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Admiral: Links to 'Fat Leonard' in the past

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
AND COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Vice Adm. Craig S. Faller, who has been nominated as commander for U.S. Southern Command, told a panel of senators on Tuesday that any questionable ties to the so-called "Fat Leonard" case are behind him.

Faller, a 1983 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy who has served as the senior military assistant to Defense Secretary Jim Mattis since January 2017, made the comments during a joint nomination hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

On Monday, The Washington Post reported Faller accepted dinners from Leonard Glenn Francis, the infamous defense contractor from Singapore known as "Fat Leonard" who confessed to bribing dozens

of U.S. Navy officials with expensive gifts, wild parties and prostitutes.

On Tuesday, Faller was adamant he didn't have nefarious contacts with Francis' affiliated companies, such as Glenn Defense Marine Asia or Glenn Marine Group. The Navy also had found no fault in his actions.

"After a lengthy and thorough investigation by several different law enforcement organizations, I was cleared of all wrongdoing," Faller said. "I've never solicited, accepted or asked for a gift from Glenn Marine Defense and every decision I made, event I attended, I had had ethics counsel review."

But the Fat Leonard report was a cloud over Faller's nomination Tuesday, and lawmakers appeared eager to hear from him about the scandal.

"I know you are prepared to address

comments that were raised recently in the press, which I think are important to get before the committee," Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., ranking Democrat for the Senate Armed Services Committee, said apparently referencing the Fat Leonard case. "There are certain allegations that have arisen with respect with your participation. But my understanding is that they've all been fully investigated, ... you've been exonerated from any culpability."

Faller's service includes commanding the destroyer USS Stethem and the cruiser USS Shiloh. He later commanded Carrier Strike Group 3 and has supported operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Faller's other assignments include serving as an assistant to the U.S. Pacific Command and U.S. Central Command chiefs, and later as director of operations for Central Command.

Gen. Abrams: US-S. Korea exercises are top priority

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
AND COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Gen. Robert B. Abrams, nominated to become commander of U.S. Forces Korea, told a panel of senators on Tuesday that the pause in U.S.-South Korea military exercises could eventually hurt troop readiness and would be a top priority under his watch.

Abrams, who also would lead United Nations Command and Combined Forces Command in Korea if confirmed, made the comments during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing to vet him for these jobs.

The joint exercises were stopped following the June summit in Singapore between President Donald Trump and North Korea's Kim Jong Un, a move that drew criticism that the lack of training would

hurt military readiness on the peninsula.

"That's hard to judge, and to be honest, if confirmed, this will be one of my top priorities when I get on the ground... to do my own personal assessment," Abrams, who now leads U.S. Army Forces Command, told the committee.

"I know from my 36-plus years of service about what a shelf life is of readiness of our forces, to be able to conduct certain activities. But I need to apply that judgment based on what I assess when I get on the ground."

Abrams, who has commanded U.S. Army Forces Command since August 2015, was nominated this year to command U.S. Forces Korea, replacing Gen. Vincent Brooks, who is departing the post after two years.

Abrams has been vocal that a pause in the joint exercises on the Korean Peninsula could

eventually hurt readiness.

"I think that there was certainly degradation to the readiness of the force for the combined forces. That's a key exercise to maintain continuity and to continue to practice our interoperability," Abrams said of the pause. "And so there was a slight deviation, but I have great confidence" in the mitigation plan until the next series of exercises are planned.

Abrams said he has seen some of the mitigation plan, which includes participation at smaller training exercises, but not at the same scope of the large-scale ones.

Following the June 12 summit in Singapore, Trump stunned U.S. lawmakers, allies and Pentagon officials with an announcement halting military exercises with U.S. ally South Korea.

The United States and South Korea conduct two major sets of

military exercises each year — Foal Eagle and Key Resolve in the spring and Ulchi Freedom Guardian, which was slated for August. They also hold smaller training exercises throughout the year.

Abrams has led Army Forces Command, the largest organization in the service, since August 2015 and in that role is responsible for ensuring combat soldiers are trained and prepared to deploy.

Abrams' other previous assignments included serving as the senior military adviser to then-Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel. He commanded the Army's 3rd Infantry Division, including a deployment to Afghanistan. Before that, he commanded the Army's National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif.

Mattis: US focus in Syria is ISIS defeat

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — U.S. troops have been fighting Islamic State militants in Syria for four years and will remain in eastern portions of the war-torn country until American leaders are convinced the terrorist group cannot mount a return, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Monday.

For now, ISIS remains the sole focus for the roughly 2,000 American troops in Syria, whose objectives include aiding Syrian Democratic Forces in defeating the terrorist group and training local security forces to protect areas already purged of the group, Mattis told reporters at the Pentagon.

It was a similar refrain from the defense chief who has long

insisted U.S. troops were only in Syria to face down ISIS.

“Our troops are there for that one purpose right now,” Mattis said of the fight against ISIS. “We obviously have got to train up local security forces, so that ISIS and others ... cannot get in. That’s part of the defeat of ISIS.”

But his comments followed statements by national security adviser John Bolton that American forces had other roles in Syria.

