

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## GIs fought an hour before call for help

BY JOHN VANDIVER  
AND STEPHEN CARLSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Green Berets fought off an ambush by Islamic State militants in Niger for an hour before calling for help, a sign that the U.S. soldiers and their Nigerien counterparts might have believed they had the attack under control, the top U.S. general said Monday.

The U.S. forces, on a patrol near Niger's border with Mali, eventually made a call for support as they battled insurgents armed with rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns and small arms, Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters at the Pentagon.

French forces responded to the call with Mirage jets, which took 30 minutes to mobilize and 30 minutes to arrive on the site, he said. But no bombs were dropped. French armed helicopters and a Nigerian quick-reaction force showed up that afternoon.

"When they didn't ask for support for that first hour, my judgment would be the unit thought they could handle it without that additional support," Dunford said in the most detailed public accounting of what happening during the Oct. 4 attack that resulted in four U.S. soldiers being killed and two others injured.

Five Nigerien troops were also killed in the ambush.

The roughly 40-person U.S.-Nigerien patrol, which included about 12 U.S. soldiers, came under attack by about 50 ISIS fighters at midmorning on Oct. 4 as the unit was making its way back to its operational camp, Dunford said. The patrol had left the Niger capital, Niamey, on Oct. 3 to meet with local leaders in an area near the village of Tongo Tongo, about 53 miles to the north.

Staff Sgts. Bryan C. Black, Jeremiah W. Johnson and Dustin M. Wright and Sgt. La David Johnson, all assigned to the 3rd Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, were killed in the attack.

Two other soldiers were injured on the battlefield and evacuated by French military, later arriving at Landstuhl Regional

Medical Center in Germany for treatment. The reliance on French assets was part of the existing casualty evacuation plans, Dunford said.

Many questions remain about the attack and what went wrong, including how Johnson's body, which was most likely recovered by Nigerien troops, was missing for nearly 48 hours.

Dunford said the military is still trying to piece together what happened between the start of the patrol Oct. 3, the ambush Oct. 4 and Johnson's body being recovered Oct. 6.

**'When they didn't ask for support for that first hour, my judgment would be the unit thought they could handle it without that additional support.'**

**Gen. Joseph Dunford**  
chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

U.S. Africa Command is conducting an investigation into what went wrong and will look into whether the command has sufficient intelligence-gathering assets to measure potential threats. The FBI also is investigating the attack.

"We'll find out in the investigation exactly why it took an hour for them to call," Dunford said.

The 12-person U.S. team departed their operational center in Niamey and traveled about 52 miles north near the village of Tongo Tongo on a civil-military reconnaissance mission. The exact configuration of the unit hasn't been detailed by military officials, but "A-team" special operations forces typically included a force of 12 that is led by a captain. The unit is rounded out with a warrant officer and noncommissioned officers.

The United States maintains a drone site in Niger, which has emerged as the centerpiece for U.S. operations in western Africa. A surveillance aircraft operating in the area was on the scene within minutes after a call for support to provide intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, Dunford said. However, it was unclear what information was captured or whether the drone

was armed for attack. Dunford said the drone did not launch a strike and he hadn't witnessed video from the surveillance.

Dunford said AFRICOM is examining whether that mission expanded beyond its original scope.

"What happened after they began to execute; in other words, did the mission change?

"That is one of the questions that's being asked. It's a fair question, but I can't tell you definitively the answer to that question," Dunford said.

The U.S. military mission in Niger dates back decades, and Dunford said the United States has been an off-and-on military presence in the country for 20 years.

However, more permanent operations in the country date back only five years. There are 800 U.S. troops in Niger, and more than 6,000 forces in 53 countries throughout Africa. Outside of Djibouti, in eastern Africa, Niger now has the largest concentration.

The operation in western Africa has gained momentum during the past year as the United States works with local forces involved in battling a range of militant groups, such as al-Qaida affiliates, Boko Haram and local ISIS offshoots.

In the wake of the attacks, questions have emerged about whether French or U.S. aircraft have the authority to carry out strikes if its forces are under attack. Dunford said they have the authority to fire when needed.

"U.S. forces and coalition forces in the area don't have any limitations. ... We have the inherent right," he said.

U.S. forces in Niger will accompany Nigerien soldiers on patrols only when it has been determined that enemy engagement seems doubtful, Dunford said.

"We will only accompany our partner forces when chances of enemy contacts are unlikely," he said.

AFRICOM has warned it lacks sufficient search-and-rescue as well as intelligence-gathering assets in Africa, delivering a red flag to Congress in March about its operational shortfalls.

Dunford said AFRICOM is now back to conducting normal advisory operations in Niger.

# Mattis, NATO allies eye faster Europe deployments

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and military leaders from across NATO will consider command structure reforms to enable the more rapid deployment of forces in Europe when allies meet in Brussels next month.

Measures under review include establishing two new headquarters — one focused on securing transit routes by sea and another to deal with guarding supply lines across land in Europe, according to an internal NATO report obtained by the German magazine *Der Spiegel*.

Allies also are adapting national legislation to allow military equipment to transit faster across borders and are working on improving national infrastructure, NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu said.

"Fast-evolving security challenges mean new demands on our command," Lungescu said.

