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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Plane captains' critical role

By CHRIS CHURCH

Stars and Stripes

ABOARD THE USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER — There is a maxim about the military: Make rank and gain responsibility. Many of the larger responsibilities are given to those with the knowledge and experience that comes from time in and rising through the ranks.

Not true for all. Plane captains are among the most junior enlisted servicemembers yet they are responsible for multimillion-dollar naval aircraft and the lives of the pilots who fly them.

"If we aren't doing everything right, we are essentially putting the pilot's life in our hands. It could become very dangerous," said Petty Officer 3rd Class Desiree Moon, a plane captain with Strike

Fighter Squadron 131 deployed in the Middle East with the Eisenhower Strike Group. "So we've got to make sure everything is good."

The plane captain's preflight checks are one of the final steps before a naval aircraft takes off.

The captain checks everything from the tires to the cockpits. He or she looks for any foreign object that could cause damage, cracks, missing fasteners; they ensure the antennas are intact and that everything the aircraft needs to be mission-ready is in place. Plane captains are also responsible for the cleanliness of the aircraft, especially the canopy.

These checks are done several times per day, including after an aircraft returns from its mission.

"For every five minutes we

spend checking the jet, they spend an hour," said Strike Fighter Squadron 131 F/A-18C Hornet pilot Lt. Matt, who couldn't be identified by his full name for security reasons. "A lot of confidence we have flying those jets is from the plane captains."

The plane captains go through considerable training, said Matt, who used to be the division officer for the plane captains. The sailors go through some difficult boards before they can get their qualifications, he said.

The plane captains' role in preventive maintenance also helps keep the strike fighter squadron's jets out of the hangar bay, said Matt. That allows the pilots to continue supporting the air campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

Prisoner at Gitmo: 'Royal' a member of terror group

Associated Press

MIAMI — An accused al-Qaida bomb maker told military officials at the U.S. base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, that he believed a member of the Saudi royal family was part of an effort to recruit him for violent acts before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, according to a newly released transcript.

Ghassan Abdallah al-Sharbi said a religious figure in Saudi Arabia used the term "your highness" during a telephone conversation with a man, just before urging al-Sharbi to return to the U.S. and take part in a plot that would involve learning to fly a plane.

The 9/11 Commission found there was no evidence to indicate that the Saudi government as an institution or Saudi senior officials individually had supported the attacks, and the kingdom's government has consistently denied it had any role in the plot.

Al-Sharbi described the conversation in June to the Periodic Review Board, which assesses whether Guantanamo prisoners can be released. The Pentagon on Thursday posted a transcript, with parts blacked out, on the website of the board.

The statement is convoluted and lacks important details, such as whether the "religious figure" might be close to any Saudi officials. It does not indicate who the Saudi royal might be.

Al-Sharbi also appears to be struggling with illness. He told the board he had just come from the detainee hospital, is "really exhausted, and nauseous and lethargic" and uses what is described as a "manual breathing device."

Residents near ex-Navy bases file suit

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Residents near two former suburban Navy bases are suing producers of firefighting foam once used there, claiming they contaminated the drinking water.

New York law firm Weitz & Luxenberg filed the federal lawsuit Thursday in Philadelphia on behalf of seven people who lived near the Willow Grove Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base and the Naval Air Warfare Center. The lawsuit seeks chemical cleanup and unspecified damages.

Named as defendants are The 3M Co., of St. Paul, Minn.; U.K.-based Angus Fire; The Ansul Co., of Marinette, Wis.; North Carolina-based Buckeye Fire Protection Co.; Wisconsin's Chemguard; and National

Foam, of West Chester, Pa.

The residents allege the companies should have known perfluorooctane sulfonate and other chemicals would pose health and environmental risks. They're seeking class action status.

"With this lawsuit, we are fighting to ensure that the companies who manufactured and marketed products containing these chemicals — and put their profits ahead of public health in the process — are brought to justice for their wrongdoing," Robin Greenwald, who heads an environmental unit at the law firm, said in a statement.

The chemical compounds have been found in some firefighting foams that were widely used for decades on military

bases throughout the country. They also are found in some household items such as food packaging.

The issue has gotten the attention of environmental activist Erin Brockovich, who spoke with residents at a community meeting in Willow Grove in June. Brockovich, who was portrayed by Julia Roberts in a 2000 movie bearing her name, works as a consultant to Weitz & Luxenberg.

No scientific evidence has consistently linked the chemicals to cancer in humans, although some studies have shown that people exposed to high levels of the compounds had higher incidents of kidney, prostate and testicular cancers, the Pennsylvania Department of Health says.

Shrinking Army aims to remain battle ready

Associated Press

FORT STEWART, Ga. — Before citizen-soldiers of the 48th Infantry Brigade deployed to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Georgia National Guard troops spent months training away from their families and day jobs as they prepared for war. Now a shrinking Army wants them able to get ready for combat sooner.

The brigade's 4,200 soldiers are the first of 13 National Guard and Army Reserve units nationwide chosen to test a new role that pairs them with commanders on active-duty who will oversee their training.

