

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Navy sails near Paracels to dispute claim

Associated Press

BEIJING — A U.S. Navy destroyer sailed near the Paracel Islands last week in a challenge to China's claim to the waters around them.

The operation by the USS Wayne E. Meyer on Friday demonstrated that the waters are beyond what China can claim as its internal waters or territorial seas under international law, said Cmdr. Reann Mommsen, a spokeswoman for the Navy's Japan-based 7th Fleet.

China said that its air and naval forces

warned the Meyer to leave its waters.

A Defense Ministry statement accused the U.S. of conducting "hegemonic voyage activities" that seriously damage China's sovereign rights.

"China has indisputable sovereignty over the South China Sea islands and its adjacent waters," the statement read in part.

"No matter in what kind of proactive way a foreign warship has chosen to pose a challenge, it will not change that fact."

China, Taiwan and Vietnam have com-

peting claims to the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea.

Mommsen said the Meyer, a destroyer, was also challenging China's requirements that a foreign military vessel get permission or provide advance notification to pass through the waters.

"By engaging in innocent passage without giving notification to or asking permission from any of the claimants, the United States protested the unlawful restrictions imposed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam," she said in a statement.

NATO drill seeks to protect waters where Russia operates

By SCOTT WYLAND

Stars and Stripes

U.S. divers used underwater drones to find and clear simulated mines and submerged explosives in a NATO exercise that seeks to boost security in the Baltic Sea area, where Russia has grown more active.

Eighteen countries, 40 vessels and 3,000 personnel are participating in this year's two-week Northern Coasts exercise in the Danish straits, which link the Baltic and North seas.

"The Baltic Sea is of vital importance for the Alliance and is bordered by six NATO countries," NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu said in a statement. "Unfortunately, the security environment in the region

has deteriorated after Russia's illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimea and its continuing military buildup."

Northern Coasts, which runs until Thursday, is not only a show of force to potential adversaries but also provides troops with tactical training, NATO officials said in a statement.

In this year's exercise scenario, a fictitious country made territorial claims over islands in the Baltic Sea and used naval forces to threaten freedom of navigation.

Allies and partner nations countered the simulated threat through a coordinated effort that included maritime surveillance, naval combat, air defense, anti-submarine warfare and mine clearance.

Sailors used underwater drones to detect, identify and take images of threats and then cleared simulated mines and improvised explosives from the shore and water, the Navy said.

Unmanned submersibles, such as the torpedolike Remote Environmental Measuring Unit, or REMUS-100, help cut the time divers have to spend in dangerous waters, reducing the risk of loss of life, it said.

Mine warfare continues to be waged throughout the world, and nations work together in exercises like Northern Coasts to practice neutralizing those underwater threats so commanders know where to direct landing forces, the Navy said.

Two U.S. units — Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit

8 from Rota, Spain, and Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit 2 based in Virginia Beach, Va. — worked alongside allies in the mine clearance exercises.

As Russia grows more assertive, it has become increasingly important for the U.S. and its allies and partners to combine forces to safeguard the Baltic region, Adm. James Foggo, head of Naval Forces Europe and Africa, has said.

"We must commit and invest in a robust and capable naval presence to maintain regional stability," Foggo wrote Friday in an Atlantic Council newsletter. "Not doing so could be far more costly."

Military reports US troop killed in action in Afghanistan

Associated Press

A U.S. servicemember was killed in action in Afghanistan on Monday, the military said.

The name of the servicemember was being withheld until 24 hours after next of kin

notification, the U.S.-led NATO mission in Afghanistan said in a statement.

The coalition did not provide further details on the death, which is the 17th combat fatality in the country this year. The year is already the deadliest for

American troops since 2014, when the U.S. and its foreign allies transitioned from a combat mission to a largely training and advising focus.

The death earlier this month of Army Sgt. 1st Class Elis A. Barreto Ortiz, 34, in a roadside

bombing in the Afghan capital that killed 11 others, prompted President Donald Trump to call off scheduled talks with Afghan and Taliban officials at Camp David, Md., Trump said on Twitter days after the attack.

Marine tackles 2 students in school fight

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Two teens were engaged in fisticuffs on the grounds of a California school when a Marine sprinted across the lawn, tackling one of them from behind and taking both kids to the ground in an incident captured on video and now under investigation.

School district officials are looking into the matter, which took place last Wednesday at Edison High School in Stockton, the district wrote in an email after video of the incident began circulating widely on social media.

The footage shows Pfc. Josue Valdez Sarmiento stand up after the tackle, separate the two brawlers and strut away into the distance to join another Marine. One of the kids gets up, but the other doesn't and lays on the ground as adults arrive on the scene.