"So work is underway to ensure that the NATO command structure remains robust, agile and fit for purpose."

NATO declined to comment on what was detailed in the *Der Spiegel* report, which outlined specific reforms under review. However, command-and-control issues will be on the agenda when defense ministers convene Nov. 8 and 9 in Brussels, NATO said.

"NATO is making progress in all these areas, but we are not complacent. We are focused on military mobility as a matter of priority," she said.

NATO's moves are in response to concerns about a more aggressive Russia. Still, military officials have acknowledged the odds of direct confrontation between NATO and Moscow are remote.

For the past three years, U.S. Army Europe boss Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges has repeatedly called for allies to establish a military zone that would enable convoys

to cross national borders freely during peacetime. Often, U.S. forces on convoy get delayed by varying customs rules that they must comply with as they move between countries.

Such barriers could theoretically be lifted or ignored during wartime, but in a developing crisis, militaries would likely need to mobilize under peacetime conditions.

"Anybody that thinks, 'Don't worry, we'll be able to drive anywhere' — not true," Hodges recently said. "Anybody who thinks you'll be able to fly anywhere at night — not true. Everything we do prior to declaration of Article 5 is going to be done in peacetime conditions."

Article 5 is NATO's collective defense provision which states that an attack on one member requires a response from all.

"The ability to deploy forces quickly across the alliance is important for NATO's collective defense," Lungescu said.

## Audit: Slow repairs hobbling F-35 jets

*Bloomberg*

The Pentagon is accelerating production of Lockheed Martin's F-35 jet even though the planes already delivered are facing "significantly longer repair times" than planned because maintenance facilities are six years behind schedule, according to a draft audit.

The time to repair a part has averaged 172 days — "twice the program's objective" — the Government Accountability Office, Congress' watchdog agency, found. The shortages are "degrading readiness" because the fighter jets "were unable to fly about 22 percent of the time" from January through August for lack of needed parts.

The Pentagon has said soaring costs to develop and produce the F-35, the costliest U.S. weapons system, have been brought under control, with the price tag now projected at \$406.5 billion. But the GAO report raises new doubts about the official estimate that maintaining and operating them will cost an additional \$1.12 trillion over their 60-year lifetime.

Upkeep of the F-35 fleet will become more challenging as the Pentagon prepares for what the manager of the program has called a "tsunami" of new production toward an eventual planned U.S. fleet of 2,456 planes, plus more than 700 additional planes to be sold to allies.

The F-35 program office and Lockheed have identified steps to increase parts availability "to prevent these challenges from worsening" as aircraft numbers increase, the GAO said, but Pentagon documentation indicates "the program's ability to speed up this time line is uncertain."

## A dozen F-35A stealth fighters set for 6-month Okinawa deployment

By SETH ROBSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Twelve of America's newest stealth fighters are headed to Japan for a six-month deployment, the Air Force announced Monday.

The F-35A Lightning IIs and 300 airmen from Hill Air Force Base, Utah's 34th Fighter Squadron, will arrive at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, in early November, a Pacific Air Forces statement said.

Kadena already has hosted F-35Bs — the "short takeoff vertical landing" version of the

jet — from the Iwakuni, Japan-based Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121. The "Green Knights" arrived in Japan in January and landed at Kadena for the first time in June.

The F-35A deployment will be the first for the aircraft in the region after its successful debut at the Seoul International Aerospace and Defense Exhibition earlier this month, the statement said.

"The F-35A gives the joint warfighter unprecedented global precision attack capability against current and emerging threats while complementing

our air superiority fleet," Pacific Air Forces commander Gen. Terrence O'Shaughnessy said in the statement. "The airframe is ideally suited to meet our command's obligations, and we look forward to integrating it into our training and operations."

The F-35A is being deployed under U.S. Pacific Command's "theater security package" program, which has been in operation since 2004. This deployment is designed to demonstrate the continuing U.S. commitment to stability and security in the region, the Air Force said.



## PM to Tillerson: Pakistan US' ally in terrorism fight

*The Washington Post*

Pakistan's prime minister pledged his country's cooperation in fighting militants during talks Tuesday with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who has repeatedly said Pakistan must do more to curb support for terrorist groups.

"The U.S. can rest assured that we are strategic partners in the war against terror and that today, Pakistan is fighting the largest war in the world against terror," Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi told Tillerson just before their closed-door talks began.

Shortly before, Tillerson had alluded to U.S. concerns that Pakistan is providing safe haven to terrorist groups. Tillerson has said U.S. aid may be cut if Pakistan does not act more proactively against the groups, and Islamabad is jeopardizing Pakistan's future by not pushing out militant groups that range across the border into Afghanistan.

"Pakistan is important, as you know, regionally, to the U.S. security relationships, and so important regionally to our joint goals of providing peace and security to the region and providing opportunity for greater economic relationship as well," he said.

On Monday, during a short visit to Afghanistan, Tillerson said he intended to make clear that Pakistan's relationship with the United States will suffer if Pakistan does not do more to undermine the support the Taliban and other groups receive in Pakistan.

Abbasi appeared eager to assure Tillerson he had heard the message and Islamabad is prepared to take more action.