The Pentagon hopes the change will make the Guard and Reserve troops better prepared to fight overseas at a time when the Army has roughly 100,000 fewer full-time soldiers than it did at the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"We're still a National Guard unit, but we're hopefully maintaining a high level of training," said Col. Reginald Neal, the 48th Brigade's commander

and a former school teacher and administrator.

A few hundred of the brigade's citizen-soldiers — who work as police officers and engineers, attorneys and truck drivers in their day jobs — attended a ceremony Friday at Fort Stewart in which the Guard soldiers stripped the brigade's lightning bolt insignia from their left shoulders and replaced it with the diagonally striped square patch of their new active-duty partner, the 3rd Infantry Division.

Though they still typically train one weekend each month — a schedule not expected to change in their new role — the 48th Brigade's soldiers long ago shed the National Guard's old weekend warrior stereotype.

The brigade deployed alongside 3rd Infantry units to spend a year fighting in Iraq in 2005, followed by a yearlong tour in Afghanistan in 2009. The citizen-soldiers paid their dues in blood. In all, 34 Georgia guardsmen were killed during the two deployments.

"This isn't that crazy of a thing we're doing here," said

Maj. Gen. Jim Rainey, commander of the 3rd Infantry, who noted the shared history between his division and the Georgia Guard unit. "We've trained together, we've fought together, and sadly we've bled together."

Rainey said his job is to make sure the 48th Brigade is "ready to go to war" more quickly than in the past. The brigade spent nearly five months training at Fort Stewart and at the Army's National Training Center in California before it was ready to deploy to Iraq in 2005.

The Army is forging similar active-duty partnerships for nine additional National Guard units based in Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Vermont, Washington and Texas, which has four units participating. Joining them are two Army Reserve units based in North Carolina and Hawaii.

The pairings are scheduled to last for at least a three-year test period. The Army says more units may be added after the pilot ends in the fall of 2019.

The number of soldiers serv-

ing on active-duty in the Army has dropped from 570,000 during the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to 473,844 in July. Despite post-war cutbacks the U.S. military remains a premier force, with Congress debating a proposed authorization of \$602 billion for the next fiscal year beginning Oct. 1.

Any National Guard units being paired with active-duty commands will remain available for their states' governors to mobilize in response to natural disasters and other emergencies.

Meanwhile, leaders of the 48th Brigade have already been sharing training reports and planning meetings with the 3rd Infantry. A few additional days may need to be added to the brigade's training schedule, Neal said, but otherwise he expects few major changes.

"It solidifies the relationships that we've already established," Neal said. "In other words, we're getting credit for what we've already been doing."

First ladies talk about troops, veterans

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Anyone who wants to be president should not "pop off about going to war" because it is serious business, Michelle Obama said Friday as she reflected on the "sobering experience" of visiting wounded patients at military hospitals.

In the early years of President Barack Obama's tenure, the first lady said their hospital visits would last for hours as they visited dozens of patients, including many who had lost limbs or had suffered other devastating injuries.

"And that's something that a commander in chief thinks

about before they pop off about going to war, because when you've spent time on a base and you know these men and women and you know their families you don't just talk about war like there are no implications," Michelle Obama said during an appearance with former first lady Laura Bush at the National Archives.

Less than eight weeks out from the presidential election, Obama's comments were viewed as a direct criticism of Republican candidate Donald Trump, who has said he would "bomb the hell out of ISIS," also known as the Islamic State group. Trump's Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, has

said he cannot be entrusted with the codes needed to launch America's nuclear arsenal.

Obama used the same "pop off" language later Friday as she headlined her first campaign rally for Clinton.

War is "serious business and lives are changed forever," Obama said at the Archives, "so I would hope that any commander in chief that would have the privilege of serving would understand that these are real lives and real families that are impacted."

She said her husband's most recent hospital visit was considerably shorter because fewer servicemembers are being injured, "and that feels good."

USAF grounds 13 new F-35As over insulation

The Air Force on Friday grounded 13 of its new F-35A aircraft after discovering that insulation around coolant lines inside the fuel tanks was peeling and crumbling. Two F-35As belonging to Norway also were grounded with the same damaged lines, the Air Force said.

The faulty insulation was found just weeks after the Air Force brought its first F-35A stealth fighters on line in August.

Air Force personnel conducting routine maintenance discovered the problem, which affects 57 aircraft — including 42 in production in Fort Worth, Texas.

From staff reports

Brigade leader fired for policy violations

Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas — A brigade commander who oversaw 4,000 soldiers at a Texas post has been relieved of his duties after an Army investigation found violations of sexual harassment and other policies.

Fort Bliss officials announced last week that Col. Earl Higgins Jr. was reassigned to administrative duties following an investigation that lasted several weeks.

Higgins commanded the 1st Brigade Combat Team, one of

six brigades under the 1st Armored Division at Fort Bliss.

Officials said in a statement Thursday that there were no allegations of inappropriate physical contact by Higgins, but that he used inappropriate sexual language and consequently created a hostile work environment. The statement also said he failed to treat subordinates respectfully. Officials declined any further comment.

Higgins was reassigned Tuesday after having led the brigade since July 2015.

Powell discussed Israeli nuclear weapons in email

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a private email exchange last year leaked this week by hackers, former Secretary of State Colin Powell discussed Israel's nuclear weapons capability with a friend, saying the country has 200 warheads.