"He just wanted to do what was right for the school" when no one else was stepping in, said Sgt. Jocelyn Ontiveros at the Marines' Sacramento recruiting station, which oversees the

substation in Stockton where Valdez Sarmiento is helping out with recruiting while home from boot camp. "The Marine Corps doesn't condone violence."

A recent graduate of Edison High, Valdez Sarmiento was in a "boots and utes" — camouflage trousers and combat boots with a T-shirt and no uniform top.

He was touring the campus, speaking to students with recruiter Sgt. Sean Colosi when he saw the two boys scuffling, the Marine Corps said.

In the video, the boys are seen flailing their arms at each other. One kicks at the other before falling down, getting back up and kicking again. Few of either boy's blows appear to land anywhere but the other's arms or back.

"He saw a dangerous fight break out," Maj. Thomas E. Driscoll, the recruiting station's commanding officer, said in a statement. "We recognize Pfc. Valdez Sarmiento's desire to do the right thing."

But it seemed excessive, Edison High student Johnny

Hemphill told Stockton's KCRA News on Thursday.

"I feel like going at a kid, especially when he's not looking, makes more of an impact," Hemphill said.

Video of the event was posted Thursday on Marine Corps social media groups and forums, where some commenters have praised the Marine's initiative but questioned his execution.

A Reddit user who claimed to be Valdez Sarmiento posted an offer of "ask me anything," or AMA, on a Marine forum there.

"I am Josue Valdez Sarmiento, the Stockton high school [recruiter's assistant], up-and-coming offensive linesman and soon to be NJP'ed Marine. AMA!" the post read, using an abbreviation for nonjudicial punishment.

Another post sharing the video called the recent boot camp graduate a "tan belt warrior," a reference to the lowest color belt ranking in the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program, and deemed the students "two small teens."

A slowed-down version of the video shared on that post shows

the first boy's head snap back when Valdez Sarmiento wraps him up, and then his head snaps forward into the second kid as they all go to the ground.

"What was he actually thinking?" one commenter wrote. "U didn't have to break the kids back to stop them from fighting."

Neither of the students reported injuries immediately following the event, the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego said in a statement. The Stockton Police Department also had personnel on campus at the time and assisted with the situation after the kids were tackled, the statement said. The police told KCRA News that the school is handling the inquiry into the matter.

Meanwhile, videos of the event have been sent to the recruiting command, and Valdez Sarmiento has been counseled on better ways to intervene in the future, the recruit depot's statement said.

"We will continue to guide and mentor Marines to respond to stressful situations with the appropriate level of involvement," Driscoll said.

US airman killed in Calif. base accident tested parachutes

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

An airman killed in a parachuting accident last week was an enlisted leader of the Air Force's parachute-testing team and a combat veteran who had deployed to the Middle East in support of personnel recovery efforts.

Staff Sgt. Adam K. Erickson, 29, was killed on Sept. 10 during a training accident on a routine military proficiency jump, Edwards Air Force Base said in a news release last week.

He was assigned to the California base's 412th Test Wing and had served with the Joint Personnel Recovery Center in Qatar in 2016. More recently, he had served earlier this year as a jumpmaster and operations liaison in Romania, where the Air Force is deployed as part of the mission to deter Russian aggression in Europe.

At Edwards, Erickson was the noncommissioned officer in charge of test-parachutist program operations, the base said on its Facebook page, sharing a GoFundMe campaign started by the airman's sister.

The fundraiser was intended to defray travel costs for family, friends and colleagues coming to his funeral, which is scheduled for Wednesday in Ventura, Calif., near Erickson's hometown of Ojai. His sister, Lauren Andrews, upped the campaign's target on Sunday with plans to create permanent memorials in his hometown and at Edwards, she said in an update on the site over the weekend.

"We are overwhelmed by the generosity and support," she said. As of Monday morning, it had raised more than \$16,500 of a \$25,000 goal.

Erickson grew up in the area surrounding the upscale southern California re-

sort town and graduated from Nordhoff High School in 2008, Andrews said on Facebook.

He joined the Air Force to be a Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape specialist and waited a year for a slot to open before heading to basic training in Texas in November 2011. The following year, he began SERE training at Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, Wash., the post said.

Erickson transferred to Edwards in October 2018 for special duty as a test parachutist.

The only unit of its kind in the Air Force, the parachute testing team is part of the 418th Flight Test Squadron and is made up of a small number of airmen, including three jumpers from the 412th Operations Support Squadron's SERE section, Edwards said in a 2006 statement.

Troops warned to stop vaping amid scare

By CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

Servicemembers are being told to avoid vaping after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the habit may be linked to hundreds of cases of severe lung disease, and at least six deaths, in dozens of states.

The Army Public Health Center issued an alert last week warning soldiers and family members to avoid all electronic cigarette and vaping products, “particularly those sold off the street or modified to add any substances not intended by the manufacturer.”

