in September that Tillerson would be replaced, said a senior administration official. By that point, some issues that needed sign-off from the secretary of state were being put off until after Tillerson was gone, said the official who, like others, wasn't authorized to comment publicly and demanded anonymity.

Army veteran says Franken groped her during USO tour

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Embattled Minnesota Sen. Al Franken is facing a new allegation of inappropriately touching a woman after an Army veteran accused him of groping her during a USO Christmas tour in the Middle East more than a decade ago.

Stephanie Kemplin, 41, of Maineville, Ohio, told CNN on Thursday that Franken had cupped her right breast when she stood next to him for a photo in December 2003. Kemplin, who was deployed to Kuwait at the time, is the fifth woman in two weeks

to accuse Franken of sexual misconduct.

Franken's office released the same statement it provided CNN late Wednesday.

"As Sen. Franken made clear this week, he takes thousands of photos and has met tens of thousands of people and he has never intentionally engaged in this kind of conduct. He remains fully committed to cooperating with the ethics investigation," the statement said.

Kemplin did not immediately return a call from The Associated Press seeking comment. She is the second woman to accuse

Franken of inappropriate behavior during a USO tour. He apologized this month to Leeann Tweeden, now a Los Angeles radio host, who said he forcibly kissed and groped her during a 2006 tour. Tweeden released a photo showing the comedian-turned-senator posing in a joking manner with his hands on her chest as she naps wearing a flak vest aboard a military plane.

Franken apologized to Tweeden and said he welcomes an investigation by the Senate Ethics Committee of the other allegations against him.

No deal yet on defense sending

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee on Thursday said that members are “nowhere” on a deal to fund a massive \$700 billion defense bill.

Rep. Adam Smith, of Washington state, said members have yet to strike a deal to appropriate funds that would move forward the 2018 defense budget since it surpasses statutory budget caps.

Two weeks ago, Congress sent the defense bill, also known as the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, to President Donald Trump’s desk for him to sign. But since it surpasses caps by about \$80 billion, it will need a special legislative fix to approve the additional funding.

“It’s nowhere,” Smith said during a morning breakfast meeting with journalists about negotiations to surpass the caps. “People are talking and mumbling and everything, but the decision-makers are not having a conversation. And as far as I can tell, there has been no progress whatsoever towards figuring how to resolve the budget cap problem.”

If resolved, and the defense bill as it stands now is funded, the legislation would enact

raises for servicemembers, increase the size of the military, fund new ships and aircrafts, and authorize new spending on missile defense. The bill was approved by the Senate on Nov. 16 and sent to the president’s desk ahead of Thanksgiving.

Congressional members who negotiated the deal have lauded the plan, which authorizes funding for the Department of Defense and national security programs through the Department of Energy. But additional legislation is required to approve the actual funding.

Though the plan has overcome several significant hurdles, it set the stage for a new fight on how to fund the major increase in military spending. It surpasses the budget cap of \$549 billion for defense spending and will require new congressional action to be enacted. Otherwise, the proposed budget could trigger automatic, across-the-board spending cuts.

Smith also sounded the alarm that Congress is headed for a government shutdown, which would happen if members don’t strike an overall budget deal by the Dec. 8 deadline. Smith suggested that such a shutdown could, however, last a short period of time before another temporary funding bill is approved.

In September, Congress approved a temporary funding

measure that gave Congress at least three months to approve a new overall spending plan for fiscal 2018, which began Oct. 1.

But that also meant a new military budget was on the clock. Congress has until Dec. 8 to come up with a deal to fund its defense proposal or it might have to delay its spending plans again.

Congress has been here before. Former President Barack Obama signed the 2017 defense policy plan Dec. 23, 2016. But faced with another round of delays, a \$1.1 trillion omnibus government spending bill that included the defense budget wasn’t approved until May. Until then, military operations were kept afloat by a short-term funding bill — as is the case now.

Smith suggested Congress and the defense bill could be in a tougher position this time. “It’s worse,” he said, following the meeting at the Fairmont Washington hotel in Georgetown. “I don’t see the agreement.”