Though Israel is widely believed to have developed nukes decades ago, it has never declared itself to be a nuclear state. The existence of its weapons program is considered classified information by both the Israeli and U.S. governments.

Powell, 79, a retired Army general who has served as White House national security adviser and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told The Associated Press on Friday through a spokeswoman he was referring to public estimates of Israel's nukes.

"Gen. Powell has not been briefed or had any knowledge from U.S. sources on the existence and or size of an Israeli nuclear capability," the statement said. "He like many people believe that there may be a capability and the number 200 has been speculated upon in open sources." It added: "This email was written 10 years after he left government and has not received briefings on

classified matters."

In the March 2015 exchange from his personal Gmail account, Powell was discussing a speech that day to a joint session of Congress by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The conservative Israeli leader staunchly opposed the deal then proposed by President Barack Obama to curb Iran's nuclear weapons program.

"Iranians can't use one if they finally make one," Powell wrote to Democratic donor Jeffrey Leeds, who serves on the board of the Colin L. Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership at the City College of New York. "The boys in Tehran know Israel has 200, all targeted on Tehran, and we have thousands."

Powell is not the first top-level U.S. government official to publicly discuss Israel's nukes. Former President Jimmy Carter has said in interviews and speeches that Israel has between 150 and 300 warheads.

But the issue is not supposed to be discussed openly by those who work for the U.S. government and hold active security clearances. Even members of Congress are routinely admonished not to even mention the existence of an Israeli nuclear arsenal, said Avner Cohen, a professor at the James Center for Nonproliferation Studies.

Airstrike kills top Islamic State official

BY TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A U.S.-coalition airstrike on Sept. 7 killed the Islamic State group's minister of information, the Pentagon announced Friday.

The airstrike took place near Raqqa, which the terrorist group uses as its headquarters in Syria, and killed Wa'il Adil Hasan Salman al-Fayad, known as "Dr. Wa'il," Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook said in a prepared statement.

"Wa'il oversaw (the Islamic State group's) production of terrorist propaganda videos show-

ing torture and executions," Cook said.

Wa'il was the second high-profile Islamic State group official killed in recent weeks. On Aug. 30, another airstrike killed Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the group's spokesman and a key plotter of attacks outside Syria, the Pentagon said.

Russia and the United States have reported conducting airstrikes around Raqqa, and Russia had announced earlier that it was to be credited for al-Adnani's death, a claim the Pentagon disputed.

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Five transgender troops seek outside treatment

USA Today

WASHINGTON — At least five transgender troops have sought waivers for treatment outside the military health care system since the Pentagon repealed its ban on their service.

One of the five is seeking sex-change surgery, and the other four are seeking hormone treatment as well counseling, according to a defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity because officials were not authorized to speak publicly about the medical issues.

Three of the troops are either sailors or Marines, and the other two are airmen, the official said. There are no soldiers seeking care outside the military health care system for gender dysphoria. Transgender is a term used for people who identify with the opposite gender to which they were born.

On Tuesday, one soldier, Pvt. Chelsea Manning, the convicted national security leaker, received assurances that she would be allowed to have surgery to complete her transition to a woman. Manning is serving a 35-year sentence in the

Army's prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kan.

The practice of discharging troops for gender dysphoria ended June 30 when Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced its repeal. By Oct. 1, the Pentagon's health care system will be required to provide "all medically necessary care related to gender transition." If a military base's medical facility lacks the expertise in treating transgender service-members, those troops can seek waivers to find outside health care providers.

The policy's reversal is scheduled to be complete July 1, 2017, when the military begins accepting transgender recruits who meet military standards.

Providing health care for transgender troops is no different than caring for other soldiers, said Aaron Belkin, director of the Palm Center, which researches issues of sexual orientation in the military.

"Health care for transgender people is straightforward, including hormone management, counseling, and most surgeries," Belkin said in an email.

Putin questions US dedication to cease-fire

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday questioned the U.S. commitment to a shaky cease-fire in Syria, suggesting Washington wasn't prepared to break with "terrorist elements" battling Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces.

The truce has largely held since going into effect last Monday, but both sides have alleged dozens of violations, and aid convoys have been unable to enter rebel-held parts of the northern city of Aleppo — a key opposition demand.

Russia has accused Washington of failing to rein in the rebels, and on Saturday, Putin asked why the United States

has insisted on not releasing a written copy of the agreement. Officials have provided details of the agreement in press conferences, but have not released an official document, fueling suspicions on both sides.

He appeared to be referring to the Fatah al-Sham Front, an al-Qaida-linked group previously known as the Nusra Front, which is embedded in rebel-held areas and fights alongside more moderate groups.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov echoed Putin's remarks during a phone call with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. Lavrov noted the "refusal by an array of illegal armed groups to join the cease-fire" and Washington's

obligation to "separate units of the moderate opposition from terrorist groupings," according to a Foreign Ministry statement.

Under the agreement, the U.S. and Russia would work together to target the Fatah al-Sham Front, as well as the Islamic State group, while Assad's forces refrain from striking opposition-held areas.