Troops and their loved ones may want to discontinue using products including e-cigarettes, e-hookahs, vape pens and electronic nicotine delivery systems until the CDC completes its investigation, the Defense Health Agency said in a post Thursday.

Lung disease had, as of last week, been linked to vaping in 36 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the CDC said.

All patients who developed lung illnesses reported using e-cigarette products from a few days to several weeks before they became ill, the CDC said.

Many reported using them with liquids containing cannabis byproducts that troops are prohibited from ingesting or inhaling.

Symptoms include cough, shortness of breath or chest pain; nausea, vomiting and diarrhea; or fatigue, fever or weight loss. They generally do not improve with antibiotic treatment alone, said Dr. Amy Millikan Bell, an Army Public Health Center adviser.

Those who vape should monitor their breathing and digestive symptoms and seek prompt medical attention if they experience any of the listed symptoms or other abnormalities, Millikan Bell said.

Even without the risk of lung disease, vaping may be harmful to soldiers’ health, Army public health officials said. It has been associated with anxiety, increased blood pressure and seizures, one Army public health official said.

“Vaping of e-cigarettes should be highly discouraged at this time,” said Dr. Marc Williams, a toxicologist and vaping expert with the Army Public Health Center’s toxicology directorate.

NY moves to enact ban on flavored e-cigarettes

Associated Press

NEW YORK — New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is pushing to enact a statewide ban on the sale of flavored e-cigarettes amid growing health concerns connected to vaping, especially among young people.

The Democrat announced Sunday that the state health commissioner would be making a recommendation this week to the state Public Health and Health Planning Council.

The council can issue emergency regulations that would go into effect as soon as they are voted on and start being enforced in as little as two weeks, following a short grace period for retailers, officials said.

In announcing the action, Cuomo sharply criticized the flavors that are for sale, like bubble gum and cotton candy.

“These are obviously targeted to young people and highly effective at targeting young people,” he said.

Officials pointed to a significant increase in e-cigarettes use by young people, which they said was driven by the flavors.

According to data from the state health department, nearly 40% of high school seniors and 27% of high school students overall in the state use e-cigarettes. High school use went from 10.5% in 2014 to 27.4% in 2018.

Nationwide, the 2019 National Youth Tobacco Survey showed traditional cigarette usage continuing to fall for students in sixth to 12th grade, but vaping continuing to surge higher.

The biggest player in the industry, Juul Labs Inc., said it was reviewing the announcement but agreed with the need for action.

OxyContin drugmaker Purdue files for bankruptcy

Associated Press

Purdue Pharma filed for bankruptcy in the first step in a complex, multibillion-dollar plan by the maker of OxyContin to settle thousands of lawsuits brought against it by state and local governments over the nation’s deadly opioid disaster.

The company and members of the Sackler family, which owns it, expressed sympathy but not responsibility.

“Like families across America, we have deep compassion for the victims of the opioid crisis,” family members said in a statement, calling the settlement plan a “historic step towards providing critical re-

sources that address a tragic public health situation.”

But the bankruptcy filing, made late Sunday, may not get either the drugmaker or the Sacklers off the legal hook.

About half the states and lawyers representing at least 1,000 local governments have agreed to the tentative settlement, which the company says could be worth \$10 billion to \$12 billion over time and would include at least \$3 billion from the Sacklers.

Under the settlement, the family would give up control of the company, and its profits would be devoted to cleaning up the opioid mess and reimbursing state and local gov-

ernments for the cost of the crisis, which has killed more than 400,000 Americans in the past two decades. But some of the states that are holding out made it clear last week that they intend to object to the deal in bankruptcy court and seek to continue their lawsuits against members of the Sackler family.

In all, the company is facing some 2,600 lawsuits.

“My office is prepared to hold the Sacklers accountable, regardless of whether or not Purdue declares bankruptcy,” Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul said last week.

It will be up to Robert Drain, a federal bankruptcy judge in White Plains, N.Y., to sort out

what happens now — including whether those state lawsuits against Sackler family members can continue. A first court hearing on the bankruptcy plan is expected Tuesday.

For Purdue and the Sacklers, the effort revolves around getting more states to agree to the plan, which could make the settlement’s approval more likely.

“We are hopeful that in time, those parties who are not yet supportive will ultimately shift their focus to the critical resources that the settlement provides to people and problems that need them,” the families of late company owners Mortimer and Raymond Sackler said in their statement.

Report: Kim invited Trump to N. Korea

(Tokyo) *Japan Times*

In a move that could see President Donald Trump set foot on North Korean soil again, Kim Jong Un has invited the U.S. leader to Pyongyang, a South Korean newspaper reported Monday, as the North's Foreign Ministry said it expected stalled nuclear talks to resume "in a few weeks."