The bill comprises a base budget of more than \$620 billion, with \$66 billion in a warfighting account not subject to budget caps called the Overseas Contingency Operations fund and another \$8 billion for other defense activities.

DOD tallies civilian dead in Iraq, Syria

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — At least 801 civilians have been killed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, according to a Pentagon report released Thursday.

Five more strikes, all in Syria, were investigated over the past month and found to have resulted in 15 civilian additional civilian deaths, the report stated.

Monitoring groups say the number of civilian casualties from coalition airstrikes is far higher than the Pentagon acknowledges.

Since August 2014, more than 5,000 civilians have been killed as a result of coalition airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, according to the Airwars organization that tracks civilian deaths in the anti-ISIS operation.

The majority of civilian casualty allegations are currently from coalition airstrikes in Syria. The Pentagon says it is still assessing 695 reports of civilian casualties, more than 400 of which are from strikes carried out in Syria. Each investigation that found an allegation credible determined it was “more likely than not” that a coalition strike resulted in a civilian casualty, the report stated.

Experts warn of defense challenge for US

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A panel of defense experts told senators on Thursday that the United States will face a daunting challenge in developing a new defense strategy with a military facing a readiness crisis against the backdrop of deteriorating foreign affairs in several regions around the world.

The wide-ranging discussion, which was the subject of a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, comes ahead of a Department of Defense plan to release a new defense strategy

in the coming months.

Mackenzie Eaglen, a resident fellow of the Marilyn Ware Center for Security Studies at the conservative-leaning American Enterprise Institute, said the competing demands facing today’s military has resulted in a “crisis in confidence” in U.S. defense-making strategy.

“We have a problem and this is the last, best chance to fix it,” Eaglen said. “There is a disconnect between reality as it is in the world and what those forces are being told what they should be doing on paper.”

The 2017 National Defense Authorization Act required the

DOD to develop and implement a new national defense strategy that would lay out the military’s top priorities and plan to achieve warfighting superiority, detailing U.S. threats and the strategy to address them.

Growing threats from North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile program, continuing efforts to combat new terrorist efforts, Russia’s aim to expand its influence around the world and growing instability in the Middle East are among some of the challenges a new U.S. military strategy must address, lawmakers and experts agreed Thursday.

Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., said the strategy could be finalized by early 2018.

“This is not the first time in our nation’s history that we have had to confront multiple threats from abroad, but it is an incredibly dangerous and uncertain time,” he said.

Retired Lt. Gen. Thomas W. Spoeher, who is director of the Center for National Defense at the conservative-leaning Heritage Foundation, said plenty of work remains to return the military to robust levels in light of the threats and ongoing conflicts.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Girl climbs from wrecked car to find help for mom

ME WESTFIELD — Maine State Police said an 8-year-old girl was able to climb out the back of a wrecked car and flag down help for her severely injured mother.

Police said the girl was in the back seat of a car driven by her 26-year-old mother Tuesday night when the vehicle went off a road in Westfield and hit a tree.

The girl suffered minor injuries and was treated at a nearby hospital.

Rescue crewmembers freed Lili Parady from the car, and she was flown to Eastern Maine Medical Center for treatment.

Couple finds burglar asleep on bedroom floor

OR PORTLAND — Authorities said a couple awoke to find a burglar asleep on their bedroom floor.

The Washington County Sheriff's Office said the couple escorted the man out Wednesday morning before realizing that wallets, cellphones and a tablet computer were missing. Deputies, aided by the Find My iPhone app, found a 64-year-old suspect hiding under the porch of a nearby home.

Ervin Solomon was charged with burglary, theft and felon in possession of a restricted weapon.

Man who hunted deer earlier helps save buck

ME EUSTIS — A Maine hunter who had been pursuing deer in the woods just a day earlier loaned a boat to save a drowning buck from a freezing lake.

The Bangor Daily News re-

ported Justin Wyman saw the struggling deer in Flagstaff Lake in Eustis on Sunday. The animal appeared to be 300 or more yards from the shore and had fallen through thin ice.

Wyman offered his boat to game wardens to try to save the deer. They got some rope around the buck's antlers and took the animal back to a boat landing. Eventually, they coaxing it onto land.