Earlier Monday, Bolton told The Associated Press that American troops would remain in Syria as long as Iranian-controlled forces were in the country propping up Syrian President Bashar Assad, whose forces have been locked in a seven-year civil war also

backed by Russia.

“We’re not going to leave as long as Iranian troops are outside Iranian borders and that includes Iranian proxies and militias,” Bolton said.

Earlier this year, President Donald Trump signaled that he was considering the pullout of U.S. troops from Syria. Trump said last week that he would make a decision soon about the future of the American troops there.

Mattis on Monday declined to make the same assertion as Bolton about Iranian forces. Still, the former Marine general insisted there was “no daylight” between his and Bolton’s position on Syria. Mattis said the two men had spoken twice already Monday, but he referred questions about Bolton’s

statement to the White House.

Mattis placed blame for the ongoing bloodshed in Syria on Russia and Iran. Without their support for Assad, Mattis said the war would have ended years ago. He encouraged all sides to support the U.N.-led peace process to end the war.

In eastern Syria, U.S. troops and Syrian Democratic Forces are fighting ISIS in their final stronghold of Hajin, a town on the Euphrates River about 20 miles from the Iraqi border. Mattis declined to say how long that fight could last. U.S. officials have estimated ISIS still boasts 1,000 to 2,000 fighters in the area.

“That fighting is ongoing,” Mattis said. “As we forecasted, it’s been a tough fight, and we are winning.”

Marines opt for new ACVs instead of AAV upgrades

By WILL MORRIS
Stars and Stripes

Marine ground troops will say goodbye to the venerated amphibious assault vehicle much sooner than planned, after the Marine Corps torpedoed a program to upgrade the vehicles for future use.

The Marine Corps ordered the company contracted to perform the upgrade to halt work on Aug. 27 after the service sank \$125 million into the program.

Instead of extending the service life of the legacy vehicle, the Marines will speed up production and delivery of the new amphibious combat vehicle, Marine Corps Combat Development Command said in an email to Stars and Stripes on Tuesday.

It hasn’t been determined how the remaining \$96 million in funding for the upgrade project will be spent, but Manny Pacheco, a spokesman for Ma-

rine Corps Systems Command, said one option would be to spend the money on developing the vehicle’s successor.

In June, the Marines awarded a \$198 million contract option to BAE Systems to begin low-rate initial production of 30 amphibious combat vehicles, dubbed ACV 1.1, after its design beat a prototype by SAIC in competitive trials. The contract’s total value, if all options are executed, could amount to \$1.2 billion.

The first vehicles are expected to be delivered by fall 2019 to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force’s 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion out of Camp Pendleton, Calif.

The “AmTrac,” as the amphibious assault vehicle has been known, entered the fleet in 1972. It has been a mainstay of the Marine Corps, serving in combat operations around the world.

Mounting casualties prompt shift in Afghanistan tactics

By PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan is adjusting tactics to address mounting casualties among local security forces, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said this week.

Mattis said the international coalition — which focuses on training, advising and assisting Afghan forces — had begun providing more support in other areas. He didn’t elaborate.

“The Afghan army has taken severe casualties over the past year and a half,” Mattis told reporters Monday at the Pentagon. Mattis stopped short of calling the casualty rate unsustainable when asked if it was.

Mattis’ comments came a day after Afghan Defense Minister Gen. Tariq Shah Bahrami told parliament’s upper house that the past month had been the deadliest ever for the Afghan army.

“Unfortunately, in the last month, 513 [Afghan National

Army] soldiers were killed, 718 wounded and 43 captured; it was the highest number of fatalities we have had in a single month,” Bahrami said, according to Afghanistan’s TOLO News.

Adding to the toll were the Taliban’s storming of Ghazni city — which required U.S. special operations forces and air power to tackle — and attacks on three military bases in different parts of the country in August. Bahrami said enemy casualties during the same period were three to four times higher.

Afghan casualties, an important number for gauging success in the U.S.’s longest war, now in its 17th year, have largely been kept from the public since last year. In October, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction said it had been asked by the U.S. military not to publish casualty data, attrition rates or recruitment numbers.

U.S. Forces-Afghanistan said much of the information was being restricted at the request of the Afghan government.

Sailors give back on Guam after Valiant Shield drills

BY CHRISTIAN LOPEZ
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS Ronald Reagan strike group arrived in Guam this week after wrapping up “successful” Valiant Shield drills in the Northern Marianas, a Task Force 70 statement said.

The weeklong, U.S.-only exercise included 15,000 sailors, airmen, soldiers and Marines participating in maritime security operations, anti-submarine and air-defense drills and a sinking exercise in which a decommissioned ship was used for live-fire training.

“Our assets performed remarkably well during the event,” Cmdr. Randy Reed of Submarine Group 7 said in a 7th Fleet statement. “There were a lot of lessons learned, which for our submarine crews and commanders is a critical aspect of operational readiness.”

Capt. Pat Hannifin, who took the helm of the Ronald Reagan on Sept. 10, said the sailors were excited about the port visit to Guam.

“After demonstrating United States strength and resolve across the region for the last month and completing combat exercises in local waters, Reagan sailors have looked forward

to visiting Guam for some time now,” he said in the Task Force 70 statement.