A letter from Kim, the second Trump received from the North Korean leader last month, was passed to the U.S. president during the third week of August and came ahead of the North's launch of short-range projectiles Sept. 10, the South's JoongAng Ilbo newspaper reported, citing multiple people familiar with the matter.

In the letter, Kim expressed his willingness to meet the U.S. leader for another summit — a stance that echoed Trump's own remarks just days earlier.

The *Japan Times* could not confirm the veracity of the report, and the U.S. State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha, asked at a parliamentary session Monday about the report, appeared to initially confirm the letter's existence.

"We received a detailed explanation from the U.S. side that a letter of that kind has been delivered," Kang told lawmakers without touching on details.

The Foreign Ministry later clarified that she had been speaking about the earlier letter Trump received from Kim, the South's Yonhap news agency reported, citing an unidentified ministry official.

News of the apparent new letter came as the North's Foreign Ministry released a statement Monday saying that it expected working-level talks with the U.S. to resume "in the next few weeks" but warning that "dialogue offers two options: crisis and opportunity."

"Only when the threats and obstacles that disturb our institutional security and hinder our development are ... removed will we be able to denuclearize," the statement, carried by the official Korean Central

News Agency, said.

The flurry of news appeared to be part of a bid by both sides to jump-start nuclear talks as an end-of-year deadline for progress set by Kim fast approaches.

Trump and South Korean President Moon Jae-in are expected to hold a summit on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York later this month, Moon's office said Friday, amid hopes for a restart of the stalled talks with the North.

Pyongyang had said it is willing to restart the talks later this month but warned that chances of a deal could evaporate unless Washington takes a fresh approach.

Attacks ahead of Afghan elections kills at least 7

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Militant attacks and more violence killed at least seven people across Afghanistan as the country prepares for presidential elections later this month, Afghan officials said Monday.

At least five civilians, including women and children, were killed when their vehicle struck a roadside bomb in western Farah province Sunday, according to Mohibullah Mohib, spokesman for the provincial police.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing, which occurred near the city of Farah, the provincial capital, but the Taliban are active in the province.

Earlier this month, the Taliban launched an attempt to take the city of Farah, briefly seizing an army recruitment center and setting it on fire. Airstrikes were called in and the Taliban were eventually forced out of the city.

On Monday, a sticky bomb

attached to a mini bus belonging to the university in Ghazni province exploded and killed the bus driver. Arif Noori, spokesman for the provincial governor, said five Ghazni University students were also wounded in the blast.

And in eastern Logar province, a schoolgirl died in the crossfire during a battle in the Mohammad Agha district between the Taliban and the security forces, the police said. A second student was wounded.

The attacks come as the Afghan government is preparing for the upcoming presidential election on Sept. 28.

Around 100,000 members of the country's security forces will provide security on polling day.

The Interior Ministry said 72,000 security personnel will be on duty around the 4,942 polling centers across Afghanistan while nearly 30,000 additional troops will serve as reserve units.

Saudis: Iranian weapons used in attack on facility

Bloomberg

Saudi Arabia said preliminary findings show Iranian weapons were used in the attack on one of its key oil installations but stopped short of directly blaming the Islamic Republic for the strikes that cut its crude output by half and rattled oil markets.

Ongoing investigations of "debris and wreckage" show "it belongs to the Iranian regime," Turki al-Maliki, a spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, told reporters in Riyadh on Monday. He said initial findings suggest the attack was not launched from Yemen, contradicting claims by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels that they carried out the attack using a swarm of long-range drones with more sophisticated engines.

"We are working right now to spot the launch point of those attacks," he said.

Saturday's attacks caused an unprecedented surge in oil prices and cast a shadow over preparations for the sale of a

stake in Saudi Aramco that could be the world's biggest initial public offering.

While President Donald Trump hasn't directly blamed Iran for the attacks, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has. Two U.S. officials said the location of the damage and weapons used suggest the attack was not launched by the Houthis, who have been fighting the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen for four bruising years.

Al-Maliki said evidence of Iranian involvement would be released, without saying when. Iran denied involvement.

"Accusing Iran of the attacks is in line with the U.S.' maximum-lies policy," said Abbas Mousavi, spokesman at the Foreign Ministry in Tehran. "Such accusations are unsurprising, unacceptable and baseless."

Russia, a leading Iranian ally in the Middle East, called on countries not to rush to conclusions over who was responsible, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Trump promised to help allies following the attacks.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

2 men charged after parking spot brawl

CT ANSONIA — Police in Connecticut have charged two men in a violent dispute over a parking space.

