

STARS AND STRIPES®

Friday, September 7, 2018

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Top officials deny involvement in op-ed

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — One after another, President Donald Trump's top lieutenants stepped forward to declare, "Not me."

They lined up to deny writing an incendiary New York Times opinion piece that was purportedly submitted by a member of an administration "resistance" movement straining to thwart Trump's most dangerous impulses.

By email, by tweet and on camera, the denials paraded in Thursday from Cabinet-level officials — and even Vice President Mike Pence — apparently crafted for an audience of one, seated in the Oval Office. Senior officials in key national security and economic policy roles charged the article's writer with cowardice, disloyalty and acting against America's interests in harsh terms that mimicked the president's own words.

Trump was incensed about the column, calling around to confidants to vent about the author, solicit guesses as to his or her identity and fume that a "deep state" within the administration was conspiring against him. He ordered aides to unmask the writer, and issued an extraordinary demand that the newspaper reveal the author to the government.

In an interview Thursday with Fox News, Trump said it was unfair for the person to pen the editorial anonymously because there's no way to discredit it.

He suggested it "may not be a Republi-

can, it may not be a conservative, it may be a deep state person who has been there for a long time."

As striking as the essay was the long list of officials who plausibly could have been its author. Many have privately shared some of the article's same concerns about Trump with colleagues, friends and reporters.

With such a wide circle of potential suspicion, Trump's men and women felt they had no choice but to speak out. The denials and condemnations came in from far and wide: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis denied authorship on a visit to India; Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke chimed in from American Samoa. In Washington, the claims of "not me" echoed from Vice President Pence's office, from Energy Secretary Rick Perry, from Ambassador to Russia Jon Huntsman from Dan Coats, director of national intelligence, and other Cabinet members.

The author professed to be a member of that same inner circle. So could the denials be trusted? There was no surefire way to know, and that only deepened the president's frustrations.

On Twitter, Trump charged "The Deep State and the Left, and their vehicle, the Fake News Media, are going Crazy — & they don't know what to do."

White House officials did not respond to requests to elaborate on Trump's call for the writer to be turned over to the govern-

ment or on the unsupported national security grounds of his demand. Some who agreed with the writer's points suggested the president's reaction actually confirmed the author's concerns.

Rudy Giuliani, the president's attorney, suggested that it "would be appropriate" for Trump to ask for a formal investigation into the identity of the op-ed author.

"Let's assume it's a person with a security clearance. If they feel writing this is appropriate, maybe they feel it would be appropriate to disclose national security secrets, too. That person should be found out and stopped," Giuliani said.

As the initial scramble to unmask the writer proved fruitless, attention turned to the questions the article raised, which have been whispered in Washington for more than a year: Is Trump truly in charge, and could a divided executive branch pose a danger to the country?

Former CIA Director John Brennan, a fierce Trump critic, called the op-ed "active insubordination ... born out of loyalty to the country."

The anonymous author, claiming to be part of the resistance "working diligently from within" the administration, said, "Many Trump appointees have vowed to do what we can to preserve our democratic institutions while thwarting Mr. Trump's more misguided impulses until he is out of office."

Senate hearings for Kavanaugh enter final day

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senators began the fourth and final day of hearings for Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, 53, on Friday, but with the nominee finished answering questions, they seemed unlikely to alter his path to confirmation.

Senate Democrats worked into the night Thursday in a last, ferocious attempt to paint Kavanaugh as a foe of abortion rights and a likely defender of President Donald Trump.

But after two marathon days in the witness chair in a Senate hearing room, Kavanaugh appeared on his way to becoming

the court's 114th justice.

The appellate judge stuck to a well-rehearsed script throughout his testimony, providing only glimpses of his judicial stances while avoiding any serious mistakes that might jeopardize his confirmation. In what almost seemed like a celebration Thursday, Kavanaugh's two daughters returned to the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing room for the final hours of testimony, accompanied by teammates on Catholic school basketball teams their father has coached.

On the schedule Friday were more than two dozen witnesses on both sides of the nomination fight. Democratic witnesses

include John Dean, Richard Nixon's White House counsel who cooperated with prosecutors during the Watergate investigation, and Rochelle Garza, the legal guardian for a pregnant immigrant teenager whose quest for an abortion Kavanaugh would have delayed last year.

On the Republican side, former solicitors general Theodore Olson and Paul Clement will testify in support of the nominee, along with former students, law clerks and the mother of a basketball player Kavanaugh coached.

Republicans hope to confirm Kavanaugh in time for the first day of the new Supreme Court term, Oct. 1.

Trump OKs indefinite US presence in Syria

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump, who just five months ago said he wanted “to get out” of Syria and to bring U.S. troops home soon, has approved a new strategy for an indefinitely extended military, diplomatic and economic effort there, according to senior State Department officials.

Although the military campaign against Islamic State has been nearly completed, the administration has redefined its goals to include the exit of all Iranian military and proxy forces from Syria, and the establishment of a stable, nonthreatening government acceptable to all Syrians and the international community.

Much of the motivation for the change, officials said, stems from growing doubts about whether Russia, which Trump has said could be a partner, is able and willing to help eject Iran. Together, Russia and Iran have been Syrian President Bashar Assad’s principal allies in obliterating a years-long effort by domestic rebels to oust the Syrian leader.