"We are committed in the war against terror," he told Tillerson. "We have produced results. And we are looking forward to moving ahead with the U.S. and building a tremendous relationship."

Tillerson next heads to New Delhi. Last week, he called for stronger economic and military ties between India and the U.S. He said India, the world's most populous democracy and a bitter rival of Pakistan, will be part of an alliance that ensures security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

In August, President Donald Trump unveiled his policy for Afghanistan and South Asia. He strongly criticized Pakistan for offering protection to "agents of chaos" that kill Americans in Afghanistan. He warned Islamabad that it has "much to lose" by not hitting terrorist groups more forcefully.

## Russia: ISIS now controls just 5 percent of Syria

*Associated Press*

BEIRUT — After losing major strongholds and key urban areas across Syria, including its self-proclaimed capital, the city of Raqqa, Islamic State now controls only 5 percent of the country's territory, according to Russia's defense minister.

That's a dramatic decline from the height of the rise of ISIS in 2014, when the extremist group seized about a third of both Syria and Iraq before its downfall began.

The remarks by Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu came as Russia-backed Syrian troops are pushing deeper into the eastern Syrian town of Mehkan, one of the few still held by ISIS.

Speaking at a conference in the Philippines, Shoigu said Monday that "terrorists" — a term the Syrian government and its allies use for all armed opposition, including militant groups such as ISIS and al-Qaida's Syria affiliate — controlled more than 70 percent of the country before Russia launched its air operation at the end of 2015 to support President Bashar Assad's offensive against ISIS militants and opposition forces.

In Syria in 2015, ISIS briefly held nearly half of the country's territory. Later that year, ISIS started suffering setbacks that culminated with the fall last week of the northern city of Raqqa, the extremists' de facto capital. ISIS has also lost wide areas it once controlled in Iraq, including the northern city of Mosul, the largest city the group had ever captured. U.S.-backed Iraqi government forces retook Mosul in July.

On Tuesday, Syria's state news agency, SANA, said government forces captured several points inside the town of Mehkan just south of Mayadeen, the ISIS stronghold that Syrian troops captured this month. Government forces are now advancing toward the town of Boukamal, the last that is still fully held by the extremists.

Russia has played a main role in helping government forces capture wide areas from ISIS in northern and central Syria by giving them air cover. In September, Syrian troops and their allies reached the eastern city of Deir el-Zour, where the extremists had long besieged the government-controlled part of the city.

However, Raqqa fell to the U.S.-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which have also been effective in eastern and northern regions of Syria. Now, with the ISIS "caliphate" rapidly crumbling, a race is on between the U.S.-backed Kurdish forces and the Syrian government troops in the oil-rich Deir el-Zour province.

## Russia vetoes UN resolution on chemical inspectors

*Associated Press*

UNITED NATIONS — Russia on Tuesday vetoed a U.S.-sponsored resolution that would have extended the work of inspectors seeking to determine who is responsible for chemical weapons attacks in Syria, accusing the United States of calling the vote "to show up and dishonor Russia."

Russian U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia tried unsuccessfully to postpone the vote until next month — after the joint body comprising investigators from the U.N. and the chemical weapons watchdog issues a report on Oct. 26 about the April 4 chemical attack in Khan Sheikhoun that killed over 90 people.

The resolution was then put to a vote and received 11 "yes" votes, 2 "no" votes from Russia and Bolivia, and two abstentions by China and Kazakhstan.

Nebenzia said Russia has criticized the Joint Investigative Mechanism, known as the JIM, but doesn't want it terminated — it wants to amend its mandate, which doesn't end until Nov. 17.

U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley, who is currently in Africa, pressed for a vote before the JIM report.

She said last week that Russia wanted first to see if the report blames Syria for the Khan Sheikhoun attack, in which case it would have no faith in the JIM. She called this position unacceptable.

"We can't work like that," Haley told reporters. "We can't go and pick and choose who we want to be at fault, who we don't."

Nebenzia repeated and sharply criticized Haley's comments, telling the council Tuesday that "we never, ever, ever put it in such a way."

# Medic receives MOH for covert op in Laos

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — A once-secret Vietnam War mission ended with a very public display of pomp and circumstance for retired Army Capt. Gary Michael “Mike” Rose.

On Monday, President Donald Trump presented Rose with the Medal of Honor during a White House ceremony. A beaming Rose stood in a packed East Room surrounded by White House officials, previous Medal of Honor recipients and 10 comrades from his heroic four-day mission to Laos.

The effort comes more than 47 years after the mission, which was known as Operation Tailwind.

“Mike, this is some serious stuff,” Trump said while recounting the Operation Tailwind story. “This is not a good four days.”

Rose was the only medic among 16 Green Berets and 120 Vietnamese tribal fighters known as Montagnards traveling in the covert unit in September 1970. The unit, known as the Military Assistance Command Studies and Observations Group, or MACSOG, was dropped in the Laotian jungle Sept. 11.

As they moved into enemy territory to a North Vietnamese encampment, they almost immediately took heavy fire with multiple casualties.

In several cases, Rose used his own body as a human shield

to protect members of his unit, even as he was wounded and continued to treat others.

“Mike valiantly fought for the life of his own comrades, even if it meant the end of his own life,” Trump said ahead of awarding Rose with the Medal of Honor. “Your will to endure, your love for your fellow soldier, your devotion to your country, inspires us all.”