Accused car burglar calls 911 when confronted

AZ MAYER — A man accused of burglarizing a disabled pickup truck in north-central Arizona later called 911 to report being threatened by the vehicle's owner.

Yavapai County Sheriff's officials said Robert Jones, 25, of Glendale was booked into the Camp Verde jail on suspicion of burglary and criminal damage.

The Daily Courier reported Jones allegedly broke out the window of the truck and took items out of the vehicle.

Sheriff's deputies contacted the owner, who said his truck was left on the side of Highway 69 because it had a flat tire.

When the man returned with a spare tire, he saw the broken window and confronted Jones.

6,000 dinosaur bones donated to museum

CO DENVER — A collection of more than 6,000 dinosaur bones from Wyoming has been donated to the Denver Museum of Nature & Science.

The Denver Post reported Tuesday that the donation is the largest the museum has received. Among the bones are skulls, vertebrae and limbs of a duck-billed dinosaur called edmontosaurus, or hadrosaur.

The fossils were found in a large bone bed on private land that was likely created when a sudden flood buried the dinosaur 67 million years ago.

Arrest made in theft of mounted zebra head

AK ANCHORAGE — An Alaska woman came home to find out a thief broke into her home and stole clothing, jewelry, prescription drugs and the mounted head of a zebra she had on a wall.

Stacy Scott told Anchorage television station KTVA that she received the zebra head from a friend when she worked at a downtown boutique.

She named the head "George" and was planning to decorate him for Christmas.

A security camera recorded a woman carrying items, including George, out the front door of Scott's home and into a waiting cab.

Police arrested a 38-year-old woman at an Anchorage motel where the cab driver had dropped her off.

The suspect was charged with felony burglary and theft.

Police stop car with huge Christmas tree on top

MA SUDBURY — Police in a Massachusetts town are showing residents how not to transport their holiday trees.

Sudbury police posted a picture Nov. 24 of a vehicle with a large tree on top of it. Almost the entire car appears to be hidden.

Police said an officer stopped the vehicle on Route 20 in the town, located about 25 miles west of Boston.

Police on Facebook reminded people to transport holiday trees "responsibly."

It's unclear if the driver was cited.

Civil War bonds, ads found in Statehouse vault

NH CONCORD — Civil War bonds and old advertising posters were among the artifacts found in a mysterious vault at the New Hampshire Statehouse.

The 6- by 10-foot space is at the top of a narrow spiral staircase in a room that served as the state treasury in the 1800s and later as the Department of Motor Vehicles. Today, it's assigned to the Senate Finance Committee.

Officials originally thought the vault had been locked since the 1950s, but boxes of financial documents from the 1970s were among the items found.

Long-gone threatened snake reappears

AZ LAKE HAVASU CITY — A threatened snake that hasn't been seen along the lower Colorado River in a century has apparently repopulated an area south of Lake Havasu City.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife service spokesman Jeff Humphrey said Tuesday that biologists first spotted the northern Mexican gartersnake along the Bill Williams River in west-central Arizona. They later discovered it on the Colorado River at the Havasu National Wildlife Refuge.

Officials believe the water-loving snake repopulated the area because of habitat improvements that are part of the lower Colorado River conservation program. It was found in 2015 in Beal Lake, a marshy habitat on the Havasu refuge.

The olive-brown to olive-gray striped snake feeds on small fish. Fish and Wildlife is working to add it to the conservation program designed to protect 26 other species.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Georgia gets another shot at Auburn

Associated Press

The Georgia Bulldogs get another crack at perhaps the hottest team in college football.

It wasn't a long wait.

The sixth-ranked Bulldogs face No. 4 Auburn for the second time in four weeks Saturday in the Southeastern Conference championship game at Mercedes-Benz Stadium with a chance to avenge their only loss. The prize: almost certainly a playoff spot.

Over the last three weeks, the Tigers (10-2, 7-1 SEC) have beaten two teams who at the time topped the playoff rankings, including a dominating 40-17 win over the Bulldogs (11-1, 7-1). Auburn is coming off a 26-14 win over then-No. 1 Alabama on Saturday to earn the trip to Atlanta.