Sailors from the strike group planned to take part in community outreach projects, such as cleaning up Guam beaches and interacting and helping kids in schools, the statement added.

Ronald Reagan sailors also helped with recent Typhoon Mangkhut recovery efforts after the storm lashed area islands with winds exceeding 100 mph.

The nation’s only forward-deployed aircraft carrier has been on patrol of the Indo-Pacific region since leaving its Yokosuka homeport in August.

Plans set to commission 4th USS Indiana

Associated Press

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Indiana residents are set to celebrate the commissioning of the first Navy vessel to bear the state’s name since the end of World War II.

The commissioning ceremony for the USS Indiana will be held Saturday in Cape Canaveral, Fla., The South Bend Tribune reported.

The nearly 380-foot-long sub can reach speeds of more than 25 knots.

Construction on the new vessel began in 2012. Many Indiana manufacturers made parts for it, including Elkhart Brass, Hoosier Spring Co. and Dwyer Instruments.

The Navy received the new sub in June.

The nonprofit USS Indiana Commissioning Committee has been traveling around the state to educate students about the vessel. The nonprofit aims to create a relationship between the submarine, the crew and Indiana communities, said Chairman Ray Shearer.

The submarine is the fourth vessel to be named after Indiana. Two others were battleships — one used during the 1898 Spanish-American War and the other during World War II.

There are about a dozen living members of the former World War II battleship and one member living in Muncie plans to attend the commissioning ceremony, Shearer said.

Report: China denies port call in Hong Kong

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

Beijing has denied a U.S. port visit to Hong Kong amid trade tensions and sanctions, according to The Wall Street Journal on Tuesday.

The USS Wasp was planning to make a port call to Hong Kong next month, but unnamed military officials told the Journal that Chinese officials rejected the Navy’s request.

The denial comes a day after

the U.S.’s new 10-percent tariffs on \$200 billion of annual Chinese imports went into effect. The U.S. also recently issued sanctions on China after discovering the country had bought fighter jets and a surface-to-air missile system from Russia.

The purchases contravene a U.S. law passed in 2017 that allows the Trump administration to target Russia, Iran and others with sanctions.

The Navy regularly sends

its ships on patrols through the South and East China seas to maintain freedom of navigation through the international waters that China attempts to claim. The country is militarizing reclaimed land in the seas and regularly disputes the sovereignty of islands in the region.

China also rejected a Navy carrier strike group’s request to make a Hong Kong port call in 2016, the Pentagon said at the time.

Marine vet known for role in ‘Aliens’ dies at 75

BY MARTIN EGNASH
Stars and Stripes

Marine veteran Al Matthews, 75, who gained fame as Gunnery Sgt. Apone in the movie “Aliens,” died Sunday, in Alicante, Spain.

The cause of death is under investigation, Spanish emergency services officials said.

Matthews, a Vietnam War veteran, acted in many other

action films, including “Superman III” and “The Fifth Element.” But he is probably best remembered for his role as the tough-as-nails, cigar-chewing, Colonial Marine Gunnery Sgt. Apone in the 1986 movie “Aliens,” directed by James Cameron.

While serving in Vietnam, Matthews was meritoriously promoted to the rank of sergeant, the first African-Ameri-

can Marine in the 1st Marine Division to achieve that distinction, according to his biography in IMDb.

In a documentary about the making of “Aliens,” Matthews credited his performance to his training and experience in the Marine Corps. On set, the veteran Marine would make his platoon of actors maintain weapon discipline and firearm safety standards with their

prop weapons.

“Everyone’s instinct is automatically to put their fingers on the trigger, and they stopped doing that on set with me,” Matthews said in the documentary. “That’s the way I was trained, thank you very much, America. If you put your finger on the trigger when you’re talking or waving your weapon around, I’m gonna jam it down your throat.”

GOP ramps up Kavanaugh confirmation fight

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Brett Kavanaugh says he won't let "false accusations drive me out of this process" as he, President Donald Trump and top Republicans mount an aggressive drive to rally the public and GOP senators behind his shaky Supreme Court nomination.

Trump and Republican leaders accused Democrats on Monday of a smear campaign by using accusations by two women of sexual misconduct by Kavanaugh in the 1980s to try scuttling his Senate confirmation. There were no immediate indications that the emergence of a second accuser had fatally wounded Kavanaugh's prospects, but the nominee took the unusual step of defending himself in a television interview that underscored the GOP's new-found combativeness.

Kavanaugh, 53, said on the conservative-friendly Fox News Channel that he

wasn't questioning that his initial accuser, psychology professor Christine Blasey Ford, may have been sexually assaulted in her life. But he added, "What I know is I've never sexually assaulted anyone," a remarkable assertion for a nominee to the nation's highest court.

Kavanaugh's TV appearance came three days before a crucial Senate Judiciary Committee hearing at which he and his chief accuser, Christine Blasey Ford, were slated to testify. That session loomed as a do-or-die wild card for Kavanaugh in which a split-second facial expression, a tear or a choice of words could prove decisive.