“The new policy is we’re no longer pulling out by the end of the year,” said James Jeffrey, a retired senior Foreign Service officer who last month was named Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s “representative for

Iran, Russia, Turkey leaders meet in summit

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — The presidents of Iran, Russia and Turkey met in a high-stakes summit in Tehran on Friday to discuss the future of Syria as a bloody military operation looms in the last rebel-held area of the war-ravaged nation, each laying out terms and issues on the battlefield most critical to their own concerns.

Turkey’s president appealed for a cease-fire in Syria’s Idlib, saying a government offensive in the northwestern province would be a national security threat to his country and would unleash a humanitarian catastrophe.

His call appeared to be at odds with statements by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who said the Syrian government “has the right” to regain control over all

Syrian territory, including Idlib.

The two leaders, along with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani spoke at a summit meeting in Tehran to discuss the future of Syria as a bloody military operation looms in the last rebel-held area of the war-ravaged nation.

“Idlib isn’t just important for Syria’s future, it is of importance for our national security and for the future of the region,” said Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

“Any attack on Idlib would result in a catastrophe. Any fight against terrorists requires methods based on time and patience,” he added, saying, “We don’t want Idlib to turn into a bloodbath.”

“We must find a reasonable way out for Idlib,” he said.

Syria engagement.” About 2,200 U.S. troops are serving in Syria, virtually all of them devoted to the war against

ISIS in the eastern third of the country.

Jeffrey said U.S. forces are to remain in the country to en-

sure an Iranian departure and the “enduring defeat” of ISIS.

“That means we are not in a hurry,” he said. Asked whether Trump had signed off on what he called “a more active approach,” Jeffrey said, “I am confident the president is on board with this.”

Jeffrey declined to describe any new military mission. But he emphasized what he said would be a “major diplomatic initiative” in the United Nations and elsewhere, and the use of economic tools, presumably including more sanctions on Iran and Russia and the stated U.S. refusal to fund reconstruction in Assad-controlled Syria.

But the more activist policies he outlined, and only in vague terms, could increase the likelihood of a direct confrontation with Iran and, potentially, with Russia.

Jeffrey’s description of a much broader U.S. role follows years of criticism from lawmakers and analysts that neither Trump nor his predecessor, President Barack Obama, had a coherent strategy for Syria. Trump, like Obama, insisted that U.S. interests were focused on defeating ISIS, and he resisted significant involvement in the civil war against Assad raging in the rest of the country, even as both Iran and Russia increased their influence.

Mattis makes surprise visit to war-weary Kabul

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis made a surprise visit to Afghanistan’s war-shattered capital on Friday, the U.S. command in Afghanistan said, just days after a suicide bomber killed 21 people in the city and wounded 90 others.

Accompanied by Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, Mattis met with senior government officials, including President Ashraf Ghani and his leadership partner in the often-fractional Unity Government, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. Security featured prominent-

ly in their discussions, as did government attempts to put the brakes on runaway government corruption, said a presidential statement following the meetings.

Mattis also assured the Afghan leadership that the U.S. was committed to stay the course in Afghanistan until the country is secure and stable, the statement said.

There was no indication either from the Afghan government or the U.S. military command of a change in strategy that might bring about greater security or how the existing strategy might bring about results.

Mattis’ visit to Afghanistan, which lasted a little more than six hours, comes amid

brutal assaults against the country’s minority Shiites and a fresh round of insider attacks this week that have claimed the life of one American servicemember and eight local police.

The U.S. has been supporting Afghan forces in an aggressive campaign against Islamic State insurgents in eastern Nangarhar province, yet the ISIS affiliate repeatedly has been able to carry out attacks in the heavily fortified capital of Kabul.

The victims most often have been Afghanistan’s minority Shiite Muslims. The radical Sunni Islamic state reviles Shiites as apostates.

Vets fight to bring interpreter's family to US

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

"Take care of my son. Take care of my wife."

Those were an Iraqi interpreter's last words to his American Special Forces comrade as he lay bleeding in the desert in September 2007.

Barakat Ali Bashar — known as "Andy" to troops — shielded then-Staff Sgt. Jay McBride when a suicide bomber detonated his vest during a vehicle search near the Syrian border.

McBride, a former Special Forces medic who was shot twice by insurgents as he helped other wounded troops, remembered his friend's final plea.

So in 2015, he began writing letters in support of an application for a special visa to bring Bashar's family of ethnic Yazidis — including his widow, son, mother and brother — to America, after he heard they'd fled their home near Mount Sinjar to escape Islamic State terrorists and were living at a refugee camp in Iraqi Kurdistan.

McBride served three tours to Iraq in 2003-09 with the 10th Special Forces Group.

He stayed in touch with another linguist, Hadi Pir, and was heartened when he came

to the United States under a program that provided visas for Iraqis who had worked with U.S. forces.

"These guys see more combat than Special Forces operators," McBride said. "It's great to see them get rewarded for their effort."

When McBride and other veterans heard that Bashar's family had fled their home, they started writing letters and sending emails in support of their efforts to come to the U.S.

"I owe him my life. I would put them up in my home if that was an option," he said.

Sgt. 1st Class Michael Swett, another Special Forces soldier, also wrote in support of Bashar's family's effort to immigrate.