But Washington has warned Russia that unless aid is delivered to Aleppo, it will not move ahead with the formation of the joint coordination center.

The U.N. has accused Assad's government of obstructing aid access to the city. The Russian military says insurgents have held up the delivery by firing on government positions along

the main route leading into rebel-held districts, in violation of the cease-fire.

Russia's military said Syrian rebels violated a cease-fire 55 times over the past day, including with strikes on military and civilian targets in Aleppo. Syria's state news agency, SANA, said insurgents have violated the cease-fire 12 times in the last 12 hours.

Syrian activists said government forces have killed five civilians. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said a woman and child were killed Saturday in Talbiseh, in the central Homs province. It said two men were killed outside Damascus, and a child was killed in Aleppo province.

Trump: Disarm Hillary Clinton's body guards

Associated Press

MIAMI — Donald Trump was making his usual, sarcastic call for Hillary Clinton's Secret Service agents to be stripped of their firearms when he added an aside to his rally remarks: "Let's see what happens to her."

Soon after, Clinton's campaign said such a reference to violence was out of bounds.

Trump has long incorrectly suggested his Democratic opponent wants to overturn the Second Amendment and take away

Americans' right to own guns. In Miami on Friday, his riff about confiscating the agents' guns went further.

"I think that her bodyguards should drop all weapons. They should disarm, right?" Trump asked the crowd. "Take their guns away; she doesn't want guns. Take their — and let's see what happens to her. Take their guns away. OK, it would be very dangerous."

Trump's meaning was not immediately clear, and a campaign spokeswoman did not immediately respond to a request for

an elaboration.

But the Clinton campaign had a quick reaction. Her campaign manager, Robby Mook, released a statement saying Trump "has a pattern of inciting people to violence. Whether this is done to provoke protesters at a rally or casually or even as a joke, it is an unacceptable quality in anyone seeking the job of Commander in Chief."

"This kind of talk should be out of bounds for a presidential candidate," Mook wrote.

A spokeswoman for the Secret Service declined to comment.

Two dead and five hurt in shooting in Philadelphia

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — A wild chase and shootout through the streets of Philadelphia left two police officers and three civilians wounded and a woman and the suspect fatally shot.

Philadelphia Police Commissioner Richard Ross said Sgt. Sylvia Young was ambushed late Friday night and shot a number of times in the arm and protective vest. He said Ed Miller, a former police officer who is now a member of the police force at the University of Pennsylvania,

was also wounded. Both were in stable condition early Saturday at Penn Presbyterian Hospital.

One of the three wounded civilians was in critical condition, police said.

The suspect was cornered in an alley and fatally shot by police, the commissioner said.

Young, a 19-year police veteran, was sitting in her vehicle at about 11:20 p.m. when she was ambushed by the suspect, who fired numerous shots, Ross said. She was struck up to eight times, multiple times in her pro-

TECTIVE vest and left arm.

The suspect fled, Ross said, and shot into a nearby bar, striking a security guard in the leg. The man then grabbed a woman and used her as a shield before shooting her in the leg.

Moments later, as police gave chase, the suspect shot into a car, striking a man and a woman in the chest. Police said the woman died and the man was in critical condition. Police said the 25-year-old woman who died was shot seven times.

Ross said Miller and two po-

lice officers chased the man into an alley, where he was shot and killed. The identities of the suspect and the others who were injured were not immediately released.

Mayor Jim Kenney praised officers and pleaded with them to follow Young's example and wear their protective vests.

"Thank you for what you do for us every day, and please, please, please, every shift, please wear your vest," he said. "They will save your life, as we saw tonight."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Tours skipping dorm over pot complaints

PA SWARTHMORE — Student tour guides at a college outside Philadelphia said they have been told not to bring prospective students or their parents into a dormitory because it frequently smelled of marijuana.

The Philadelphia Inquirer reported that Swarthmore College tour administrators told tour guides that parents complained of getting a “contact high” when passing through a dorm.

The tour guides told the school newspaper they did not receive any complaints from parents themselves.

School officials said administrators made a “clarification” for tour guides. They said visiting the dorm added too much time to the tours, so they’ve “streamlined” the route.

Missing pythons on loose in neighborhood

GA HEPHIZIBAH — In a real life version of the children’s reader “Snakes Alive!,” wildlife officers are searching for 14 pythons in a Georgia subdivision after a woman reported someone let the pet snakes loose.

Jacqueline Heim told authorities the snakes were in secure cages. She suspects someone set them free deliberately.

Heim told WRDW-TV the ball pythons are not harmful. Ball pythons, sometimes known as royal pythons, are so named because their key defense against predators is to roll up in a ball.

But neighbors like Shekelia Wilcher are on edge. Wilcher told WJBF-TV that young children in the neighborhood wait for their school bus and “one might just crawl up on them.”

Burros roam onto school’s playground

AZ PEORIA — The staff of a suburban Phoenix elementary school got some wild visitors in the form of some burros.

Four burros were spotted walking onto the playground of Vistancia Elementary in Peoria shortly before 8 a.m. Thursday.

Peoria Unified School District spokeswoman Erin Dunsey said school employees saw the burros enter the grounds through a parking lot.

The animals then went on the playground and left through a side gate.