"Of course, they're going to have a crowd, there's no doubt," Tigers coach Gus Malzahn said Sunday. "This being for the

SEC championship, it's as big as it gets, no matter revenge or not and all that. We're expecting their best. You're talking about one of the more talented teams in all of college football."

The Bulldogs had hardly been challenged since a Week 2 victory over No. 15 Notre Dame. Then they came to Auburn and were thoroughly walloped on both sides of the ball, getting outgained 488-230.

Georgia will have no shortage of motivation.

"You don't shake a memory," Bulldogs coach Kirby Smart said. "You put it in their face and you challenge people, and you play more physical. You strike people and get off blocks and if you're on offense, you strike people and stay on blocks. Fundamentally, we've got to play better than we played last time. We've obviously got to play with a little more composure to avoid the knucklehead decisions that

we had in the game."

The Tigers have been rolling along with five straight wins since a loss to LSU.

The big question facing Auburn is the health of star tailback Kerryon Johnson. The SEC's leading rusher appeared to hurt his left shoulder on a goal-line hit late in the third quarter but scored on a 1-yard touchdown run on the next play.

Johnson, who ran for 167 yards and caught a 55-yard touchdown pass in the first game against Georgia, went down again in the fourth after several more carries. Malzahn said he's not sure of his status for the game.

"I know that physically if he can (play), he will," he said. Running back Kamryn Pettway remains out with a fractured shoulder blade, Malzahn said.

On the other side, the Tigers shut down Nick Chubb, Sony

Michel and Georgia's normally powerful running game in the first meeting. Partly thanks to four sacks, the Bulldogs produced just 46 yards on 32 carries.

Georgia and Auburn have staged the longest running rivalry in the Deep South but they've never met in the SEC championship game. The Bulldogs are in the title game for the first time since 2012 and haven't won an SEC championship since 2005.

The Tigers won in 2010 and 2013 with much less impressive seasons in between.

The two programs and head coaches are quite familiar with each other. Smart faced Auburn plenty of times as a former Alabama defensive coordinator and over the past two seasons with the Bulldogs. He also was one of Malzahn's chief competitors for the Auburn job after the 2012 season.

This time, TCU will focus on stopping OU's Anderson

Associated Press

NORMAN, Okla. — Oklahoma running back Rodney Anderson's rise from two season-ending injuries to become one of the nation's most productive backs has surprised even those closest to him.

The redshirt sophomore suffered a knee injury early in the 2015 season and a neck injury in fall camp in 2016, and he didn't even start the first half of this season. Since Oct. 21 against Kansas State, his first game in a featured role, he leads Power Five players and is second nationally with 1,041 yards from scrimmage.

Oklahoma left tackle Orlando Brown knew Anderson was talented but he didn't foresee this explosion.

"Straight up. I didn't expect it," Brown, an Outland Trophy finalist, said. "I told him, 'Man, I didn't think you were completely capable of this.' Obviously, he was able to get over

his injury, and he's came a long way and he's only going to get better. Have a ton of respect for him. I was wrong."

In the game that pushed him into the spotlight, Anderson gained 290 yards from scrimmage and scored four touchdowns during a 38-20 win over TCU. He will be a priority for TCU's defense in the rematch when his second-ranked Sooners (11-1, 8-1 Big 12) face the 10th-ranked Horned Frogs (10-2, 7-2) in the Big 12 Championship game Saturday at AT&T Stadium.

"We've got to tackle the running backs," TCU coach Gary Patterson said. "We did a poor job (the first time), and one of the reasons is a good player, is Rodney Anderson. You don't tackle very well, then you're going to have a hard time playing good defense. So you defend that, you defend the deep ball, you've got a chance."

The 6-foot-2, 218-pound Anderson has kept it going since

the TCU game. He gained 116 yards from scrimmage and caught a touchdown pass in limited action against Kansas, and then ran for 118 yards and four touchdowns in a 59-31 win over West Virginia.

As electric as his game is, Anderson shies away from attention. He doesn't have a Twitter account and rides a skateboard to class. He lives with offensive linemen Dru Samia and Bobby Evans and feels most at home with the big fellas up front.