"[Bashar] never shirked duty or responsibility and could always be counted on to steer our team in the right direction," he wrote in his support letter. "Additionally, he never faltered in his commitment to help American forces in Iraq, even after his family was threatened and their names were placed on a list that was circulated around the region, describing him as a traitor for supporting American forces."

"I would have absolutely no hesitation recommending Bara-

kat's family be granted citizenship, as they truly epitomize the sacrifice that so many have made during these troubling years of war in Iraq," he added.

Swett recalled the last conversation he had with Bashar in which they hoped their children might play soccer together in America one day.

After Bashar's death, the Special Forces troops conducted a patrol to his village to attend his funeral, Swett wrote.

"We felt so strongly about being there for him that we would risk our own lives to pay respect to his," he wrote. "He believed in the American dream even more than we did. Unfortunately, [Bashar] never realized his opportunity to see the country that he sacrificed so much for."

In emailed answers to questions from Stars and Stripes, Bashar's family wrote that they'd received about \$10,000 in three installments from the U.S. government as compensation for his death but had lived in constant fear ever since.

When ISIS took control of Sinjar in 2014, they fled, leaving their possessions and personal documents that proved Bashar's service with the Army.

Before his death, Bashar was

one of 50 interpreters slated to come to the U.S. under legislation signed by President George W. Bush, the family wrote.

Later, they applied for a special immigration visa under the program for interpreters, which had been expanded by President Barack Obama to include 500 people.

But their efforts were held up by a requirement that they provide the International Organization for Migration, or IOM, proof of Bashar's employment as a linguist, according to fellow interpreter Pir.

Bashar's former employer, L3, referred Stars and Stripes to U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command, which confirmed in an Aug. 30 email that he was employed under a contract with the company to work as a linguist in Iraq at the time of his death.

The family wrote that they had obtained paperwork that proved Bashar "was declared dead in a U.S. Army hospital and he was an interpreter who served with [U.S. forces]."

The case was submitted to immigration authorities; in April, the family was interviewed by the IOM, and they're waiting for a follow-up interview with the State Department, Pir said.

Arlington officially opens 27-acre addition with burials

BY NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — With a reflective, quiet ceremony Thursday afternoon, Arlington National Cemetery officially completed its first expansion in nearly 40 years — a 27-acre swath that is expected to be filled with military dead and their families by the 2040s.

Undercurrents of enthusiasm ran through an otherwise serious event. The expansion will keep the cemetery — long viewed as a shrine to America's fallen heroes — viable for about 10 years longer than expected. Plans for the new space, titled the Millennium Project, have

been in the works since Bill Clinton was president in the 1990s.

"It's a hugely important project for Arlington National Cemetery," said David Fedroff, the cemetery's deputy chief of engineering. "Any time we get to increase our burial capacity and have the opportunity to continue to serve veterans for the future is an extremely proud moment."

About 100 people huddled in the shade of two large tents in the cemetery's new Section 81 on Thursday.

The event started with cemetery officials unveiling signs for two new roads — one named for lighthouse keeper Ida Lewis

and the other for Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Jonathan W. Gifford.

Lewis is the first woman to be honored with a street name at Arlington. In the mid-1800s, Lewis rescued people near Lime Rock Island in Rhode Island, where her family tended the Lime Rock Lighthouse. The U.S. Lighthouse Service later was absorbed into the U.S. Coast Guard.

"In 1854, her first rescue saved the lives of four men. At the time, she was 12 years old," said Karen Durham-Aguilera, executive director of Army National Military Cemeteries. "She conducted many rescues, becoming a living legend, known

even in her lifetime as the bravest woman in America."

Gifford, now the first Marine to have a street named after him at Arlington, is buried in Section 60 of the cemetery. He was killed in action in Afghanistan in 2012, when he led a counter-attack against a Taliban ambush. Gifford, who died at 34, was awarded the Navy Cross posthumously.

The dedication ceremony ended with the first funeral in the new space. Two Union soldiers from the Civil War, discovered by archaeologists in June, were buried in a corner of Section 81, near the intersection of Gifford Drive and Lewis Drive.

Calif. says 20 seniors abandoned during fires

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Staff at two senior care centers abandoned residents during an evacuation as wildfires swept through Northern California last October, state officials said Thursday as they moved to revoke licenses from the Santa Rosa facilities and their top administrators. Nobody in either facility died.

A Department of Social Services complaint says more than 20 people would have died when a dementia facility burned to the ground if family members and emergency responders hadn't evacuated them after all staff left. The investigation says night staff members at Villa Capri were not trained in emergency procedures and never had practiced a fire drill. They could not find keys to a bus that could have sped evacuations.

At least three residents were not evacuated from another facility, Varena, and workers who found them the next morning lied about it, the investigation found. Both care centers are owned by Oakmont Senior Living, which called the allegations unfounded.

S. Korean leader Moon wants 'irrevocable progress' on nukes

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korean President Moon Jae-in said Friday that he is pushing for "irrevocable progress" in efforts to rid North Korea of its nuclear weapons by the end of this year as he prepares for his third summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Earlier this week, Moon sent special envoys to Pyongyang to help resolve the nuclear stalemate. After returning home, the envoys said Thursday that Kim still has faith in U.S. President Donald Trump and reaffirmed his commitment to a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, although he expressed frustration over skepticism about his sincerity.