The New Haven Register reported that Kamrin Crawford, 43, and Woodrow Ogman, 33, were arrested Saturday morning in the parking lot of a Stop and Shop grocery in Ansonia. Police said both men damaged each other's car during the dispute.

Crawford is also accused of attacking Ogman with a hammer and a metal pole, causing serious injuries to his hand, arm and torso. Crawford was charged with assault, risk of injury to a child, criminal mischief and breach of peace.

Ogman was charged with criminal mischief, breach of peace and operating a vehicle without a license.

Man kills self on day of daughter's wedding

PA EDGEWOOD — A homeowner near Pittsburgh blew up his house on his daughter's wedding day, police said shortly after his body was found in the rubble late Saturday.

The man had been seen standing in front of his house in Edgewood shortly before it exploded and caught fire, authorities said, but for several hours he couldn't be accounted for. His death has been ruled a suicide.

Officials are still investigating the explosion's cause, but "it looks like he disconnected the gas line in the basement of the house," police Chief Robert Payne said.

Most of the family was out of the house at the time for the wedding, officials said.

State sees more big, stinging jellyfish

ME PORTLAND — High numbers of a species of jellyfish that can grow to huge sizes have been sighted in recent months in the Gulf of Maine and some of its beaches.

The lion's mane jellyfish, believed to be the world's largest, can grow to five or more feet across, with tentacles more than 100 feet long. Such huge jellyfish are uncommon, but larger-than-average ones have been more common this year, beachgoers say.

Nick Record, a senior research scientist at Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences, said he typically gets 300 to 700 reports of jellyfish per summer.

This year's total number of jellyfish is likely to be about average. But usually, fewer than half are lion's manes, and this year it's almost all of them.

Firefighters rescue 4 stuck on firetruck ride

NY NEW YORK — The firetruck was fake, but the firefighters coming to the rescue were real.

The New York Post reported that four people got stuck on a firetruck-themed ride at a Staten Island fair and had to be helped down by real firefighters who responded to the scene.

The ride at the Holy Trinity Church Greek Festival got stuck on Saturday evening. Everyone came off the ride safely.

Thousands expected for shrimp, grits fest

GA JEKYLL ISLAND — Coastal Georgia is gearing up for its annual food festival that's dedicated to de-

cidating who cooks the state's best shrimp and grits.

Organizers expect more than 45,000 visitors for the Jekyll Island Shrimp & Grits Festival that kicks off Friday.

The festival's main attraction is a Saturday showdown between chefs from eight Georgia restaurants in a contest of shrimp and grits recipes.

This year's kitchen battle features returning champions from Eagle Creek Brewing Co., of Statesboro, and Atlanta's West Egg Cafe.

Yak on ride to butcher escapes to mountains

VA LOVINGSTON — Authorities in Virginia said a yak on its way to the butcher's shop escaped to the nearby mountains, avoiding animal control officers with treats trying to lure it back into a trailer.

The News & Advance reported the yak, named Meteor, was on its last ride from Buckingham to the butcher on Sept. 10 when it got out of its trailer.

Nelson County Animal Control officer Kevin Wright said the yak crossed a busy highway and avoided officers.

Female football player must change in closet

CT GROTON — A female high school football player in Connecticut was forced to change in a custodial supply closet.

The Day of New London reported that administrators were notified of the situation after the 11th grader, a wide receiver and the only girl on the Robert E. Fitch High School team, became upset and left practice Sept. 9.

School Superintendent Michael Graner told the newspaper that he met with the girl's

mother and agrees she should not have been made to change alongside mops, brooms and other cleaning supplies. Graner said the closet will be cleaned out.

Swarms of dragonflies are visible on radar

PA WAYNESBORO — Swarms of dragonflies are taking over several western Pennsylvania communities and have even shown up on weather radar.

WTAE-TV reported that meteorologists with the National Weather Service in Cleveland spotted an unusually large blob on their radar last week. It turned out to be dragonflies.

Entomologists say the swarms of dragonflies are quite common and usually happen when they are migrating south to find warmer weather as winter approaches.

13 goats lost to unknown predator

VT BENSON — A Vermont farmer has lost 13 goats to an unknown animal.

Falkenbury Farm in Rutland County reported seven goats died and six more are missing following an attack.

A Vermont Fish and Wildlife biologist was unable to find tracks to identify the species of attacker. The goats did not have scratch marks, so the attacker is not a feline.

The bodies were found intact, so the animal was not hunting for food.

Vermont Game Warden Lt. Justin Stedman said the evidence points to likely a dog or coyote.

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Saints, Steelers reeling after major QB injuries

Associated Press

Few scenes Sunday seemed more incongruous than Drew Brees and Ben Roethlisberger on the sideline watching their teams trying to score without them.

Even odder is the news Monday that Big Ben is done for the year with an elbow injury, and Brees is having hand surgery that will sideline him for a long period.