On Monday, Trump called the accusations among "the single most unfair, unjust things to happen to a candidate for anything." Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., angrily accused Democrats of slinging "all the mud they could manufacture" and promised a full Senate vote soon, but specified no date.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York retorted that if McConnell believed the allegations were a smear, "why don't you call for an FBI investigation?" He accused Republicans of "a rush job to avoid the truth."

The similar wording and arguments that Republicans used suggested a concerted effort to undermine the women's claims and portray an image of unity among GOP senators while pressing toward a confirmation vote.

Despite the forceful rhetoric by Kavanaugh and his GOP supporters, it remained unclear how three moderate Republicans — Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Arizona's Jeff Flake and Alaska's Lisa Murkowski — would react to the latest accusation. With the GOP's Senate control hanging on a razor-thin 51-49 margin, defections by any two Republican senators would seal his fate if all Democrats vote "no."

More rain aims for SC as flooding continues

Associated Press

YAUHANNAH, S.C. — The soggy remnants of Florence keep causing chaos in coastal South Carolina long after the hurricane swirled ashore, with rivers still flowing far beyond their banks and a new storm gathering more rain just offshore.

Authorities urged up to 8,000 people leave their homes in Georgetown County, on the South Carolina coast, as the Pee Dee and Waccamaw rivers overflowed with a record 10 feet of flooding reaching a crest in their communities Tuesday.

Some places along Georgetown's waterfront were predicted to flood for the first

time since record keeping began before the American Revolution.

The National Hurricane Center said a broad area of low pressure about 300 miles south of Cape Hatteras, N.C., is producing showers and thunderstorms on its north side. Forecasters said it had potential to become a tropical depression Tuesday as it approached the coast, but was expected to dump rain regardless on coastal areas of North and South Carolina.

Pastor Willie Lowrimore and some of his congregants initially stacked sandbags around their South Carolina church as the hurricane approached. Then they

moved the pews to higher ground. Finally, the rank black water seeped around and over the sandbags on Monday, flooding the sanctuary.

"I'm going to go one day at a time," Lowrimore said as the river ruined the church he built almost 20 years ago. "Put it in the Lord's hands. My hands aren't big enough."

Ten days after Florence came ashore, the storm caused fresh chaos Monday in Yauhannah and elsewhere across South Carolina, where rivers kept rising and thousands more people were told to be ready to evacuate.

Iran video threatens missile strikes on UAE, Saudi Arabia

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — An Iranian media outlet close to the country's hard-line Revolutionary Guard published a video Tuesday threatening the capitals of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates with missile attacks, further raising regional tensions after a weekend militant attack on a military parade in Iran.

The video tweeted and later deleted by the semi-official Fars news agency comes as Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei blamed Riyadh and Abu Dhabi for the attack in the city of Ahvaz on Sat-

urday, which killed at least 25 people and wounded over 60.

The threat amplifies the unease felt across the greater Persian Gulf, which is seeing Iran's economy upended in the wake of America's withdrawal from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers and Saudi and Emirati forces bogged down in their yearslong war in Yemen.

Meanwhile, Iranian officials on Tuesday identified the five men who carried out the parade attack, which authorities have blamed on Arab separatists. At least two of the men identified have appeared in a video distributed by the Islamic State in its

own claim of responsibility for the Ahvaz attack. This further complicates the process of determining who exactly was behind the assault.

The Fars video shows file footage of previous ballistic missile attacks launched by the Guard, then a graphic of a sniper rifle scope homing in on Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. The video also threatened Israel.

"The era of the hit-and-run has expired," Khamenei's voice is heard in the video, the segment taken from an April speech by the supreme leader. "A heavy punishment is underway."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Heist suspect also accused of disrobing

MO SPRINGFIELD — Authorities said a man found naked last month underneath a desk at a Missouri park office is now accused of stealing a work truck at another park and shedding his clothes.

The Springfield News-Leader reported that Peter Gilbreth, 50, of Joplin, is charged with tampering with a motor vehicle and sexual misconduct in the Sept. 19 incident at Ritter Springs Park in Greene County.

Court documents say Gilbreth emerged from the stolen truck wearing only shoes and then attempted to get into a bathroom as a woman was preparing the facility for a school field trip.

Stolen necklace has grandma's ashes

NY BUFFALO — A woman is asking for help from Buffalo residents to find a necklace containing the ashes of her grandmother that was stolen from her home.

University of Buffalo student Haley Lang said her grandmother died last year.

WIVB-TV reported someone broke into Lang's home last week and stole a number of items and cash from Lang and her roommates. She said everything can be replaced except the necklace, and she has posted pictures online seeking its return.

Odor from plant overwhelms neighbors

IA ESTHERVILLE — Residents of a northwest Iowa town say they're being overwhelmed by the stench from a nearby rendering plant.

Emmet County zoning administrator Barb Bohm said Estherville residents have filed

more than 300 odor complaints against the Central Bi-Products plant, mostly since May. Emmet County Supervisor Jeff Quastad said the odor from the plant smells "like death, like rotting flesh."

The county Board of Supervisors has decided to pursue fines against the plant for violating its use permit.

Dan Hildebrandt, CEO of Farmers Union Industries, the parent company of Central Bi-Products, told Emmet County supervisors the plant problems were caused in part by a fire and a management change.