Dunsey said they were there before any students had arrived and that nobody was hurt.

Officials with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, which oversees wild burro adoption, said it is unusual to see the animals in a residential area.

Woman hid pot in niece’s lunchbox

FL POMPADON BEACH — A South Florida woman faces multiple charges after a sheriff’s deputy found marijuana in her young niece’s lunchbox during a traffic stop.

Broward Sheriff’s officials told local news outlets that Tasha Sims, 33, was arrested Wednesday in Pompano Beach. An arrest report said the deputy stopped Sims and smelled marijuana when he approached the car. He asked if she had anything in the vehicle. The deputy said Sims told him she put marijuana in the girl’s lunchbox because she was afraid when he pulled her over.

The deputy wrote that Sims admitted she “messed up.”

She was charged with child neglect, possession of marijuana and driving with a suspended license and issued several citations.

Museum visitors get to use gold toilet

NY NEW YORK — A New York City museum is letting visitors sit on a golden throne but only in private.

As part of his “America” exhibit at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan replaced the toilet in the museum’s fourth-floor restroom with a fully functional replica cast in 18-karat gold.

Viewers are invited to use the solid gold toilet just as they would any other facility.

It’s the first piece Cattelan has exhibited since his 2011 retrospective at the Guggenheim. It opened on Friday.

The museum said on its website that the exhibit “offers a wink to the excesses of the art market but also evokes the American dream of opportunity for all.”

‘Escape hatch’ found at halfway house

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — Oklahoma prison officials said officers discovered a false wall with an “escape hatch” inside a halfway house that holds prisoners who are nearing the end of their sentences.

The Oklahoma Department of Corrections said Friday that officers found the false wall while searching for contraband at the Center Point halfway house in Oklahoma City. Officials said inmates removed drywall to create a pathway outdoors then concealed it with a false wall.

Corrections Director Joe Allbaugh said the department will investigate security measures at the halfway house. Some inmates may see their sentences lengthened because of the escapes.

Police ‘address’ thefts of homes’ 1s, zeros

PA PHILADELPHIA — Philadelphia police are “addressing” an unusual crime spree: Someone is stealing the ones and zeroes from addresses on people’s homes.

Meghan Haley noticed the zero missing from her home on Wednesday and found a woman stealing it when she checked her surveillance video.

Another woman, Krista Ricca, was awakened by the sound of a power drill about 4 a.m. and “saw ... a man stealing the number” from her neighbor’s home.

Scott Fisher said he has no idea why someone stole his zero, too, saying, “It’s kind of weird. I don’t know if someone is trying to send a message or someone just has an obsession with zeroes and ones.”

Man dressed as Darth Vader cleans highway

VA BLACKSBURG — A Darth Vader figure picking up trash along a roadside? It may not be a typical sight, but that’s exactly what drivers along Route 460 in Blacksburg witnessed on Thursday.

WSLS-TV reported Henry Wakley donned the Star Wars character’s costume while cleaning a mile-and-a-half stretch he adopted through the Adopt-a-Highway program.

Wakley, of Blacksburg, spends most of his time working in New Zealand but has returned to town for two weeks.

He said he likes to get out and dress up because it makes people smile as they drive by.

During the day, many drivers honked, waved or even stopped by to take a picture. Wakley said it’s a fun way to bring awareness to the environment.

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Russell's TD passes help Baylor down Rice

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Rice had some fun at Baylor's expense at halftime. The Bears then toyed with the Owls in the second half.

Seth Russell threw for 337 yards and three touchdowns and No. 21 Baylor shrugged off a slow start to beat Rice 38-10 on Friday night after the Rice band mocked the Bears at halftime.

The band formed a Roman numeral IX on the field to represent Title IX, the federal law Baylor is accused of violating in a sexual assault scandal, and it shifted to a star formation in reference to Ken Starr, the former Baylor president who was demoted and eventually resigned amid the scandal.

Russell was 22-for-38 to help the Bears win their 19th straight regular-season non-conference game and improve to 3-0 for the sixth straight season, a program first.

"We've preached start fast, and we haven't done that the past three games," Russell said. "It's pretty disappointing. It's just something that we can grow on. It's an aspect of the game we need to get better

at."

KD Cannon caught nine passes for 213 yards and two touchdowns. Cannon cited the Bears' youth as a reason for the slow starts.

"Just being young and not knowing what to do," Cannon said. "It's something we have to get better at."

Rice (0-3) led 3-0 after the first quarter before JaMychal Hasty scored on a 16-yard run, and Cannon caught a 10-yard pass from Russell to put the Bears up 14-3 midway through the second quarter.

"We aren't very consistent right now," Baylor interim coach Jim Grobe said. "That's our problem. It's obvious we have some talent, and I think we can be a good football team, but right now we are just so inconsistent."

The Owls closed to 14-10 with 3 minutes left before halftime, but that was as close as they got.

Darik Dillard ran for 124 yards on 14 carries for the Owls. Emmanuel Esukpa had Rice's lone touchdown.

The Owls fell to 0-3 for the second time

in three seasons.

"Standing up here, we're 0-3, but all our goals are still intact," Rice coach David Bailiff said. "If we have that same type of effort, we'll keep growing those young ones up, and we ought to be in great shape."