This was damage of the highest order for two franchises that entered the season with championship goals.

Brees tore a ligament near his thumb and Roethlisberger hurt his elbow, also requiring surgery. Also worrisome: The injuries occurred to their right arms, the ones they use to make their millions — and help their teams compete for titles. What will be the prognosis beyond this season for Roethlisberger, and for later in the schedule for Brees, who is expected to return in a couple of months.

It's fair to say neither New Orleans nor Pittsburgh is much of a Super Bowl threat without its veteran quarterback, each having taken its team to an NFL title. Sure, Mason Rudolph looked solid enough, throwing for two fourth-quarter touchdowns in the Steelers' 28-26 loss to Seattle. And Teddy Bridgewater, though he struggled against the Rams' strong defense Sunday in a 27-9 loss, is considered by many the best insurance policy at quarterback in the NFL.

Still, we're talking about two likely Pro Football Hall of Fame inductees five years after each retires. While Brees is 40 and Roethlisberger is 37, neither has talked about hanging it up. Perhaps they're inspired by the 92-year-old, uh, 42-year-old Tom Brady in New England.

Brees was not able to grip the football, an impossible situation for a quarterback, particularly one with the Midas touch that Brees owns. New Orleans (1-1) is fortunate the NFC South is not looking particularly im-

posing, and barring a major surgery, the 19-year veteran figures to be back behind center in 2019.

Rams quarterback Jared Goff sure hopes so.

"I told him I'm hoping for the best," Goff said of his postgame chat with Brees. "He's a great player for this league, a face of the league, and somebody we need in the league."

Brees' career was in doubt in 2006 after shoulder surgery made teams wary of signing the free agent who had lost his job in San Diego to Philip Rivers. It was the Saints who rolled the dice, and were rewarded with the franchise's most successful string of seasons, including the 2009 NFL championship.

Bridgewater also had his career disrupted by injury, a nasty knee issue while Minnesota's starter that cost him the 2016 season and pretty much relegated him to backup status since. Coach Sean Payton's offense rarely has been run by anyone but Brees, so it's hard to predict how Bridgewater might fare. We're about to find out.

As for Rudolph, he beat out Joshua Dobbs for the backup role to Big Ben, whose durability isn't quite like that of Brees or Brady — or his fellow first-round draft picks in 2004, Eli Manning and Philip Rivers. But it's impressive: Roethlisberger has started 215 games, and has not missed a significant portion of a regular season since 2015, and before that in 2010, when he still guided Pittsburgh to the Super Bowl.

With the Steelers (0-2) already in a hole in an AFC North led by Baltimore, losing Roethlisberger is ominous.

It also means that the three key components of their high-octane offense of recent seasons — Roethlisberger, Le'Veon Bell and Antonio Brown — aren't around.

Of the two teams, the Saints appear in far better position than the Steelers. Regardless, this is a major blow in the Big Easy and Steel City.

Jones' late score lifts Falcons past Eagles

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Julio Jones hauled in a short pass behind the line of scrimmage, got the blocks he needed and didn't stop running until he was well past the end zone.

The Philadelphia Eagles never had a chance.

In the blink of an eye, Jones turned a fourth-down screen pass into a 54-yard touchdown with 2:10 remaining Sunday night. The Atlanta Falcons surrendered a huge play of their own on fourth down but came up with the defensive stop they needed to preserve a wild 24-20 victory.

Jones' speed on the winning play was stunning, reaching an estimated 20 mph as he glided away from a futile swipe by Rodney McLeod and left Andrew Sendejo far behind.

"OK, it's a footrace now," Jones said. "That was it. It really wasn't like I had to try hard or anything like that. I just had to stay on course."

A sluggish game turned thrilling in the final minutes. The Falcons (1-1) squandered a 17-6 lead against an injury plagued team that lost two of its top receivers, falling behind for the first time when Carson Wentz dove over from the 1 with 3:13 left and then connected on a two-point conversion pass to give the Eagles a 20-17 edge.

Philadelphia (1-1) had a chance at the end when Wentz converted on fourth-and-14, somehow getting off a pass with a rusher in his chest that Nelson Agholor hauled in between Keanu Neal and Ricardo Allen for a 43-yard completion to the Falcons 18.

But Neal and Isaiah Oliver dragged down Zach Ertz less than a yard short of the marker on another fourth-down play inside the 10 to preserve a much-needed victory for Atlanta after a dismal season opener at Minnesota.

It was Jones who really bailed out the Falcons — and became the franchise's career leader in receiving yards with his winning score, passing

Roddy White.

"He's had a lot of great ones, that's for sure," said quarterback Matt Ryan, who helped keep Philadelphia in the game with three interceptions. "It's special for him to break a record that way, in such a critical situation, in such a clutch moment. That's pretty cool."