Trump later responded by tweeting, "Kim Jong Un of North Korea proclaims 'unwavering faith in President Trump.' Thank you to Chairman Kim. We will get it done together!" Moon said the outcome of his envoys' Pyongyang trip was "much more than what was expected."

The next step in nuclear diplomacy is uncertain. Negotiators seem deadlocked over whether North Korea truly intends to denuclearize as it has pledged numerous times in recent months. North Korea has dismantled its nuclear and rocket engine testing sites, but U.S. officials want more serious, concrete action taken before North Korea obtains outside concessions.

Kim told the South Korean envoys that he is willing to take stronger steps if his "goodwill" measures are met in kind, according to chief envoy Chung Eui-yong. Kim repeatedly has said he wants a step-by-step disarmament process in which each of his actions is reciprocated with corresponding outside concessions.

North Korea, which says its nuclear program

is aimed at countering U.S. military threats, has demanded the U.S. jointly declare an end to the 1950-53 Korean War, which was halted by an armistice, not a peace treaty. During his meeting with the South Korean envoys, Kim said an end-of-war declaration wouldn't weaken the U.S.-South Korean alliance or lead to the withdrawal of the 28,500 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea to prevent a North Korean attack, according to Chung.

Moon's liberal government, which is eager to continue engagement with North Korea, also wants the declaration. In a written interview released Friday with Indonesian newspaper Kompas, Moon said he wants to see such a declaration made this year as part of trust-building measures.

"What matters is implementing with sincerity the agreements among the leaders, and our objective is producing irrevocable progress by the end of this year," Moon said, referring to denuclearization and a permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula.

During the Seoul envoys' trip, the two sides agreed that Kim and Moon would meet in Pyongyang on Sept. 18-20, in their third summit since April. South Korean officials say the meeting will focus on how to achieve denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Two senior members of South Korea's delegation to Pyongyang are to fly to China and Japan to brief them on their meeting with Kim. Chung is to meet senior Chinese official Yang Jiechi on Saturday and National Intelligence Service director Suh Hoon, who went to Pyongyang with Chung, is to meet Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Monday, according to South Korea's presidential office.

'Smokey and the Bandit' star Burt Reynolds dies at 82

New York Daily News

Burt Reynolds, the macho, mustachioed "Smokey and the Bandit" star, reportedly has died. He was 82.

The Oscar-nominated movie star died Thursday morning in Florida, his manager, Erik Krtizer, told The Hollywood Reporter.

Reynolds was best known as an action star, often preferring to do his own stunts, but he balanced his resume with romantic, comedic and dramatic parts, too, earning his lone Oscar nomination in 1998 for "Boogie Nights."

The actor played porn director Jack Horner in the Paul Thomas Anderson film, though he later famously claimed to "hate" Anderson and said he never watched "Boo-

gie Nights" all the way through.

Still, Reynolds had plenty of roles in which he could revel — the Michigan native was the top-grossing movie star in Hollywood for each year from 1978 to 1982.

In that span, he released films like "Starting Over," "The Cannonball Run," "Rough Cut" and a sequel to "Smokey and the Bandit."

It was the original "Smokey" in 1977 that Reynolds is best known for — a Hal Needham action-comedy flick that featured Reynolds as Bo "Bandit" Darville, a man hired to transport 400 cases of beer from Texas to Atlanta in 28 hours in his black Pontiac Trans-Am.

The film was a massive success and

earned \$126 million at the box office, which today would equate to \$508 million.

It also proved a hit in Reynolds' personal life. He co-starred with actress Sally Field in "Smokey," sparking a five-year relationship between the two.

He later would call Field "the one that got away."

Reynolds was born Feb. 11, 1936, in Lansing, Mich. He attended Florida State University on a football scholarship, and eventually set out for New York City to pursue a career in acting.

After appearing in several plays, Reynolds began booking TV roles, and soon broke through with his role in the 1972 thriller "Deliverance."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Beachgoer fined \$124 for kicking a seagull

NH HAMPTON — A man accused of kicking a seagull at a New Hampshire beach has been fined \$124.

Police investigated the report from a bystander at Hampton Beach earlier this summer.

NH1 reported the man, Nate Rancloes, said he had just returned from getting a cheeseburger and fries and was sitting on the sand. He said seagulls got to the burger, and he spun around with his leg to shoo one away but struck the bird. He said it was a simple mistake.

A witness said it appeared the bird's leg was injured and that it struggled to fly away.

New Hampshire Fish and Game Lt. Adam Cheeney said seagulls are protected under federal law.

Historic carousel back in action with free rides

NY ROCHESTER — A historic carousel is back in operation in a lake-side Rochester park, with free weekend rides being offered through Columbus Day.

The 113-year-old Dentzel Carousel at Ontario Beach Park on Lake Ontario recently reopened after being closed for the past year to repair mechanical problems.

Monroe County Executive Cheryl Dinolfo said the carousel will offer free rides on weekends through Oct. 8. Tickets for the 1905 carousel typically have been sold for \$1 each.

The county-owned carousel was closed in the summer of 2017 after problems were found in the crown bearing at the top. An Ohio company was hired to conduct the repairs.

The carousel, one of the few of its model still in use, features more than 50 hand-carved rideable animals.

Hunter mistakes pet pig for feral hog

OR PILOT ROCK — A bow hunter in Oregon mistook a pet pot-bellied pig that had escaped from its owners' home for a feral hog and fatally shot it.