Shock breaks record

RB Shock Linwood had 57 rushing yards to set a new school record with 3,676 yards over his career. Walter Abercrombie had 3,665 yards from 1978-81.

"It's just something I can look back on and say I am one of the legends and one of the all-time leading rushers," Linwood said.

Up next

Baylor: The Bears start Big 12 play against Oklahoma State in Waco on Sept. 24.

Rice: The Owls will look for their first win of the season as they play their second Conference USA game against North Texas on Sept. 24.

Stuntman pilots rocket over Snake River Canyon

Associated Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho— Professional stuntman Eddie Braun successfully jumped over the Snake River Canyon Friday afternoon in an ode to his boyhood idol, Evel Knievel.

Braun soared over the southern Idaho canyon in a custom-built rocket dubbed "Evel Spirit."

It launched off a steep ramp on the edge of the canyon rim just before 4 p.m. as hundreds of onlookers watched.

The rocket reached an estimated 400 mph before its parachute deployed, allowing Braun and the ship to land safely in fields on the other side of the 1,400 foot-wide canyon.

"I feel like the no-name, third-string quarterback of a junior-varsity team that just won the Super Bowl. My team got me there. I ran it into the end zone. We scored and won," Braun said in a statement after the jump.

Scott Truax, the designer of the rocket, told the Idaho Statesman that after Braun got the OK to launch he didn't

hesitate.

"He was gone in a cloud of steam and I couldn't see anything until just before he pulled his chutes," Truax said.

Braun has said the rocket was identical to the model Knievel used for his failed canyon attempt on Sept. 8, 1974. Knievel landed at the bottom of the canyon when his parachute prematurely deployed partway across the canyon, but walked away with only minor injuries. The spot where Knievel jumped was 1,600 feet wide.

Braun hoped his effort would prove that Knievel could have made it across the canyon if his parachute had deployed at the correct time.

Sprint Cup qualifying for the Chase canceled

JOLIET, Ill. — Qualifying for the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup playoff opener at Chicagoland Speedway was canceled because of rain Friday for the third consecutive year.

The lineup for Sunday's 400-

mile race will be based on the playoff seeding, putting Kyle Busch on the pole with Brad Keselowski joining him on the front row.

Denny Hamlin will start third, followed by Kevin Harvick, Cal Edwards and Martin Truex Jr. The 16 drivers who qualified for the 10-race playoff will all start at the front of the field.

Busch is seeking his second straight Sprint Cup title. He'll need to get past two elimination rounds to get into the group of four drivers eligible going into the last race Nov. 20 at Homestead.

In other auto racing news:

■ NASCAR says Kyle Busch's winning truck in Friday night's race has failed inspection for being too low in the rear.

Any penalties for the No. 18 Toyota will be announced in the coming week.

Busch won his 46th Truck Series race when he pulled away on an overtime restart at Chicagoland Speedway in Joliet, Ill., ending the hopes for

many full-time series drivers needing a win to qualify for the Chase for the championship playoff.

■ Mercedes driver Nico Rosberg took pole position for the Singapore Grand Prix with a stunning lap time at the Marina Bay street circuit on Saturday.

Rosberg trails championship leader and Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton by two points in the championship. But the German put himself in the best possible position for a third consecutive victory with a time of 1 minute, 42.584 seconds — more than half a second faster than Red Bull's Daniel Ricciardo in second.

Hamilton qualified third, ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen.

Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen qualified fifth but teammate Sebastian Vettel starts last after his car had an anti-roll bar failure in the Q1 session.

Red Bull cars start the race on harder tires than the Mercedes, allowing them to go longer Sunday before pitting.

Ground game still matters in pass-happy NFL

Associated Press

They get downgraded in the draft and told their NFL lifespan rarely goes beyond their 30th birthdays.

In the pass-happy pro football world, running backs sometimes become afterthoughts. Then, guys like C.J. Anderson, DeAngelo Williams, Matt Forte and Carlos Hyde go wild on the field.

Yes, the Patriots and Saints have found ways to prosper chucking the ball all over the yard. But as the first 17 games this season proved — including Forte's 100-yard, three-touchdown extravaganza for the Jets on Thursday night against Buffalo — the ground game still matters.

Big time.

Just ask one of the NFL's top passers.

"With all the fantasy football and all the stuff, from a player's perspective, you have to stop the run first," Arizona's Carson Palmer says. "That's what every defense wants to come in and do. You don't talk about it maybe as much, you hear so much about protecting quarterbacks, passing games ... but every team is trying to give up big chunks of yards in the run game, and every team is trying to run the football successfully. From a player's standpoint, it's a focal point of everything we do."

From some coaches' standpoints, too.

"Obviously, they are a huge part of what we like to do. There is not a substitute for a good runner," says Browns coach Hue Jackson, a noted offensive mind. "If you have a guy who can wear the defense down a little bit and a guy who knows how to carry the ball, be physical and make those tough yards, there is no substitute for those guys."

Would the Broncos have been champions without the performances of Anderson

last year? In some ways, he's more valuable than Peyton Manning and his replacement at quarterback, Trevor Simian.