Man held over drive-by paintball gun attacks

OR BEND — Authorities said a 19-year-old man was arrested in central Oregon after a series of drive-by paintball gun attacks.

Bend police said Zachary Taylor Richardson fired yellow and pink paintballs while cruising around town in a white Hyundai hatchback on Sept. 15 and 16.

There were at least 10 attacks reported by people who were pelted by the paintballs.

Richardson faces 25 criminal charges including unlawful use of a weapon, harassment, reckless endangerment and disorderly conduct.

Tire being pumped hits man in head, kills him

WI SPRING BOOK — Authorities in western Wisconsin said a man inflating a wagon tire was killed when the tire struck him in the head.

Dunn County sheriff's officials said the man was changing the tire on a wagon and while the tire was being inflated it depressurized, and the escaping air launched the tire and rim into the man's head.

The sheriff's office said Seth Splitter, 20, of rural Elk Mound, died at the scene.

Auto shop catches fire when car crashes into it

FL TAMPA — Fire officials said a Florida auto shop erupted in flames when a vehicle crashed into it.

Tampa Fire Rescue reported multiple people called 911 early Saturday to report the fire at a Havoline Express Lube shop. The Tampa Bay Times reported that flammable liquids inside the building ignited to make the fire more intense.

No one was found inside, and responders could not find the driver of the vehicle.

Oh, baby! Zoo rhino is pregnant, due in 2019

NY BUFFALO — The Buffalo Zoo said a new addition is coming to join its rhinos.

The zoo said Tashi, a greater one-horned rhinoceros, is pregnant and is expected to give birth in the summer of 2019.

The greater one-horned rhino was critically endangered and almost extinct until conservation efforts helped the population rebound to about 3,500 in India and Nepal.

Baby found crawling on road is unharmed

NJ LAKEWOOD — Authorities said a baby girl found crawling across a busy street was unharmed after a neighbor and passing motorist came to her aid.

Cory Cannon, 41, of Eatontown, told the Asbury Park Press he saw the girl on Joe Parker Road and initially thought she was a toy. When he saw the child moving, he got

out of his car to stop traffic.

A neighbor got the baby and returned the child to her home. Authorities said the baby may have left through a door left open by an older sibling.

Man gets 20 years for bat attack on athlete

MT MISSOULA — A Missoula man who attacked a Special Olympics athlete with a baseball bat, causing a severe head injury, was sentenced to 20 years in prison with eight years suspended.

KTMF-TV reported Paul Ekstedt was sentenced Friday for the June 14 attack on Gary Fuller.

Police said a witness told them that she, Ekstedt and Fuller were on their way to dinner when Ekstedt struck the victim on the head, knocking him to the floor. Fuller underwent emergency surgery, and his father said he was on a ventilator for a time.

A chemical dependency evaluation diagnosed Ekstedt with a methamphetamine use disorder, and his attorney said Ekstedt has bipolar disorder.

Feeding of eagles in city is banned

AK KETCHIKAN — The Ketchikan City Council passed an ordinance banning feeding wild eagles within city limits.

The Ketchikan Daily News reported the ordinance also prohibits property owners from allowing other people to feed eagles on their property. Violations are punishable by fines of up to \$500.

Council member Mark Flora said he supports the ordinance because he believes feeding eagles poses a risk to public safety and could lead to habituation.

From wire reports

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and Military News

NBA teams getting new season started

Associated Press

There were some Larry O'Brien trophies on display at Golden State's media day on Monday, shiny golden reminders of the three championships the Warriors have picked up over the past four years.

Their quest for another is about to begin.

So will the quest by 29 other teams to thwart them.

The offseason is over in the NBA. Most teams held media day Monday, the prelude to the start of training camps. And just like last year, those camps — from Hawaii to British Columbia to Massachusetts and 27 other spots in between — will begin with the Warriors reigning over the league and everyone else pining to get on Golden State's level.

"We've got a long way to go to get to Golden State," said LeBron James, who left Cleveland — and what became an annual date with Golden State in the NBA Finals — for the Los Angeles Lakers over the summer. "They can pick up right where

they left off ... we're picking up from scratch. So we have a long way to go. We can't worry about what Golden State is doing. Golden State is Golden State and they're the champions."

With the exception of Dallas and Philadelphia, who were permitted to start camp early because they're headed to China for preseason games, every NBA club held its first practice of the season on Tuesday. The Los Angeles Clippers are going to Hawaii, Denver is headed to San Diego, Toronto is setting up camp a few miles outside of Vancouver.

Whether they're going on the road or staying home, the goal for every club — the Warriors included — is the same: Be better.

"There's one team that's figured it out, all right?" Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said. "Golden State has figured it out. They have the template right now. Everybody else is just trying to figure it out. Some people think they have a better track at it than others. Prove it.

That's the whole point of this association. It's competition and you've got to prove it."

Warriors guard Stephen Curry said he was eager for media day, calling it "the official start to another season."

"Excited to get back to work, get the guys back together. Look forward to chasing another championship," Curry said in a video posted to the Warriors' social media channels.