The East Oregonian reported Wednesday that Janet and Jerry McKague had cared for the pig, named Porky, for more than a year. Porky escaped Aug. 31, and the family searched for him until they learned that a bow hunter had shown up at a local store claiming to have shot a 167-pound feral pig.

The McKagues contacted the Oregon State Police. Authorities contacted the hunter, who was cooperative and said he thought the pig was wild.

Porky's carcass was seized as evidence.

Middle-schooler finds insects in school lunch

TN MADISONVILLE — A Tennessee middle school student said she found live insects in her school lunch.

Madisonville Middle School seventh-grader Madison Smith told WBIR-TV that the bugs she and other students saw in their granola "looked like maggots," so they stopped eating and took video to send to their parents.

A statement from Monroe County Director of Schools Tim Blankenship says the flour mites were in a bag sealed in original packaging that had just been opened Sept. 4 for lunch. He said that after students reported it, the granola was removed immediately.

Blankenship said cafeteria workers checked other bags of food and found no more bugs.

The school says food safety is a priority. Smith's mother, Brandy Shubert, said she'll pack her daughter's lunch from now on.

Officer who said he was 'trigger-happy' demoted

CT HARTFORD — A Connecticut police officer caught on video warning a group of young people not to flee or fight because he was "trigger-happy" has been demoted and faces a disciplinary process that could lead to a suspension or his firing.

Hartford police Chief David Rosado announced Thursday that Sgt. Stephen Barone was demoted to officer and was assigned to desk duty after an internal affairs investigation found he violated the department's code of conduct. Mayor Luke Bronin said the disciplinary process could take several weeks. Barone did not immediately return a message seeking comment Thursday.

A Facebook video shows Barone telling a group he stopped last month that if they tried to flee, he's a "little trigger-happy" and added he gets paid overtime if he has to shoot someone.

Police: Man woke up, drove into firefighter

MA WORCESTER — Police in Massachusetts said a man who was found passed out behind the wheel of his car woke up when firefighters approached and drove into one of them.

Worcester firefighters responded to the scene last Sunday night, where they found Kristopher Nater, 29, of Worcester, passed out behind the wheel of a vehicle. Police said Nater woke up while two firefighters approached the vehicle and drove at them.

Both firefighters tried to get out of the way, but one of them was hit. Police said Nater drove away, but officers later found him and arrested him. The firefighter suffered minor injuries.

Police officer accused of punching umpire

LA MONROE — A police officer in Louisiana is accused of attacking an umpire at a University of Louisiana at Monroe softball game.

News outlets report Pineville police Sgt. Edric Smith, 45, is charged with battery of a school or recreation athletic contest official. An arrest affidavit says Smith was at the university Saturday to coach a softball game in which his daughter was playing.

The affidavit says Smith told police the umpire had threatened his daughter. It says the umpire told officers Smith grabbed him and punched him in the face repeatedly. It says Smith admitted to the attack.

Pineville police Chief Don Weatherford said Monday that the department is conducting an internal investigation.

Sheriff: Investigators foil escape attempt

MS STARKVILLE — A man accused of murder faces new charges on suspicion of conspiring with his girlfriend to escape from a northeast Mississippi jail.

The Lowndes County Sheriff's Office told local news outlets that Joshua Murry, 27, and Shanice Nottage, 25, are charged with conspiracy.

Murry has been jailed in Columbus on charges that he killed Jarrel Ward, 24, of Starkville, in late July.

Sheriff's officials said Murry and Nottage planned that she would impersonate a Mississippi Department of Corrections officer and would pretend to take Murry into state custody.

Lowndes County Sheriff Mike Arledge said investigators learned of the plan before Nottage attempted it.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

On a mission to provide credible reporting and daily news to America's military, wherever they serve.

Mobile apps available: www.stripes.com/apps.

Eagles beat Falcons in season opener

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Nick Foles could end up playing a new position when Carson Wentz comes back if he keeps this up.

Foles caught another pass in a clutch spot to spark a sputtering offense that looked out of sync while the defense picked up right where it left off the last time it faced Atlanta.

After seeing their “world champions” banner unveiled, the Philadelphia Eagles took the first step toward trying to become the first team to repeat in 14 years by stopping Matt Ryan to Julio Jones on the final play again in an 18-12 victory over the Falcons on Thursday night.

Foles hardly looked like Super Bowl MVP until coach Doug Pederson called his number in the third quarter when the offense needed a spark. Foles caught a 15-yard pass from Nelson Agholor to extend a drive that ended with Jay Ajayi scoring the first of his two touchdown runs.

“It’s great to have it at the right time if you can catch a team (off guard),” Foles said. “Everybody loves a good trick play.”

Foles caught a 1-yard TD pass from tight end Trey Burton in the first half of Philadelphia’s 41-33 win over New England in the Super Bowl. That play was called “Philly Special” but Foles said “Philly Philly” in

the huddle. This one was called “Philly Philly” and Pederson said he borrowed it from New England’s playbook. Tom Brady dropped that pass.

“Offensively, we were sort of misfiring a little bit,” Pederson said. “Just were looking for a big play, somebody to make a play. It felt like the right time.”

If the Eagles need any help at receiver once Wentz is cleared to play after knee surgery last December, Foles is ready to go.

Well, not really.