In the end, every soldier was wounded, three Montagnards were killed and three helicopters crashed during Operation Tailwind. Rose suffered wounds from bullets and rockets as well as his own helicopter crash during the mission.

“My focus was to take care of the guys who were hurt,” Rose recalled during an appearance

at the Pentagon on Friday ahead of Monday’s ceremony. “You just got to do your job and keep moving down the road.”

For nearly three decades, Rose told no one about the harrowing four-day covert mission.

Rose, then a sergeant and Special Forces medic, saved more than 100 lives, including a Marine crewman shot in the neck as the helicopter they rode in dropped from the sky, according to one of his award citations.

Still, Rose told no one until the mission was declassified in the late 1990s.

“Basically the unit did not exist,” Rose, 70, recalled Friday. “And was not acknowledged for almost 30 years.”

## Pence pays tribute to Marines killed in '83 bombing

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Vice President Mike Pence on Monday honored the memory of 241 U.S. servicemembers killed in the 1983 Marine barracks bombing in Beirut, calling the 3-decade-old attack the “opening salvo” in the war against terrorism.

Pence and White House National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster paid tribute to the servicemembers, including 220 Marines, on the anniversary of the deadly truck bombing during President Ronald Reagan’s first term.

The vice president pointed to President Donald Trump’s recent decision to decertify the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, which was tied to the bombing, and placed the 1983 attack as the first battle in the nation’s ongoing war against terrorism. He also recalled the 58 French paratroopers who died when a second attacker struck their installation in Beirut.

“The Beirut barracks bombing was the opening salvo in a war that we have waged ever since — the global war on terror. It’s a conflict that has taken American troops across the

wider world — from Lebanon to Libya, from Nigeria to Afghanistan, from Somalia to Iraq and many other battlefields in between,” he said. Pence said that under Trump’s leadership, “We will drive the cancer of terrorism from the face of the Earth.”

The Beirut bombing was the deadliest attack against U.S. Marines since the battle over Iwo Jima in February 1945.

The ceremony and parade at the Marine Barracks in Washington was attended by retired Lt. Col. Larry Gerlach, the commander of the battalion landing team who survived the bombing,

and families of servicemembers who were killed.

Pence told the audience of his personal connection to the incident. His brother, Greg Pence, served in the Marines and was stationed at the Beirut barracks around the time of the attack.

The vice president said he and his parents and other family members worried about his brother’s safety when they heard about the bombing. Days later, Greg Pence, who is now running for Congress in Indiana, called home to tell his family that his battalion had shipped out shortly before the bombing.

## After delay, president fulfills \$25K promise to fallen soldier’s father

*The Washington Post*

The father of a fallen U.S. soldier has received the \$25,000 that President Donald Trump promised him three months ago, perhaps ending one of the controversies since Trump falsely claimed last week to have spoken with nearly every military family who has lost a loved one since he became commander in chief.

Trump made out the check to

Chris Baldrige, whose son, Dillon, 20, an Army sergeant, was killed in Afghanistan in June. It was issued from the president’s personal account, according to a photo of the check posted online by a reporter with ABC-11 TV in North Carolina.

The check is dated Oct. 18. The Washington Post approached the White House about Trump’s \$25,000 pledge earlier that day.

As the Post reported last

week, Trump called Baldrige in July, a few weeks after his son’s death, and offered his condolences.

Baldrige expressed frustration that his ex-wife was to receive a \$100,000 death gratuity from the Pentagon and he was to receive nothing. Trump then offered to cut him a \$25,000 check.

“He said, ‘I’m going to write you a check out of my personal account for \$25,000,’ and I was

just floored,” Baldrige told the Post. “I could not believe he was saying that, and I wish I had it recorded because the man did say this. He said, ‘No other president has ever done something like this,’ but he said, ‘I’m going to do it.’”

The Post asked the White House about it that morning, and White House officials said hours later that the check had been sent.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Judge serves eviction notice on unborn baby

**UT** PROVO — A Utah mom powering through her final days of pregnancy gave her baby an eviction notice and made it official with a judge's signature. Incredibly, the baby obeyed.

The Daily Herald reported that Kaylee Bays was pregnant with her third child, a girl, and thought she was going into labor Oct. 16, but it stopped. She went back to work Tuesday to her job as a judicial assistant at the Fourth District Court in Provo and jokingly asked Judge Lynn Davis to serve an eviction notice on her baby.

It worked, and less than 12 hours later, baby Gretsel was born.

## Judge: School not at fault for student's fall

**VT** POULTNEY — A federal judge has ruled that a Vermont college won't have to pay damages to a student who was seriously hurt when he fell from a fourth-floor window after drinking wine that contained LSD.

The Rutland Herald reported that the suit accused Green Mountain College in Poughkeepsie of failing to enforce its own rules. The judge said the school can't be found at fault for not protecting the student from his own voluntary actions.

The suit was filed earlier this year on behalf of Christian Pezzino by his mother. Court records say he was permanently disabled by the 2014 fall.

## FAA: Wind blew hot-air balloon onto steeple

**PA** BOBTOWN — The Federal Aviation Ad-

ministration said it appears wind blew a hot-air balloon onto a Pennsylvania church steeple after the balloon had safely landed nearby.