No team has a better aerial game than the Steelers. Yet what makes it even more dangerous is what Pittsburgh gets from its backfield.

With Le'Veon Bell sidelined by a knee injury for much of 2015 and suspended for the first three games this season, Williams has soared. At 33, he appears in his prime — something Washington learned Monday night when Williams scooted for 143 yards and two touchdowns. He also had six receptions, and he can handle onrushing blitzers.

"It's one of those things if you can carry the load, you can carry the load," says Williams, who has prospered from splitting carries in Carolina with Jonathan Stewart before landing in Pittsburgh. "In this league now, you've got to have two backs if you want to be where you want to be, and that's the Super Bowl."

Few teams get that far without a strong passing attack, of course. With all the rules changes favoring throwing, and the onset of fantasy football, it sometimes seems like getting down and dirty with the running game is, well, down and dirty.

But one of the real pleasures of watching the NFL is how Adrian Peterson can befuddle defenses while bedazzling viewers. All-around backs such as Williams, Forte, Doug Martin, Jamaal Charles and LeSean McCoy spice up the sport.

Youngsters Hyde, Todd Gurley, David Johnson and Devonta Freeman add even more juice.

Maybe fans can't wrap their allegiances around running backs (except in fantasy football, of course) because many teams

use several RBs each game. The wear and tear of the position warrants a rotation, something inconceivable at quarterback and unlikely at wideout — no teams take out the top target when they go to multiple-receiver sets.

Behind the QB, though, sometimes there's a committee toting the ball, catching it or blocking.

No club handles depth at running back better than Kansas City. Even with its star, Charles, hobbled, Andy Reid's team can send Spencer Ware, Charcandrick West and Knile Davis at opponents. When Charles gets back to full health, that makes him even more dangerous: Reid can pick and choose when and how to use the versatile Charles because his other backs are dependable.

"Every running back is a little different and that's the beauty of our guys, they're all a little different," says Chiefs co-offensive coordinator and running game mastermind Matt Nagy. "You have Jamaal with the speed, Spencer with the power, Charcandrick with the mix, and Knile with the power and the mix. So for us, it's just a matter of us putting them in and letting them roll to their strengths."

"It's a matter of identifying what your backs do well, and it's dictated more by the player than the team."

When teams can dictate the pace of a game on the ground, they can control the clock and, often, the scoreboard.

That's not to say having a star or solid quarterback doesn't lead to winning. But ask Ben Roethlisberger or Alex Smith or whoever lines up behind center in Minnesota about the importance of running the ball.

They know.

Top pick Goff set to suit up as Rams' backup QB

Associated Press

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. — Jared Goff is one step closer to the field for the Los Angeles Rams.

The No. 1 overall draft pick will be the Rams' backup quarterback Sunday, putting him in uniform for the first time in his rookie season.

Coach Jeff Fisher made the announcement Friday after Los Angeles' final practice for its home opener against Seattle.

"He's ready to play," Fisher said. "He got some reps

throughout the week. (It's) good for him. It's exciting for him, just knowing that he's a snap away from going into the game. He was here until the wee hours (Thursday) night preparing, as he should."

Goff was the inactive third-stringer for the Rams' 28-0 loss at San Francisco in their season opener Monday. Sean Mannion served as the backup to Case Keenum, who went 17-for-35 for 130 yards with two interceptions.

Keenum is still the starter, but Fisher said the team is

confident Goff would be ready to play. Fisher hasn't decided whether he'll switch the backup job between Goff and Mannion again next week, saying he'll wait to see how the weekend goes.

Goff was told about the decision earlier in the week.

"I've just been preparing the same way I've been preparing," Goff said.

While Philadelphia's Carson Wentz and Dallas' Dak Prescott started in last week's openers as rookies, Goff watched the opener in street clothes. He hasn't

stopped studying and learning with the Rams, who obviously expect the former California star to be their starter in the near future.

Goff went 22-for-49 with two touchdown passes and two interceptions in the preseason with the Rams, who had the NFL's worst offense last season. After the preseason finale, Fisher said Goff wasn't ready to be the backup to Keenum, who easily kept the starting job he won late last season from Nick Foles.

Indians stretch AL Central lead to seven

Associated Press

CLEVELAND—Mike Napoli paused in the batter's box and admired his towering homer, a shot that climbed high into the night with zero chance of being caught.

The Indians are beginning to look uncatchable, too.

Napoli drove in four runs — two on a gift double, two on a ball that bounced out of Progressive Field — and the Indians stretched their lead over Detroit in the AL Central to seven games by beating the second-place Tigers 11-4 on Friday night.

Napoli hit a strange, ground-rule double in the first inning off rookie Michael Fulmer (10-7) and added one of those soaring shots he's made routine this

season as the Indians lowered the magic number for clinching their first division title since 2007 to nine. They did it in front of a pom-pom waving crowd of nearly 30,000 fans, who are beginning to believe this season could stretch deep into October.

"It was electric," Napoli said. "You could just feel the energy, which is adrenaline for us."

Corey Kluber (17-9) worked seven innings, kept the top of Detroit's lineup in check and set the tone for the Indians' biggest series this season. The right-hander is 8-1 in 12 starts since the All-Star break and remains the one pitcher in the rotation Cleveland can count on.