A sloppy, mistake-filled game that featured 26 penalties came down to Ryan throwing an incomplete pass to Jones in the left corner of the end zone on the final play from Philadelphia’s 5.

Jones couldn’t come down with Ryan’s pass from the 2 in the right corner of the end zone in Atlanta’s 15-10 loss in the divisional round in January.

“It was *deja vu*,” said cornerback Ronald Darby, who covered Jones on the last play this time around instead of Jalen Mills. “Jones is one of the best but we got the stop.”

A weather delay pushed kickoff back 45 minutes, forcing fans to wait a bit longer for the championship ceremony. Wearing his gold Hall of Fame jacket, former safety Brian Dawkins riled up the sellout crowd

with owner Jeffrey Lurie by his side and led a chorus of “Fly Eagles Fly.”

It was the most excitement for a while on a hot, muggy night that seemed more like an August preseason game than a playoff rematch. Both teams looked rusty after many starters didn’t play much in preseason.

Here are some things we learned from the game:

Red Zone woes: The Falcons were 1-for-5 in the red zone after struggling inside the opponents’ 20 last year. Second-year offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian spent plenty of time in the offseason trying to improve the team’s scoring efficiency. Jones only had three TD catches last season. He had 10 receptions for 169 yards but didn’t score.

“It’s never discouraging,” Jones said. “We just got to keep working, stick together and make plays and get things called down there.”

Jay Train: Jay Ajayi had 62 yards rushing on 15 carries. His 11-yard TD run and 2-point conversion gave the Eagles a lead with 2:25 left. Ajayi ran in from the 1 on the drive Foles made the catch.

“I knew I would have a good day if I just stayed being myself and being the Jay Train,” Ajayi said.

Source: Kaepernick watched ad’s airing from Nike HQ

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — As Colin Kaepernick watched from the apparel giant’s headquarters in Oregon, Nike aired its highly anticipated ad featuring the quarterback known for his social protests during the NFL season opener Thursday night.

The spot highlighting the former 49ers quarterback locked in a grievance with the league aired during the first ad break in the third quarter of the Eagles-Falcons game, which started with no overt demonstrations by players during the national anthem.

A person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press that Kaepernick was watching the ad’s first television airing on NBC at an event held at Nike’s world headquarters in Beaverton, Ore. The person spoke on condition of

anonymity because details of the visit were not announced publicly.

Still, some attendees posted accounts of the visit on social media, including video of Kaepernick speaking to a crowd Thursday several hours before the ad aired.

“You have to think beyond what you see around you,” said Kaepernick, who hasn’t spoken to the media publicly since opting out of his contract with San Francisco and becoming a free agent in 2017.

“You have to see the future that you believe in and that you want not just for yourself but all the people you see globally,” he said.

Kaepernick’s deal with Nike for the 30th anniversary of the “Just Do It” campaign was the most polarizing issue in sports this week, prompting heated debate on several topics in-

cluding athletes protesting social injustice and Nike wading into political waters. Some fans responded to Kaepernick’s sponsorship deal by cutting or burning gear with Nike’s signature swoosh logo. Others argued the backlash and calls for a Nike boycott showed how debate has morphed beyond how to react to athletes trying to highlight issues like racial inequality and police shootings of unarmed minorities.

There were no clear-cut protests as “The Star-Spangled Banner” played before the game with both teams on the field and the song broadcasted nationally.

Eagles safety Malcolm Jenkins and defensive end Michael Bennett were on the sideline and neither really demonstrated during the song. Jenkins and Bennett regularly have either knelt or stayed off the field dur-

ing the anthem to protest social injustice and racial inequality. They have been among the most vocal protesters since Kaepernick began similar demonstrations in 2016. Jenkins stood with teammates while Bennett wandered behind them near the Eagles bench and adjusted his equipment.

Jenkins said he thinks players should shift the focus of the debate away from the anthem itself and back to the issues they are trying to highlight.

“I think there’s a huge need for us to turn the attention to not only the issues, but what players are actually doing in their communities to promote change,” he said. “We’re trying to move past the rhetoric of what’s right or what’s wrong in terms of the anthem and really focus on the systematic issues that are plaguing our communities.”

Week 2: No. 3 Georgia gets an early test

Associated Press

A couple of early conference games are the only ones matching ranked teams in week two of the college football season.

No. 3 Georgia faces what could be its toughest SEC East test when it goes to newly ranked and No. 24 South Carolina. In the Pac-12, No. 17 Southern California goes to No. 10 Stanford in a rematch of the conference title game last season.

Otherwise the schedule is dominated by nonconference games, with some ranked teams hitting the road like No. 2 Clemson, No. 13 Penn State, No. 15 Michigan State and No. 18 Mississippi State.

Five things to know about college football's week two.

Best game

No. 15 Michigan State at Arizona State.

There are a few candidates here, no clear-cut choice.

Clemson's trip to Texas A&M is fascinating because it will be the first measuring stick for Jimbo Fisher's Aggies, and it comes against the

team and coach that yanked control of the ACC away from Fisher's Florida State teams.

Penn State at Pittsburgh is a great old rivalry with a chance to be high-scoring.

Both the ranked vs. ranked games could have the most long-term impact.

But Spartans at Sun Devils is intriguing on a few levels. Michigan State struggled at home last week against Utah State. Should there be real concern? Arizona State looked great in its first game with Herm Edwards as coach, beating UTSA. How seriously should we take that performance?