On fourth-and-3 at the Falcons 46, Jones dropped behind the line to haul in Ryan's short pass and got just enough of a pick from fellow receiver Mohamed Sanu to take out cornerback Rasul Douglas. Left tackle Jake Matthews squashed another defender with a crunching block out on the edge.

Just like that, Jones was gone.

"A big little play," coach Dan Quinn called it.

Jones crossed over the goal line and kept right on going, disappearing down the tunnel. He finished with five catches for 106 yards and two touchdowns, also hauling in a 4-yard score that gave the Falcons their 11-point lead early in the third quarter.

The Eagles were hampered by injuries that took out receivers DeSean Jackson (groin) and Alshon Jeffery (calf), forcing them to go with backups Mack Hollins and J.J. Arcega-White-side much of the game.

"It was tough," Wentz said. "Some of the stuff tonight you can't make up. I've never seen guy after guy like that early in the ballgame, but guys stepped up. Guys were resilient. We came up a little short today, but I'm proud of the way the guys fought."

Wentz and the short-handed offense finally got going in the fourth quarter, completing eight straight passes for 72 yards on a drive that culminated with a quarterback sneak for the go-ahead touchdown. He finished 25 of 43 for 231 yards with two interceptions.

"What a game he had," Agholor said. "That's one of the best performances I've seen from our quarterback, man. He's very resilient, getting the ball to everybody."

NFL roundup

Pineiro's late FG lifts Bears past Broncos

Associated Press

DENVER — Eddy Pineiro kicked a 53-yard field goal as time expired, giving the Chicago Bears a wild 16-14 win over the Broncos and their former defensive coordinator Vic Fangio, whose gutsy 2-point call 31 seconds earlier had given Denver the lead.

The Broncos (0-2) thought time had expired when Mitchell Trubisky stepped up and threw a 25-yard pass to Allen Robinson on fourth-and-15 from his 40-yard line. Robinson was tackled at the Denver 35 by Chris Harris Jr.

The clock showed all zeroes and both teams milled around on the field not knowing whether to celebrate a win or lament a loss. Then referee Adrian Hill announced there was 1 second remaining and Chicago was using its last timeout.

Pineiro's winner sent the Bears (1-1) streaming back onto the field in celebration.

Rams 27, Saints 9: With Drew Brees watching from the sideline with an injured hand, host Los Angeles didn't need a no-call to beat New Orleans again.

Jared Goff passed for 283 yards and a touchdown and rushed for another score, and the Rams (2-0) stopped New Orleans from scoring an offensive touchdown for the first time since 2016.

The much-anticipated matchup changed dramatically when Brees was injured late in the first quarter. His throwing hand collided with Aaron Donald's outstretched hand while he threw an incompletion on the Saints' second drive. The NFL's career leader in yards passing spent the afternoon on the Coliseum sideline with his thumb heavily wrapped.

Teddy Bridgewater went 17 of 30 for 165 yards and Alvin Kamara rushed for just 45 yards for the Saints (1-1).

Patriots 43, Dolphins 0: Antonio Brown caught a 20-yard touchdown pass in his debut for visiting New England, and they

scored twice on interception returns in a two-minute fourth-quarter span.

Brown also made an 18-yard catch on his first play for the Patriots (2-0), who signed him Monday. He finished with 56 yards on four receptions, all in the first half.

Seahawks 28, Steelers 26: Russell Wilson threw for three touchdowns for visiting Seattle, including a 28-yard rainbow to DK Metcalf midway through the fourth quarter.

Pittsburgh lost starting quarterback Ben Roethlisberger to a right elbow injury late in the first half and fell to 0-2 for the first time since 2013 despite solid play from backup Mason Rudolph, who threw a pair of second-half touchdown passes to Vance McDonald.

Wilson was 29 of 35 for 300 yards and the three TDs, becoming the fifth-fastest quarterback in league history to reach 200 career touchdown passes (114 games).

Chiefs 28, Raiders 10: Patrick Mahomes bounced back from the first scoreless opening quarter of his career in the regular season by throwing four touchdown passes in a near perfect second period.

Oakland (1-1) held Mahomes in check for the opening 15 minutes before he carved up an overmatched defense with big play after big play in the second quarter for visiting Kansas City (2-0).

Mahomes finished 30-for-44 for 443 yards.

Colts 19, Titans 17: Jacoby Brissett became the latest Indianapolis quarterback to top Tennessee, throwing a 4-yard touchdown pass to T.Y. Hilton with 4:38 left. After Andrew Luck retired with a perfect 11-0 record against the Titans, Brissett picked up right where Luck left off. He passed for 146 yards and three TDs.