"The offensive line — they're my favorite people, to be honest with you," Anderson said. "I hang out with them. We go eat sometimes. I'm always with the offensive line. They're amazing. It's always good when they block for me."

The linemen claim Anderson as one of their own, though Brown joked that unlike them, everything Anderson eats "turns into muscle."

"Rodney's a funny guy, man," Brown said. "I don't re-

ally know how to describe it, but he's a big guy. He fits in right with us. Whether that just be his swag, the way he carries himself, he fits right in with us. He likes to play games, likes to eat."

He's different than the average running back on the field, too. The past six games, he has 785 yards and nine touchdowns rushing and 256 yards and five touchdowns receiving. He had 151 yards rushing and 139 yards receiving against TCU in the regular-season showdown.

"His versatility has been impressive," Oklahoma coach Lincoln Riley said. "How well he's caught the ball, he's pass protected well, he's ran physical. He's popped some long plays running. Him being able to do all that and then having the other guys right there with him that have been very productive as well have really helped us."

Stanford faces well-rested USC again

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — While the Pac-12 North was being decided in Seattle, Pac-12 South champion Southern California was enjoying an overdue day off.

Tight end Tyler Petite went to the Bay Area to see his girlfriend. Tight end Daniel Imatorbhebhe watched rivalry games play out across the country.

Quarterback Sam Darnold was flipping back and forth between Notre Dame-Stanford and the Apple Cup, where Washington's 41-14 win over

Washington State gave the 14th-ranked Cardinal the division title and a spot in the Pac-12 championship game Friday night against the rested 11th-ranked Trojans.

USC will be the first team from a Power 5 conference to play in a conference championship game after a bye week since Oklahoma and Auburn in 2004.

It wasn't intentional. The Pac-12 has to accommodate USC and Stanford's rivalry games against the Fighting Irish and a nine-game conference schedule.

The Cardinal have only a

short bus ride to Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, Calif., to worry about, and Stanford head coach David Shaw has no issues facing a recharged USC team.

"If anybody in the country deserved it, it's them. I mean, going 12 straight weeks without a bye, especially in this conference playing nine conference games and Notre Dame, it's brutal," Shaw said.

USC spent much of the season hindered by injuries, but its break came when the team is largely healthy.

Outside linebacker Porter Gustin (toe) will not play in the Pac-12 title game, USC head

coach Clay Helton said, but the rest of the roster is good to go. Gustin missed eight of USC's last 10 games after he was injured against Stanford on Sept. 9 and has a "better opportunity" to play in a bowl game, Helton said.

For Petite, the bye week gave him more time to recover from a shoulder injury. Imatorbhebhe was happy to set aside the mental grind of the game for a few days.

"Just got to rest," Imatorbhebhe said. "It was awesome. My mind needed it as well as my body, so it was cool."

College basketball roundup

Weary Duke uses late scoring run to hold off Indiana

Associated Press

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski saw how tired his team was Wednesday night.

He heard it, too.

Fortunately for the Blue Devils, Marvin Bagley III and Grayson Allen still had enough energy to persevere.

Bagley scored 23 points and grabbed 10 rebounds, Allen had 21 points and No. 1 Duke used a late scoring run to fend off pesky Indiana 91-81 in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge.

"When you're tired, especially guys when they're tired, they don't talk," Krzyzewski said. "They talk to themselves and that's how we played most of the game. We wanted to win but we were in 'This is what I have to do instead of what we have to do.'"

Eventually, Duke (9-0) figured it out and went on a decisive 17-4 run that sealed Indiana's fate.

But after logging nearly 8,500 miles and playing nine times in 20 days, fatigue clearly was a factor.

In the first half, the teams traded the lead 10 times, had 11 ties and the Blue Devils couldn't

get any real separation.

Once they did, early in the second half, they couldn't maintain the momentum and got into foul trouble.

That's how college basketball's winningest coach drew it up, but he also understood.

"We're exhausted," Krzyzewski said. "They're dead right now, but they certainly played those 5 minutes at the end with an incredible will to win."

Indiana was led by Robert Johnson with 17 points and De'Ron Davis with 16 as its three-game winning streak came to an end.