Heisman watch

Stanford running back Bryce Love was held to 29 yards on 18 carries last week against San Diego State. Love had 24 runs of at least 30 yards when he was Heisman Trophy runner-up last season.

Love has a chance to get make up for the off game in a big way this week in prime time against the Trojans. In two losses to USC last season, Love ran for 285 yards. Last week against UNLV, the Trojans allowed 308 yards rushing and more than 7 per carry.

Numbers to know

9: Touchdown passes by Hawaii's Cole McDonald in leading the Rainbow Warriors to a surprising 2-0 start. Rice visits Hawaii this week, a chance for McDonald to put up more big numbers.

29: Consecutive games with a touchdown pass for Penn State's Trace McSorley. That's the longest current streak in FBS.

31: No. 25 Florida has won 31 straight games against Kentucky, the longest current winning streak between two teams in the country. The Wildcats visit the Gators.

1959: The last time Clemson won a game in Texas. The Tigers beat TCU in the Bluebonnet Bowl.

900: Ohio State needs one more victory to become the second school to reach 900 recognized by the NCAA. Michigan is the other. The Buckeyes host Rutgers.

Off the radar

Georgia Tech at South Florida.

ACC-AAC matchup, and one of several opportunities for Group of Five teams to make a statement this week by knocking off Power Five foes. In this one, it is also the first

real test for USF's Blake Barnett, the former blue-chip recruit who is playing quarterback for the Bulls. The Arizona State transfer, who started his career at Alabama, passed for 305 yards and three touchdowns last week against Elon of the FCS.

The Yellow Jackets had an easy victory against Alcorn State last week, putting up 439 yards rushing with their triple-option.

Other prime spots for a G5 over P5 victory include Arizona at Houston and Fresno State visiting Minnesota.

Hot seat watch

Kansas coach David Beaty is probably sitting on the hottest seat in the country with three victories in 37 games with the Jayhawks. Kansas began the season with yet another loss, this time to FCS Nicholls.

Kansas hits the road this week, where it has lost an NCAA record 46 straight games that dates back to a 2009 trip to UTEP. The Jayhawks are at Central Michigan on Saturday in what represents their best chance to snap the road skid and one of the few spots on the schedule where Beaty has a chance to build a little momentum.

UCLA's Kelly, Oklahoma's Riley match offensive wits

Associated Press

NORMAN, Okla. — Oklahoma's Lincoln Riley gets a chance to match wits with UCLA's Chip Kelly on Saturday in a game pitting two of the game's more gifted offensive coaches.

Riley took over at head coach last year, and the Sooners led the nation in total offense and quarterback Baker Mayfield won the Heisman Trophy. Kelly's offenses at Oregon were among the nation's best and he is back in the college ranks after a stint with the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles.

Riley expects his sixth-ranked Sooners (1-0) to be tested. His young defense will need to learn quickly to keep up.

"Knowing coach Kelly, his reputation offensively, they're

going to continue to challenge you, to play fast, put you in tough situations defensively," Riley said.

The 35-year-old Riley said he has learned from watching Kelly over the years.

"I think maybe the principles and packaging were always eye-popping, and I thought they were always creative too," Riley said. "You could always turn on the film and find something that was maybe a new idea or new wrinkle that you thought could help or build into your own system. When they were at Oregon, when those guys were on TV you were always trying to catch a peek of it to see what they were doing."

UCLA (0-1) is still adjusting. The Bruins blew a 10-point lead against Cincinnati and had just

306 yards in a 26-17 loss.

Worse, quarterback Wilton Speight was injured in the second quarter and his status for Saturday's game was uncertain. Freshman Dorian Thompson-Robinson stepped in last week and he may get the call in front of nearly 90,000 fans. The Sooners rolled to a 63-14 win over Florida Atlantic in their season opener.

Suspended players return: UCLA suspended six players for the opener, and they will be back Saturday: offensive lineman Boss Tagaloa, tight end Devin Asiassi, running back Soso Jamabo, defensive lineman Osa Odighizuwa, defensive back Mo Osling and defensive lineman Moses Robinson-Carr.

Murray's running: Oklahoma quarterback Kyler Murray

passed for 209 yards and two touchdowns against Florida Atlantic, but he ran just four times for 23 yards. He's capable of much more — the first-round Major League Baseball draft pick is one of the fastest Sooners. Last season, he took off for a 66-yard run on the first play against West Virginia.

Beamer ball: New Oklahoma special teams coach Shane Beamer got off to a great start against Florida Atlantic when Lee Morris blocked a punt and Curtis Bolton recovered it in the end zone during the first quarter. Riley said Beamer, the son of former Virginia Tech coach Frank Beamer, has helped the rest of the staff understand the importance of special teams. Oklahoma's top athletes have bought in — Bolton is a starting linebacker.

Williams, Osaka secure US Open final

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Serena Williams was a bit shaky at the start of her U.S. Open semifinal.

For all of six minutes.

That's how long it took her to drop the opening two games Thursday night. Williams spent the next hour playing flawlessly, particularly up at the net, grabbing 12 of 13 games to beat No. 19 seed Anastasiya Sevastova of Latvia 6-3, 6-0 and reach her ninth final at Flushing Meadows and 31st at all Grand Slam tournaments.