The balloon had been participating in a Balloons over Morgantown event in West Virginia, about 14 miles away, when it landed in the Bobtown section of Dunkard Township about 9 a.m. Saturday.

FAA spokeswoman Kathleen Bergen said the agency has not classified it as a crash because the balloon had landed before it was driven toward the St. Ignatius Catholic Church steeple.

No injuries were reported.

Crews used a cherry picker to lift the deflated balloon from the steeple.

## More officers trained to help veterans in crisis

**DE** WILMINGTON — More police officers in Delaware are being trained to help military veterans going through a mental health crisis.

The News Journal, of Wilmington, reported Sunday that a new unit has been formed within the New Castle County Police Department. The Veterans Response Team includes officers who served in the military. It will complement the department's Crisis Intervention Team.

Four officers recently attended veterans response training in North Carolina. They've been sharing the expertise with other agencies, including Delaware State Police and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Police Service in Elsmere.

## Officer on run after breaking ankle monitor

**OH** CLEVELAND — A Cleveland police officer facing charges for the alleged physical and sexual as-

sault of his girlfriend is on the run after police say he broke his GPS ankle monitor.

U.S. Marshals have confirmed they are actively seeking Officer Tommie Griffin III.

Griffin was charged with rape, felonious assault and kidnapping in connection with an attack on his girlfriend, 42, at their Parma home in January.

Police allege the man pistol-whipped his girlfriend and fired two shots next to her during the attack. Griffin, who is in his early 50s, was suspended without pay following his arrest.

Authorities later seized more than 60 guns from his home, including five assault rifles and an Israeli Uzi submachine gun.

## Girl goes on mission to find owner of \$2

**NJ** PEQUANNOCK — A young girl in New Jersey hoped to return two dollar bills she found on a sidewalk to their rightful owner.

Isabella King, 10, found the money on a sidewalk in Pequannock on Oct. 18. Her mother told the Daily Record that Isabella insisted on taking the money to the police. Pequannock police Capt. Christopher DePuyt said police politely declined to take it since there was no way to prove ownership of such a small amount.

Isabella's mother, Alyssa King, said no one came forward to claim the money so they will donate a box of Girl Scout nuts to the military.

## Mother, son, daughter charged in robberies

**NY** MASTIC BEACH — Police said a woman and her adult son and daughter have been arrested in connection with a string of

seven armed robberies of small businesses.

Suffolk County authorities said a 25-year-old man went into a Dunkin' Donuts in Coram on Saturday night, displayed a knife and asked for money. The store employee opened the register and went to the back of the store while the man took some money and fled. His 55-year-old mother was waiting in a parked car.

Police said both were taken into custody, and an investigation led to the arrest of a 31-year-old woman, the man's sister.

Authorities said the mother has been arrested in connection with one of the seven robberies, and her children are facing charges related to six robberies.

## Driver wielding hatchet is arrested for DUI

**CT** STONINGTON — Police said a Rhode Island motorist who was intoxicated when he wielded a hatchet during an argument with another driver faces charges in Connecticut.

The Westerly Sun reported that police said Everett Beltran got into an argument with the driver early Friday after he sideswiped the vehicle in Stonington.

Beltran allegedly removed a hatchet from the trunk of his car during the argument. Police said he put it back in his car when officers arrived. Beltran struggled with officers as they tried to arrest him, officers said.

Beltran, of Westerly, is charged with driving under the influence, having a weapon in his motor vehicle and other offenses.

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STARS AND STRIPES®

# World Series rosters full of fresh faces

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Carlos Correa is such a fresh face, his first big league hit was assisted by technology.

When he made his debut for Houston on June 8, 2015, Correa hit a three-hopper off White Sox ace Chris Sale and was called out by first base umpire Larry Vanover. About a minute later, a replay umpire in New York overruled the call, and the 20-year-old had an infield single and his first RBI.

"It feels like it was yesterday. Not long ago, I got drafted by a team that lost 111 games in a season, and now we're in the World Series," Correa said Monday. "It's pretty incredible."

A new generation of ballplayers is featured in the World Series starting Tuesday night. Houston's dynamic infield duo of Correa and the diminutive Jose Altuve sparks the top offense in the major leagues. The tantalizing trio of Cody Bellinger, Corey Seager and Chris Taylor has the Los Angeles Dodgers in the Series for the first time since 1988.

"Media day in Oklahoma City was about two people there, and now I'm here and getting ready for the World Series," Bellinger said, surrounded by dozens of reporters in the Dodger Stadium's Dugout Club. "I could

never imagine this."

Altuve skipped Triple-A and made it to the major leagues on July 20, 2011, after Houston traded Jeff Keppinger to San Francisco. He singled off Washington's Tyler Clippard that night in his big league debut.

Houston finished last in each of his first three seasons. Now Altuve is among four Astros remaining from the team that lost a club-record 111 games in 2013, joined by pitchers Dallas Keuchel and Brad Peacock along with utilityman Marwin Gonzalez.

At 27, Altuve already is a five-time All-Star and three-time batting champion.