James made his debut in a Lakers uniform out in Los Angeles. In Toronto and San Antonio, new Raptors forward Kawhi Leonard and new Spurs guard DeMar DeRozan talked about the summertime blockbuster that saw them changing jerseys. Up in Boston, Gordon Hayward talked about how he's finally been able to play 5-on-5 again in recent weeks after his first season with the Celtics ended with a horrific leg injury on opening night.

"There's nothing like playing basketball," Hayward said. "There's nothing like in-game stuff that you can't get from

drills."

Preseason games start Friday, with Boston going to Chapel Hill, N.C. and set to face Charlotte. The Hornets are training in Chapel Hill, which undoubtedly pleases team owner — and Tar Heels legend — Michael Jordan. That same night, Philadelphia plays Australian club Melbourne United.

Those are the first two of 79 preseason games on the calendar, running through Oct. 12.

And then on Oct. 16, it begins for real with Philadelphia visiting Boston and Oklahoma City headed to Golden State — the night when the Warriors will pick up their latest championship rings.

"The excitement that I have right now to get this thing rolling and get on out to training camp, it's unbelievable," said Carmelo Anthony, who signed with Houston this summer in an effort to push the Rockets over the top in the Western Conference. "Big shoutout to the fans. You guys won't be disappointed this year."

Woods' win helps build Ryder Cup buzz

Associated Press

SAINT-QUENTIN-EN-YVELINES, France — Already the most intense competition in golf, the Ryder Cup doesn't need help to boost the excitement.

Tiger Woods managed to take it to another level.

He looked like the Woods of old by leading the final 36 holes of the Tour Championship, not letting anyone near him until it was too late, a vintage performance made all the more remarkable by four back surgeries and a future that looked bleak only a year ago.

Woods was a vice captain at the Presidents Cup a year ago this week and said he envisioned a scenario where he never returned to competition. One PGA Tour event into his return, Jim Furyk selected him as a vice captain for the Ryder Cup.

And then he picked him for the team. And then Woods won for the first time in more than five years.

"It's obviously a nice buzz for our team," Furyk said Monday, a few hours after the

American charter plane landed in Paris.

Monday was as much a time to reflect on Woods as it was to rest up for a busy week at Le Golf National.

"I spent 25 years playing professional golf with Tiger Woods on the scene, and any time he does anything great, that's a story. And that's where we want to see him," said Bjorn, the only player to be paired with Woods over 72 holes and beat him. That was in Dubai in 2001.

"He does so much for the game of golf," Bjorn said. "Watching that last night, I thought it was brilliant. It was great for the greater aspect of the game."

NBC Sports Group said the overnight TV rating from the Tour Championship was 5.21, the highest-rated telecast in the 12-year history of the FedEx Cup playoffs, which cover 48 events featuring some of the strongest fields of the year.

That was the highest rating of the year this side of the majors, and the highest for the Tour Championship dating to 2000.

"In the end, whatever it is these 24 guys are going to do this week, the game of golf

needs that boost of somebody like him that transcends the game to the masses," Bjorn said. "So for everyone in golf, it's brilliant."

Now that Woods is back on his game, the hope for Furyk and the U.S. team is that he's not back to Ryder Cup form.

For all that he has achieved — 80 victories on the PGA Tour, 14 majors, No. 1 in the world for 683 weeks — he has a 13-17-3 record in Ryder Cup matches, and he has played on only one winning team since his first one in 1997.

The Americans have not won the Ryder Cup away from home since 1993, a drought Furyk has been hearing about since he was appointed captain in January 2017. The Americans have confidence from winning big at Hazeltine two years ago — Woods was a vice captain that week — and from a team that boasts nine major champions.

That makes them favorites on paper. And that means little, as recent history would suggest. Even with the loss two years ago, Europe still has won eight out of the last 11 times dating to that '93 American victory at The Belfry.

Steelers hold off Bucs for first win

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — It was not the way Ben Roethlisberger would draw it up, but the Pittsburgh Steelers will take it.

In desperate need of a win, the two-time defending AFC North champions capped a tumultuous week in which star receiver Antonio Brown made headlines by shouting at an assistant coach on the sidelines and getting into a spat on social media with a 30-27 victory over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Monday night.

The Steelers (1-1-1) built a 20-point lead and held on for their first win despite not scoring after halftime.

“I don’t feel like we had the ball much in the second half. Three possessions maybe. We need to do a better job putting it away,” Roethlisberger said.

“At the end of the day we just wanted to get out of here with a win,” cornerback Joe Haden

added. “It wasn’t a good-looking win at all. They made a lot of plays on us, but at the end we made some big stops.”

Roethlisberger threw for 353 yards and three touchdowns, with all but 80 yards of that production coming while the Steelers were building a 30-10 halftime lead.

Vance McDonald scored on a 75-yard pass play and finished with four catches for 112 yards. Brown and Ryan Switzer also had first-half TD receptions for Pittsburgh, which had been winless through two games for the first time since 2013.

The Pittsburgh defense did its part, too, forcing four turnovers, including three first-half interceptions of Ryan Fitzpatrick, the 35-year-old journeyman who threw for 819 yards and eight touchdowns in two victories to begin Tampa Bay’s season.