Carlos Santana added two RBIs for the Indians, who improved to 12-1 against the

Tigers.

"They've had our number for a few years now," Kluber said. "I don't know if you're really thinking about turning the tables on them, so to speak. Obviously we have a lot of games left against them, so it's not done yet — but that's a good feeling."

Justin Upton hit a pair of homers and drove in all four runs for Detroit, which missed another chance to gain ground and is running out of season.

"It's really very similar to 11 out of the first 12 games we played," Tigers manager Brad Ausmus. "They just stuck it to us. They were better than us."

This was the first of seven games between the rivals over the next two weeks and the Indians, who have led the division since June 4, made sure the

Tigers didn't get any closer or gain any momentum.

Napoli's 34th homer gave the Indians a 6-1 lead.

Jason Kipnis was on second with one out when Napoli, who proudly says he swings as hard as he can, whenever he can, sent a 2-2 fastball from Fulmer over the wall in left. None of the fans was able to catch it on the fly and it ricocheted off the sidewalk, over the fence and into the plaza behind the ballpark.

"For me, a high fastball like that, I swing at them a lot, but I don't really connect with them," Napoli said with a laugh. "For me to get on top of that one and be able to drive it, I was pretty excited about it."

Red Sox down Yankees, maintain lead in AL East

Associated Press

BOSTON — Hanley Ramirez homered for the second straight game and David Ortiz had a pair of hits on Friday night to send the AL East-leading Boston Red Sox to a 7-4 victory over the New York Yankees.

The Red Sox maintained a two-game lead over Baltimore. The Yankees, who on Thursday night were one out from climbing within three games of the division lead, fell six games back and lost ground in the AL wild-card race.

Clay Buchholz (7-10) allowed two runs in six innings. Ramirez homered for the ninth time in 16 games, including a three-run shot to cap a five-run ninth in Boston's 7-5 victory Thursday.

Blue Jays 5, Angels 0: Troy Tulowitzki hit a two-run homer and R.A. Dickey pitched scoreless ball into the sixth inning as visiting Toronto stayed atop the AL wild-card race with a victory over free-falling Los Angeles.

Edwin Encarnacion added a late two-run homer for the Blue Jays (81-66), who stayed even with Baltimore for the league's

two wild-card playoff spots. Both teams trail Boston by two games for the AL East lead with 15 to play.

Orioles 5, Rays 4: J.J. Hardy and Michael Bourn came through with RBIs in the eighth inning as host Baltimore rallied from a four-run deficit to beat Tampa Bay.

Mets 3, Twins 0: Bartolo Colon limited his opponents to three singles in seven innings while Jose Reyes and Asdrubal Cabrera hit consecutive home runs off rookie Jose Berrios in the third as host New York beat Minnesota in the opener of its final homestand this season.

Giants 8, Cardinals 2: All that talk about Buster Posey's second-half power drought was answered with one mighty swing in a September game that mattered — a two-run homer that helped host San Francisco beat St. Louis in this matchup of playoff contenders.

Posey drove in four runs and the Giants stayed four games back of the NL West-leading Los Angeles Dodgers, who won at Arizona. San Francisco maintained its one-game lead over the New York Mets for the league's top wild card,

moving three games up on the Cardinals in the wild-card standings.

Cubs 5, Brewers 4 (10): Miguel Montero homered in the 10th inning and Chicago celebrated its NL Central title with a dramatic victory over visiting Milwaukee.

The Cubs became the first major league team to clinch its division when St. Louis lost at San Francisco late Thursday night. A day later, they put together quite a party.

Nationals 7, Braves 2: Trea Turner homered, had four hits and scored four runs while Max Scherzer won his fifth straight decision to help visiting Washington beat Atlanta.

Rangers 7, Athletics 6: Jonathan Lucroy hit a two-run single with two outs in the ninth inning as host Texas moved closer to clinching the AL West.

Dodgers 3, Diamondbacks 2: Kenta Maeda limited Arizona to a run on three hits over five innings as visiting Los Angeles held on for the win.

White Sox 7, Royals 4: Chris Sale pitched his American League-leading sixth complete game to pick up his 16th

win and Carlos Sanchez hit a three-run homer in the eighth inning as Chicago beat host Kansas City.

Phillies 4, Marlins 3 (13): Pinch-hitter Jimmy Paredes singled home the winning run with one out in the 13th inning to lift Philadelphia over visiting Miami.

Pirates 9, Reds 7 (10): Jordy Mercer had an RBI single with the bases loaded in the 10th inning and David Freese added a two-run single as visiting Pittsburgh overcame some shaky defense to preserve its chances in the NL wild-card race.

Rockies 8, Padres 7: Pinch-hitter Daniel Descalso lined a game-winning single off the center-field wall in the bottom of the ninth inning to lift host Colorado past San Diego.

Astros 6, Mariners 0: Collin McHugh allowed just two hits in seven stellar innings and Evan Gattis and Marwin Gonzalez both hit solo home runs as visiting Houston ended Seattle's eight-game winning streak.

McHugh was outstanding, not allowing a base runner until Nori Aoki's leadoff single in the fourth inning.