"I'm coming from a team that lost a hundred games in a row three years, three straight years," he said. "We made the playoffs in 2015. We didn't make it last year, and after last year we were a little uncomfortable because we were watching the playoff games from home."

Dallas Keuchel, the Astros' Game 1 starter, thought back to when he met Altuve when they were on the Tri-City ValleyCats in the Class A New York-Penn League in 2009.

"He hadn't really hit puberty yet, and so he sounded different," the pitcher said. "He sounded like he shouldn't even have been playing baseball."

Correa, the top pick in the 2012 amateur draft, was a first-time All-Star this season, hitting 24 homers and driving in 84 runs despite a torn ligament in his left thumb that needed surgery, causing him to miss 42 games.

Bellinger, son of former Yankees infielder Clay Bellinger, started the season at Triple-A Oklahoma City and made his debut April 25 at San Francisco. He found out about his call-up at 2 a.m. after noticing he had four missed calls from Dodgers farm director Gabe Kapler.

At 21, Bellinger became the youngest position player in Dodgers history selected for the All-Star Game, set a National League rookie record with 39 homers and had 97 RBIs in 132 games. Now he's talking to his dad about his three World Series appearances.

Seager, at 23 the youngest of three brothers who played pro ball, was a unanimous pick as NL Rookie of the Year in 2016 and repeated as an All-Star this season. He became the first Dodgers player since Jackie Robinson in 1947-48 with 30 doubles or more in each of his first two seasons, and his 52 career home runs is already second-most among Dodgers shortstops behind Pee Wee Reese's 122. He missed the

NL Championship Series after hurting his back on a slide into second base in Game 3 of the Division Series but is expected to be in the starting lineup for the opener against the Astros.

He thought back to watching on television as Derek Jeter led the New York Yankees to the 2009 title.

"It's pretty easy to fall in love with the guy, on and off the field what he did for that community, what he did for that culture, that team," Seager said.

Taylor blossomed at 27 after 2½ unremarkable seasons with Seattle. Traded to the Dodgers in June 2016, he started the season at Triple-A, was called up April 19 and earned the leadoff spot in the batting order. He had three grand slams and finished with a .288 average, 21 homers, 72 RBIs and 17 steals.

"It's crazy how fast things can change in this game, both ways, starting the year in Triple-A, playing in front of like maybe 100 people and then getting to this stage," Taylor said. "It's been an unbelievable journey."

Correa would like a Series ring to add to his mementos. He has the ball from his first hit, but given the delay, can he be 100 percent sure?

"Maybe it was the wrong ball," he said with a laugh and a smile.

## Postseason baseball games stretch to record length

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Don't be surprised if you doze off during one of these World Series games, wake up and discover they're not even at the seventh-inning stretch.

With managers and pitching coaches walking to the mound earlier and more often in another postseason of record game times, Justin Verlander is the lone throwback.

Verlander pitched the only complete game during the playoffs, when the average time of a nine-inning game stretched to a sometimes thrilling but often

annoying 3 hours, 32 minutes, up seven minutes from last year and 18 from 2015.

"There are the outliers; there are guys like me who can still go deep in games," the Houston ace said as he prepared to start Game 2 against the Los Angeles Dodgers on Wednesday night.

When the Dodgers last were in the World Series, Orel Hershiser pitched a pair of complete games against Oakland, a three-hit shutout in Game 2 that took 2:30 and a four-hitter in the Game 5 finale that lasted 2:51.

The average time of a nine-

inning postseason game hasn't been below three hours since 1990, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Attribute the elongated action — or inaction — to mushrooming mound visits along with television commercial time.

Los Angeles ace Clayton Kershaw won't get the chance to replicate the feats of Sandy Koufax, who pitched a four-hit shutout against Minnesota in Game 5 of the 1965 Series at Dodger Stadium that took 2:34, then came back on two days' rest to toss a three-hit shutout on the road that won Game 7, which breezed by in 2:27.

"I don't think it's fair to compare eras because baseball is a lot different now," Kershaw said. "I'm not going to debate which one is better or worse. But there's a lot of things that change over the course of the time. And we have a really good bullpen; you can't argue with that. I think the era of baseball we are in is pretty great. I'm happy to be a part of it."

Even before the postseason, teams were concerned the average nine-inning game during the regular season took 3:05:11, up from 3:00:42 last year and 2:56 in 2015.



# Stellar Wentz leads Eagles past 'Skins

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — The Philadelphia Eagles keep losing key players and are still winning games thanks to No. 11.

Carson Wentz tossed four touchdown passes and ran for a career-best 63 yards, helping the Eagles overcome losing nine-time Pro Bowl left tackle Jason Peters in a 34-24 win over the Washington Redskins on Monday night. Linebacker Jordan Hicks also went down with an ankle injury.

Peters was carted off the field and Hicks left the stadium on crutches. Coach Doug Pederson didn't have any updates on their status after the game.

"This is a resilient group and we've seen it over the first two months of the season," Pederson said.

They'll be fine as long as Wentz is under center.

The second-year quarterback made one highlight play after another in front of a national audience. Wentz has led the NFL-best Eagles (6-1) to five straight wins and is an early front-runner for MVP.

"He is amazing," receiver Nelson Agholor said. "I talk about how great and how athletic he is and how he has a great arm, but the attention to detail, the film study, the professionalism he has is second to none."