Fitzpatrick, the only player in NFL history to open a season

with consecutive games with over 400 yards passing and four touchdowns, tried his best to create “FitzMagic” again in his third start in place of the suspended Jameis Winston.

He led a long field-goal drive in the third quarter, and then tossed fourth-quarter TD passes of 4 yards to Chris Godwin and 24 yards to Mike Evans to rally the Bucs (2-1) within 30-27 with 5:43 remaining.

“We obviously dug ourselves a pretty big hole,” Fitzpatrick said. “The great thing to me coming out of this game is again the belief in the huddle in the second half and guys not wavering and not blinking and having the feeling the whole time that we were going to come back and win the game.”

The Bucs got the ball back with just over three minutes left; however, the Steelers forced a punt and Roethlisberger ran out the clock.

Fitzpatrick, who sacked

three times, finished 30-for-50 for 411 yards and three TDs.

“We just did so many things in the first half of that game that we haven’t been doing, so many things to beat ourselves,” Bucs coach Dirk Koetter said. “I’m really proud of the way we fought. You’re down three touchdowns or three scores at halftime, it’s not easy to come back in this league,” Koetter added. “We gave ourselves a chance there at the end and just couldn’t pull it off.”

Roethlisberger was 30 of 38 with one interception, completing nine passes to JuJu Smith-Schuster for 116 yards and six to Brown for 50 yards.

Fitzpatrick threw interceptions on three consecutive pass attempts during one stretch of the second quarter. The first stopped a promising drive at the Steelers’ 6, and linebacker Bud Dupree returned the last one 10 yards for a touchdown that put the Steelers up 23-7.

QB Garoppolo’s season ends with torn ACL

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Jimmy Garoppolo’s addition last season immediately turned around the fortunes of the San Francisco 49ers. Now the 49ers will have to go back to life before Garoppolo for the rest of the season.

The Niners announced Monday that Garoppolo tore the ACL in his left knee while making a cut late in a loss at Kansas City, sidelining him for the rest of the season.

“It is very unfortunate,” coach Kyle Shanahan said. “I’m not going to sugarcoat it. It was hard waking up today. We were down and disappointed about it because we were looking forward a lot to playing with Jimmy this year and going through the good and the bad knowing that he’d benefit from all of it. Now we don’t get to do it. I know Jimmy is really down about it and so are we but it’s still going to be all right.”

The injury deals a serious blow to the 49ers (1-2), who had planned their rebuild around Garoppolo and now must turn again to C.J. Beathard at quarterback.

Garoppolo will undergo surgery in the next week or two after the swelling goes down and should be ready to play again

next season. The 49ers are planning to bring several veterans in for tryouts this week, including Tom Savage, Kellen Clemens, possibly T.J. Yates and Matt Moore.

The Niners struggled with Beathard and Brian Hoyer last season before the midseason addition of Garoppolo changed their fortunes. San Francisco won the final five games last year after Garoppolo took over as starter and the team rewarded him with a \$137.5 million, five-year contract.

The 49ers will have to wait another year to earn dividends on that investment. Garoppolo got hurt in the fourth quarter of a 38-27 loss Sunday when he was scrambling toward the sideline and decided to cut up field instead of going out of bounds.

Garoppolo’s left knee buckled just before Kansas City cornerback Steven Nelson delivered a big hit, ending what was supposed to be his first full season as a starter after just three games.

Expectations were high in San Francisco this season that the team could end a four-year playoff drought after Garoppolo had a full offseason to immerse himself in Shanahan’s offense. But with Garoppolo and new running back Jerick McKinnon both knocked out for the season with torn ACLs in September, those high hopes have

been put on hold.

Garoppolo had completed 59.6 percent of his passes with five TDs, three interceptions and an average of 8.1 yards per attempt for a 90 passer rating. While he hasn’t been quite as efficient as he was late last year after being acquired at the trade deadline from New England for a second-round pick, the Niners offense has been far more potent than it was before he took over as quarterback.

Beathard started five games as a rookie last year, completing 54.9 percent of his passes with four touchdowns, six interceptions, 19 sacks, 6.4 yards per attempt and a 69.2 passer rating that was second lowest in the NFL.

Beathard threw a touchdown pass to George Kittle on his first snap Sunday only to have it negated by a penalty and wasn’t in for any other plays in the game.

“I have a lot of confidence in C.J.,” Shanahan said. “I think C.J. got a lot of experience last year. We liked him a lot coming out of college. ... He got thrown into as tough a situation as I could imagine a rookie quarterback being thrown in and the guy didn’t blink.”

A's clinch playoff berth, then beat M's

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Champagne flowed in the clubhouse as players bopped around and screamed in a wild celebration after the Oakland Athletics clinched their first playoff berth in four years.

"It's a lot of fun," a soaked Khris Davis said. "We're just trying to enjoy the moment. It's a blast. We've been waiting for this day for a while. I feel so much excitement. It's just a dream come true."

The surprising Athletics were assured no worse than an American League wild card Monday night when Tampa Bay lost to the New York Yankees. A few hours later, Oakland finished off a 7-3 victory over the Seattle Mariners behind Davis' major league-leading 46th home run.

Jonathan Lucroy, Jed Lowrie

and Matt Chapman also went deep for the A's.