"I've been working hard on my volleys. I have won a few doubles championships, so I know how to volley," Williams said with a laugh, before adding this punch line: "I just usually come in only to shake hands."

With one more victory, Williams will earn her seventh U.S. Open championship and her 24th major singles trophy, equaling Margaret Court for the most in tennis history. Williams already owns the mark for the most in the half-century professional era; Court won some of hers against amateur competition.

On Saturday, Williams will face No. 20 seed Naomi Osaka, a 20-year-old who is the first Japanese woman to reach a Grand Slam final.

Osaka saved all 13 break points she faced Thursday and defeated 2017 runner-up Madison Keys 6-2, 6-4.

Asked during her on-court interview how she managed to stave off all of those break chances, Osaka replied with a laugh, "This is going to sound really bad, but I was just thinking, 'I really want to play Serena.'"

Why?

"Because she's Serena," Osaka said. "Like, what do you mean?"

Williams had lost in the semifinals in her previous two trips to New York — against Roberta Vinci in 2015 while bidding for a calendar-year Grand Slam, and against Karolina Pliskova in 2016.

A year ago, Williams missed the U.S. Open because she gave birth to her daughter, Olympia, during the tournament. She then dealt with complications related to blood clots.

The American returned to the

tour in February and to Grand Slam action at the French Open in May, when she had to withdraw from the field with an injured chest muscle. At her second major back, Wimbledon, she was the runner-up.

Now comes a chance to take a title and become, a few weeks shy of turning 37, the oldest woman to win a Slam in singles.

"It's honestly really incredible. A year ago, I was fighting for, literally, my life at the hospital after I had the baby," Williams said, her voice wavering. "So every day I step out on this court, I am so grateful that I have an opportunity to play this sport, you know? So no matter what happens in any match — semis, finals — I just feel like I've already won."

The key for Williams, really, was something of a new wrinkle: moving forward as much as possible.

Sevastova changes speeds and angles a lot, which helped her eliminate defending champion Sloane Stephens in the quarterfinals. In order to avoid too many lengthy exchanges

from the baseline, Williams and her coach, Patrick Mouratoglou, thought it made more sense to press Sevastova.

It worked. And how.

Williams won 24 of the 28 points when she went to the net. Add that to her usual powerful baseline game and always superb serve, which reached 120 mph, and this really was no contest at all.

"To come this far, so fast," Williams told the fans afterward, "I'm just beginning, you guys."

Osaka is at the beginning of what could be a marvelous career. She is the youngest woman to reach a U.S. Open final since 2009 and only has one tour-level title so far, which came on a hard court this season.

She was born in Japan, but moved to New York at the age of 3 and is now based in Florida. Her coach is Sascha Bajin, who used to be Williams' hitting partner.

Encouraged to direct a message to Williams, Osaka said, "I love you," then giggled and covered her face, before adding, "I love everybody."

MLB roundup

Lindor hits two home runs to lead Indians past Jays

Associated Press

TORONTO — Francisco Lindor had two solo homers and four RBIs, rookie Shane Bieber pitched into the seventh inning to remain unbeaten in nine road starts and the Cleveland Indians beat the Toronto Blue Jays 9-4 on Thursday night for their third straight win.

Cleveland trimmed its magic number to seven for clinching a third consecutive AL Central championship.

Lindor connected on Sam Gaviglio's third pitch for his 10th career leadoff homer and seventh this season. He went deep to right off Gaviglio again in the third for his eighth career multihomer game. Lindor

has 33 home runs, matching his total from last year. He added a two-run single in the fifth and singled again in the ninth.

Toronto's Rowdy Tellez doubled in the second and fourth after getting a pinch-hit double in his debut Wednesday, making him the first player in major league history with extra-base hits in each of his first three plate appearances.

Jason Kipnis hit a three-run homer off Blue Jays reliever Mark Leiter Jr. in the ninth.

Braves 7, Diamondbacks 6 (10): Dansby Swanson scored the go-ahead run on Yoshihisa Hirano's wild pitch in the 10th inning, and visiting Atlanta regrouped to beat Arizona after

blowing a two-run lead in the ninth.

Coming off a three-game sweep by Boston, the NL East-leading Braves jumped on Zack Greinke with homers by Kurt Suzuki and Johan Camargo to lead 6-4 heading into the ninth. But then A.J. Pollock hit a sacrifice fly and Paul Goldschmidt tied it with a homer off winner Jesse Biddle (5-1).

Cubs 6, Nationals 4 (10): Pinch-hitter David Bote had an RBI double and scored in the 10th inning as visiting Chicago came back to beat Washington in the opener of a four-game series.

Bote, who hit a two-out grand slam in the bottom of the ninth

to give the Cubs a 4-3 win over the Nationals on Aug. 12 in Chicago, knocked a 100 mph fastball from Jimmy Cordero (1-2) into right field to score Albert Almora Jr. Bote came home on a single by pinch-hitter Taylor Davis.

Padres 6, Reds 2: Francisco Mejia hit a solo homer and a three-run shot during his first start as his team's up-and-coming catcher, leading visiting San Diego over Cincinnati.

Mejia connected on his first two swings against Luis Castillo (8-12) for his first homers in the majors. The 22-year-old was called up Tuesday as the Padres get him ready for a bigger role next season.