Kirk Cousins threw for 303 and three TDs for the Redskins (3-3).

"Carson made some unbelievable plays there in crunch-time situations," Redskins coach Jay Gruden said. "We lost and it wasn't good enough by anybody, offensively. But Kirk competed and made some great throws, some great plays."

The Eagles went three-and-out three times in their first four drives and had only 57 total yards before Wentz hit Mack Hollins in stride with a perfect 64-yard TD pass to tie it at 10.

That got the offense rolling.

Wentz connected with Zach Ertz for 46 yards on the next series and found him again for a 4-yard TD pass to make it 17-10.

After getting the second-half kickoff, the Eagles drove 86 yards for another touchdown. Peters was injured during the

series, and fans chanted his name while teammates surrounded the cart.

Wentz finished the drive off with a play that Peters would appreciate.

While being hit by two defenders and falling forward, Wentz lofted a 9-yard TD pass to Corey Clement.

Wentz fired a 10-yard TD pass to Agholor to expand the lead to 31-17. Wentz kept that drive alive by escaping a sack and running 17 yards on third-and-8.

Cousins tossed a 7-yard touchdown to Chris Thompson to give the Redskins a 10-3 lead. He connected with Jordan Reed on a 5-yard TD to cut the deficit to 24-17 and threw a 12-yard pass to Reed to cap the scoring.

Here's some things we learned from Philadelphia's win over Washington:

**Legitimate contenders.** The Eagles are the real deal and have a commanding lead in the NFC East. The Redskins and Cowboys (3-3) are tied for second place. Dallas still has a

chance because they play Philadelphia twice, but Washington was swept in the season series for the first time since 2013. "Every time we win, it's harder," Pederson said. "And the bulls-eye on our back becomes bigger."

**Plenty of options.** Wentz threw TD passes to four different players, excluding starting receivers Alshon Jeffery and Torrey Smith. "The depth we have and the ability to spread the ball around makes us tough to defend," Wentz said.

**Terrelle the cheerleader.** Josh Doctson started over Terrelle Pryor, who signed a one-year, \$8 million contract to be the No. 1 guy in the offseason. Pryor had only two catches for 14 yards and has been a bust so far. Cousins didn't even mention his name when rattling off all the options he has. "I was on the sideline really just cheering my teammates on," Pryor said. "Just trying to be the best teammate I could be on the sideline and get guys pumped up. Whatever I could do on the sideline."

## Frustrated Steelers' WR Bryant lashes out

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Pittsburgh Steelers laughed along with Martavis Bryant a week ago as the talented but erratic wide receiver downplayed reports he requested a trade.

It's not quite so funny anymore.

Bryant stayed home on Monday with an illness. The timing looked considerably curious after Bryant defended himself on social media and took a shot at rookie teammate JuJu Smith-Schuster following another ineffective performance in an otherwise dominant victory over Cincinnati.

Bryant was limited to one carry for 2 yards and one reception for 3 yards while splitting snaps with Smith-Schuster in Pittsburgh's 29-14 victory. Seven games into his return from a yearlong suspension for violating the league's substance abuse policy, Bryant has 18 receptions for 234 yards and a score, well off the numbers he posted while becoming one of the NFL's premier big-play threats in 2014 and 2015.

After an Instagram user claimed Bryant

was being ignored by Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, Bryant posted — and then promptly deleted — from his verified account a comment in which he claimed Smith-Schuster is "no where near better than me."

Bryant amended it later to call Smith-Schuster a "great talent" while adding, "I just wants mine period point blank."

Smith-Schuster, who scored his third touchdown of the season on a 31-yard catch-and-run in the second quarter against the Bengals, said he spoke to Bryant and didn't take Bryant's frustrations personally.

"I understand where he's coming from," Smith-Schuster said. "If I was in his shoes, I put myself in his shoes. There's only one ball and so many athletes on the field. It's tough."

At 20, Smith-Schuster is the youngest player in the league. Yet he's played long enough to understand the careful balance of egos involved, particularly on an offense as loaded as the Steelers (5-2), who are in firm control of the AFC North as the season nears the midway point.

"Hopefully, we do get him the ball more, we do feed him," Smith-Schuster said. "He's a great athlete. I would like him to be on our team and moving forward I think he's going to be big for us."

Bryant was in 2014 and 2015, when he caught 14 touchdowns over 21 games while helping the Steelers to consecutive playoff berths.

Then the suspension hit in March 2016 and Bryant spent a year on his own, getting his life in order while living in Nevada. Bryant has said and done all the right things in his return, yet at this point his frustration appears to be bubbling over.

The NFL trade deadline is next Tuesday and moving Bryant doesn't make much sense for the Steelers even if Bryant's production dips.

If he runs afoul of the substance abuse policy one more time, the ensuing discipline could effectively end his NFL career. That's a significant risk for any team that would consider acquiring him in a trade.

## NBA roundup

# Simmons gets his first triple-double

Associated Press

DETROIT — Four games into his NBA career, Ben Simmons already has a triple-double to his credit.

And with some help from Joel Embiid, he finally led the Philadelphia 76ers to a victory.