No. 4 Villanova 90, Penn 62: Jalen Brunson had 17 points to lead five players in double figures for host Villanova.

Omari Spellman, Mikal Bridges and Phil Bridges added 14 points apiece and Donte DiVincenzo scored 12 for the Wildcats (7-0), who remained undefeated while winning their 15th straight game against Penn.

AJ Brodeur paced Penn with 15 points and Darnell Foreman had 13 for the Quakers (5-4).

The game was played at Jake Nevin Field House, a bandbox gym on Villanova's campus that seats 2,220. It was the first

game at the Wildcats' former home since Jan. 4, 1986. Villanova is playing most of its home games this season at Wells Fargo Center, home court of the 76ers, while its regular on-campus arena gets a makeover.

No. 10 Miami 86, No. 12 Minnesota 81: Dewan Huell scored 23 points in 27 minutes and Bruce Brown Jr. added 16 points and nine rebounds to lead visiting Miami in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge.

Ja'quan Newton had 12 points, and the Hurricanes (6-0) shot 56 percent from the field after halftime and had 17 points off Minnesota turnovers.

Amir Coffey scored 23 points for the Gophers (7-1).

No. 13 North Carolina 86, Michigan 71: Luke Maye scored 27 points and host North Carolina shot 55 percent in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge.

Joel Berry II added 17 points on a bounceback offensive night for the Tar Heels (6-1). They were coming off a 63-45 loss to No. 3 Michigan State in the PK80 Invitational that included them shooting a program-record-low 24.6 percent.

But North Carolina had no troubles against the Wolverines (6-2). The Tar Heels closed the

first half on a 17-5 run for a 51-37 lead, then went a 17-2 run to blow the game open.

Moe Wagner scored 20 points to lead Michigan.

No. 15 Gonzaga 103, Incarnate Word 68: Rui Hachimura scored 18 points and Zach Norvell Jr. added 17 for host Gonzaga (6-1).

No. 23 TCU 87, Belmont 76: Vladimir Brodziansky scored 22 points and the host Frogs extended the nation's longest winning streak to 12 games.

The 6-foot-11 senior from Slovakia was 5-for-6 from three-point range and 8-for-11 overall in TCU's first game since returning to The Associated Press Top 25 for the first time in almost three years.

No. 24 Alabama 77, Louisiana Tech 74: Collin Sexton made four free throws in the final 8 seconds to help the host Crimson Tide overcome an 11-point deficit in the last 14 minutes and hold off the previously unbeaten Bulldogs (5-1).

Dazon Ingram and Sexton, the SEC's leading scorer, led Alabama (6-1) with 22 points each.

NBA roundup

Harden powers Rockets past Pacers

Associated Press

HOUSTON — James Harden had 29 points, 10 assists and eight rebounds and the Houston Rockets rolled past the Indiana Pacers 118-97 on Wednesday night for their sixth straight victory.

Thaddeus Young cut the lead to 10 with a hook shot with about eight minutes left. The Rockets put it away with a 16-4 run that made it 110-88 with about four minutes left.

Trevor Ariza made a three-pointer in that stretch and Ryan Anderson added two and finished with 19 points.

The Pacers missed numerous shots, were called for defensive three seconds and committed an offensive foul to allow the Rockets to pad the lead.

Warriors 127, Lakers 123 (OT): After struggling from long range all night, Stephen

Curry hit two quick three-pointers to open overtime and visiting Golden State outlasted Los Angeles.

The victory prevented the Warriors from losing two straight games for the first time this season.

Kevin Durant led Golden State with 29 points, while Curry added 28 and Klay Thompson 20. Curry had 13 points in overtime.

Spurs 104, Grizzlies 95: LaMarcus Aldridge set his team high with 41 points and host San Antonio spoiled J.B. Bickerstaff's debut as Memphis coach by handing his team its ninth straight loss.

San Antonio is the first NBA team with 10 home wins this season. It has won three in a row overall.

Knicks 115, Heat 86: Enes Kanter had 22 points and 14 rebounds and host New York beat

Miami despite losing Kristaps Porzingis to a sprained right ankle after 2½ minutes.