And then, it was time to party.

Oakland was one out into the game when Tampa Bay was eliminated with a 4-1 loss to the Yankees. The A's went on to win after Chapman broke a 3-all tie with a two-run drive in the seventh off Shawn Armstrong (0-1).

Coming off three straight last-place finishes in the AL West, the A's (95-62) are 4½ games behind AL West-leading Houston. They trail the Yankees by 1½ games for home-field advantage should they meet in a wild-card matchup.

"No matter who we play or where it is, we'll be ready," Chapman said during the celebration. "I can't really put it into words, but this team is special."

Few predicted the A's could

make the playoffs this season, a young team with few proven stars after going 75-87 a year ago. Oakland won only 68 games in 2015 and 69 in 2016. The A's have the third-lowest payroll among the 30 major league clubs at \$78 million for their 40-man roster, ahead of only the White Sox and Rays.

"This happened for us quicker than most people thought it would," manager Bob Melvin said. "This is the best group I've had in all my years of managing. It's everybody playing for the guy next to him. We really wanted to win this game. Even though we knew we had clinched, we wanted to celebrate right after a win."

Oakland was 34-36 and 11 games behind Seattle in the wild-card race on June 15. The A's have gone 61-26 since.

"We've had some younger players mature and become,

for me, stars," Melvin said before the game. "We've gone from last year being one of the worst defenses in the league to now one of the best. Our bullpen has been a strength for us all year. We don't just rely on one facet. We seem to be able to win in different ways."

One big contributor is Davis, the team's designated hitter, with 120 RBIs. Davis has hit at least 40 homers and driven in more than 100 runs in each of this three seasons with the Athletics.

Blake Treinen, who pitched a perfect ninth inning, is 9-2 and one of the top closers in baseball this season with 37 saves and a 0.80 ERA, the lowest of all major league relievers with at least 75 innings pitched. Opponents have a .091 batting average against him with runners in scoring position.

MLB roundup

Red Sox set franchise record for victories with 106th

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Red Sox were still shaking hands on the field when the "106" went up in the win column of the AL East standings that are posted on the Green Monster.

Scoreboards flashed "106 Wins." Fans waved signs to celebrate breaking a record that has stood as long as Fenway Park itself.

"You think about all the history of the game and the history of this franchise," Boston manager Alex Cora said after the Red Sox beat the Baltimore Orioles 6-2 on Monday night to earn their record 106th victory and clinch home-field advantage throughout the playoffs.

"To be part of this, I can't even explain it. We should call timeout and enjoy this one," said Cora, who is in his first year as manager. "We know what we want to do in October, but this one ... for us to do it is amazing."

Mookie Betts had a pair of hits to leave his major league-best batting average at .343, and Nathan Eovaldi struck out 10 hapless batters to assure the Red Sox of the best record in the major leagues.

Yankees 4, Rays 1: Aaron Hicks injured his left hamstring running up the first-base line, another concern for visiting New York heading into next week's AL wild-card game.

Astros 5, Blue Jays 3: Brian McCann and Josh Reddick hit back-to-back home runs, and visiting Houston beat Toronto to move one step closer to its second straight AL West title.

The defending World Series champions reduced their magic number to two over Oakland to clinch the division — which would set up a best-of-five post-season matchup against AL Central champion Cleveland.

Dodgers 7, Diamondbacks 4: David Freese homered and had three hits to back Clayton Kershaw (9-5) as visiting Los

Angeles maintained its lead in the NL West.

Los Angeles added three ninth-inning runs to stay 1½ games ahead of Colorado.

Rockies 10, Phillies 1: Jon Gray (12-8) pitched seven crisp innings and drew a bases-loaded walk as part of a five-run third to lead host Colorado over Philadelphia.

The Rockies closed within a half-game of St. Louis for the second wild card.

Brewers 6, Cardinals 4: Eric Thames scored on reliever Bud Norris' throwing error in the eighth inning and visiting Milwaukee improved its playoff positioning by topping St. Louis.

The Brewers (90-67) opened a three-game lead over St. Louis for the top spot in the wild-card standings and pulled within 1½ games of the NL Central-leading Chicago Cubs.

Pirates 5, Cubs 1: Jameson Taillon (14-9) outpitched Cole Hamels (4-2), Francisco Cer-

velli hit a two-run homer and visiting Pittsburgh made Chicago wait at least another day to clinch a playoff spot.

Indians 4, White Sox 0: Corey Kluber (20-7) struck out 11 in seven scoreless innings and won his 20th game, and Brandon Guyer hit a go-ahead solo homer in the seventh as AL Central champion Cleveland beat host Chicago.

Nationals 7, Marlins 3: Anthony Rendon homered and drove four runs, Bryce Harper reached 100 RBIs in a season for the first time and host Washington beat Miami.

Padres 5, Giants 0: Bryan Mitchell (2-4) struck out seven in 8⅔ strong innings, and Jose Pirela had a homer among his three hits to lead visiting San Diego.

Angels 5, Rangers 4 (11): Jose Briceno delivered a pinch-hit homer leading off the 11th inning, and host Los Angeles snapped its five-game skid by beating Texas.