Simmons had 21 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists, and Embiid scored 30 points to lift the 76ers to a 97-86 win over the Detroit Pistons on Monday night.

Detroit, which rallied from a 21-point deficit to beat the New York Knicks on Saturday night, fell behind by 21 again in the second quarter against the 76ers. The Pistons chipped away and were within three in the fourth, but Philadelphia held on.

"It's awesome to have a triple-double, but at the same time, it's even better to have a win," Simmons said.

Simmons was the No. 1 pick in the 2016 draft before missing all of last season with a foot injury. He finished two assists

shy of a triple-double at Toronto on Saturday night, and his skill and versatility were evident in Detroit.

Philadelphia never trailed. It was 56-43 at halftime and 75-67 after three quarters before the Pistons cut the deficit to three on a three-pointer by Anthony Tolliver. The teams traded baskets for a bit before a three-point play by Robert Covington and three-pointer by T.J. McConnell put the 76ers up by nine.

Detroit trailed by four after a 6-0 run late in the fourth, but an awkward-looking hook shot by Andre Drummond missed everything, and the 76ers were able to close out the game.

"It's mind-boggling to have two games in a row where we weren't ready to play. We have to figure out a way to fix that, whether those five guys can boost the intensity or if we have to change the lineup," Pistons coach Stan Van Gundy said. "I'm going to take the blame for Simmons. I'm not saying

the players couldn't have done things better, but we didn't have a good game plan for him."

**Suns 117, Kings 115:** Devin Booker scored 22 points, including two free throws with 9.8 seconds to play, and host Phoenix got its first win of the season in the first game under interim coach Jay Triano.

Phoenix fired coach Earl Watson on Sunday and guard Eric Bledsoe was sent home Monday morning after he sent out a tweet over the weekend that left the impression he no longer wanted to play for the Suns.

**Bucks 103, Hornets 94:** Giannis Antetokounmpo had 32 points and 14 rebounds, and the host Bucks scored the final nine points in the win.

**Wizards 109, Nuggets 104:** Bradley Beal scored 20 points, helping the undefeated Wizards to another victory on the road.

All five Washington starters scored in double figures. John Wall had 19 points on 3-for-13 shooting and finished with 12 assists. Otto Porter Jr. added 17

points and 10 rebounds.

**Grizzlies 98, Rockets 90:** Marc Gasol scored 26 points to lead the visiting Grizzlies to another victory.

Memphis has won its first three games for the first time since the 2014-15 season when the team got off to a 6-0 start.

**Warriors 133, Mavericks 103:** Stephen Curry scored 29 points, Kevin Durant added 25 and visiting Golden State pulled away from winless Dallas.

**Heat 104, Hawks 93:** Josh Richardson scored 21 points, Wayne Ellington made six three-pointers in the second quarter and the host Heat wasted a 21-point lead before recovering.

**Spurs 101, Raptors 97:** LaMarcus Aldridge scored 20 points and Dejounte Murray had 16 points and 15 rebounds, powering the host Spurs to the win.

San Antonio was without Kawhi Leonard and Tony Parker, and Toronto played without Jonas Valanciunas.

## NHL roundup

# Martin, Leafs hand Kings first regulation loss

Associated Press

TORONTO — Matt Martin thinks his offensive statistics might be helped by his new linemate.

Mitch Marner played on Toronto's fourth line for the third straight game and set up goals by Martin and Tyler Bozak, and the Maple Leafs handed the Los Angeles Kings their first regulation loss of the season with a 3-2 victory on Monday night.

"He's one of the elite playmakers in the league so it's a good opportunity for me and (Dominic Moore) right now to try and get some offense," Martin said.

"We'll ride this as long as we can."

Marner had 19 goals and 42 assists in 77 games last season as a rookie. But he struggled to produce early this season with his regular linemates Bozak and James van Riemsdyk, leading to him being replaced on

Toronto's second line by Connor Brown.

He entered Monday with just one goal in eight games, but coach Mike Babcock felt he was Toronto's best player against the Kings.

"We need him to be a star; we think he's a star," Babcock said.

"The NHL is a hard league when it doesn't go your way and the other thing about the league is when someone gets in your spot and they play real good, that makes it hard for you. I thought he was excellent tonight, I thought that line was good, I thought Matt Martin was a good player for us."

Patrick Marleau also scored for the Maple Leafs (7-2-0), and Frederik Andersen made 36 saves.

Toronto has won at least seven of its first nine games for the first time since the 1993-94 season and just the seventh time overall in franchise history.

Adrian Kempe and Trevor Lewis scored for Los Angeles (6-1-1), which had won four in a row. Jonathan Quick stopped 31 shots.

Marner helped the Maple Leafs jump in front 5:46 into the first. He entered the zone and curled behind the net before teeing up Roman Polak for a one-timer from the blue line that Martin deflected past Quick from the top of the crease.

"Everyone is scared of [Martin] when that guy's coming full speed at you on the forecheck," Marner said.

"We kind of talked about that before the game, just let him be the animal he is in deep. It worked out. He made some great plays out there to get me the puck and it went our way."

**Sharks 4, Rangers 1:** Logan Couture had a goal and an assist, Martin Jones stopped 33 shots and the Sharks beat the struggling host Rangers.