Porzingis had started quickly, making his first two shots before he was hurt chasing the ball near the baseline by the Miami bench. Justise Winslow stepped on his foot, causing Porzingis' ankle to turn awkwardly, and he was helped to the locker room during a timeout.

The Knicks said X-rays were negative and that their leading scorer was available to return, but they later ruled out a return in the third quarter.

Magic 121, Thunder 108: Aaron Gordon had 40 points and 15 rebounds to help host Orlando end a nine-game losing streak with a victory over struggling Oklahoma City.

Timberwolves 120, Pelicans 102: Andrew Wiggins scored 28 points to help visiting

Minnesota win a game that saw New Orleans forward Anthony Davis ejected for the first time in his career.

76ers 118, Wizards 113: Ben Simmons had 31 points and a career-high 18 rebounds and overcame a Hack-a-Shaq strategy, leading host Philadelphia past Washington.

Pistons 131, Suns 107: Reggie Jackson scored 23 points and Detroit beat visiting Phoenix for its third straight victory.

Raptors 126, Hornets 113: Kyle Lowry scored a season-high 36 points, DeMar DeRozan had 30 and Toronto beat Charlotte to improve to 7-1 at home.

Nets 109, Mavericks 104: DeMarre Carroll scored 15 of his 22 points in the third quarter to help Brooklyn beat host Dallas.

NHL roundup

Rask snaps 4-game skid, helps Bruins top Lightning

Associated Press

BOSTON — Charlie McAvoy and Riley Nash scored first-period goals, Tuukka Rask made 19 saves to snap his four-game losing streak and the Boston Bruins hung on for a 3-2 victory over the Tampa Bay Lightning on Wednesday night.

Torey Krug also scored and Brad Marchand assisted on the first two goals for the Bruins, who opened a 3-0 lead to post their fifth win in six games. Boston improved to 13-3 in its last 16 at home against the Lightning.

Steven Stamkos and Andrej Sustr scored for the Lightning, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 33 saves. Tampa Bay, which entered the game with the NHL's best record, lost for the third time in four games following a season-high five-game winning

streak.

Criticized lately for his uneven play combined with recent solid performances by backup Anton Khudobin, Rask raised his record to just 4-8-2 this season. Khudobin is 7-0-2.

Canadiens 2, Senators 1: Carey Price made 25 saves to lead host Montreal to its third straight victory.

Jonathan Drouin and Phillip Danault scored in the second period for the Canadiens. Price improved to 3-0-0 while allowing just two goals on 100 shots since he returned last week after missing 10 games with a lower body injury.

Mark Stone scored his 14th goal for Ottawa, which has lost seven games in a row for its longest skid since also going 0-6-1 in 2012. The Senators have not won since sweeping a pair of games from Colorado

in Stockholm, Sweden, on Nov. 10-11.

Ottawa goalie Mike Condon, pressed into service by Montreal when Price missed most of the 2015-16 season with an injury, started against his former team for the first time and finished with 28 saves.

Ducks 3, Blues 2: Antoine Vermette scored twice and John Gibson stopped 37 shots to help visiting Anaheim snap a four-game skid.

Kevin Roy also scored for the Ducks, who jumped out to a 3-0 lead before holding on for the win. Vermette snapped an 11-game scoreless drought with his first multigoal game since Nov. 25, 2015.

Gibson, who was pulled after giving up four goals on 22 shots in a 7-3 loss at Chicago on Monday, improved to 8-9-1.

Kyle Brodziak scored twice

in the game's final 3:48 for the Blues, who had won four of their previous five.

Avalanche 3, Jets 2: Nathan MacKinnon scored a power-play goal 59 seconds into overtime after he had a goal waved off 30 seconds earlier to lift host Colorado past Winnipeg.

Alexander Kerfoot had a goal and an assist and Nikita Zadorov also scored for the Avalanche, who improved to 8-2-1 at home this season. MacKinnon also had an assist and finished November with 20 points — five goals and 15 assists — in 12 games.

Semyon Varlamov stopped 31 shots in his first game since Nov. 18 because of an illness.

Bryan Little and Josh Morrissey scored for the Jets, and Connor Hellebuyck made 23 saves. Winnipeg is 7-2-1 in its last 10 games.