The visiting Colts (1-1) also sacked Marcus Mariota four times on a day when Adam Vinatieri, the NFL's oldest player and career scoring leader but in

an early-season slump, missed two extra points.

Ravens 23, Cardinals 17: Lamar Jackson kept visiting St. Louis guessing all afternoon, supplementing an effective passing attack with more than an occasional jaunt out of the pocket. Jackson threw for 272 yards and two touchdowns and ran for 120 yards in a showdown between two of the league's most exciting young quarterbacks.

The 2016 Heisman Trophy winner outdid the 2018 Heisman winner, Arizona rookie quarterback Kyler Murray, who went 25-for-40 for 349 yards but fell short of carrying the Cardinals to a second straight fourth-quarter comeback.

Texans 13, Jaguars 12: Justin Reid stopped Leonard Fournette on a two-point conversion attempt with 36 seconds left.

Houston led by 13-6 in the fourth quarter when Jacksonville rookie Gardner Minshew led a long drive that included an 18-yard run on fourth-and-10, and he capped it with a 4-yard TD pass to DJ Chark. Instead of trying to tie it with a kicked extra point, Jaguars coach Doug Marrone opted to go for the potential win. But Fournette was stopped by Reid.

Bills 28, Giants 14: Somewhat maligned Josh Allen ran for a touchdown, threw for another, and visiting Buffalo claimed the bragging rights of New York.

Buffalo has its first 2-0 start since 2014 and only the third in 11 mostly fruitless years.

Devin Singletary scored on a 14-yard run and Frank Gore iced the game with a 1-yard plunge into the end zone with 5:53 to play as the Bills completed the New York/New Jersey sweep at MetLife Stadium. They beat the Jets last weekend.

49ers 41, Bengals 17: Jimmy Garoppolo tied his career high with three touchdown passes and the 49ers completed a sweet and satisfying week in the Buckeye State.

Rather than return to the West Coast after their opening

31-17 win in Tampa Bay, the 49ers headed to Youngstown, Ohio, where they worked out on a soccer field, enjoyed a local ice cream shop and rested at a Holiday Inn. Then they started their trek west with a resounding and notable win.

Packers 21, Vikings 16: Aaron Rodgers threw two early touchdowns on a day when Green Bay honored late Hall of Famer Bart Starr at halftime.

Rodgers completed nine of his first 10 passes for 134 yards and two touchdowns and had a perfect 158.3 rating through the first quarter. He finished 22 of 34 for 209 yards.

The Packers improved to 2-0 under new coach Matt LaFleur after opening the NFL's 100th season with a victory at rival Chicago.

Cowboys 31, Redskins 21: Dak Prescott carved up the Washington defense with his arm and his legs, completing 26 of 30 passes for 269 yards and three touchdowns and rushing for 69 yards.

A week after putting up a perfect 158.3 QB rating, Prescott responded from an interception to lead visiting Dallas (2-0) on consecutive touchdown drives of 97, 83 and 75 yards.

The Redskins (0-2) got a rushing touchdown from Adrian Peterson and passing TDs from Case Keenum to Paul Richardson and rookie Terry McLaurin.

Lions 13, Chargers 10: Matthew Stafford threw a go-ahead, 31-yard touchdown pass to Kenny Golladay midway through the fourth quarter and Darius Slay made an interception in the end zone with 1:03 left.

Detroit (1-0-1) overcame Stafford's two interceptions, Slay giving up a lot of receptions and Matt Prater missing an extra point and a field goal.

The visiting Chargers (1-1) were in a position to attempt a 45-yard field goal to tie the game, but Philip Rivers tried to force a pass to Keenan Allen and Slay picked it off.

MLB roundup

Rizzo injury puts damper on Cubs sweep

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Star first baseman Anthony Rizzo was pulled from a game Sunday with a sprained right ankle, putting a damper on the Chicago Cubs' 16-6 victory over the Pittsburgh Pirates that completed a three-game sweep.

Rizzo was injured fielding a bunt at first base, had to be helped off the field and could not put pressure on the leg. X-rays taken at Wrigley Field showed no fractures. He was to get an MRI on Monday.

Chicago's postseason pursuit has already been hindered by an injury to shortstop Javier Baez, who is out for the rest of the regular season with a hairline fracture of his left thumb.

"We're gonna miss Riz, we already miss Javy, but I really believe the rest of the group is up to the task," manager Joe Maddon said.

The Cubs maintained their one-game lead over Milwaukee for the second NL wild card.

Dodgers 3, Mets 2: Jedd Gyorko came off the bench late and played a big role in rallying Los Angeles to a victory that damaged host New York's dwindling wild-card chances.

Gyorko scored the tying run in the eighth inning on Chris Taylor's double and hit an RBI

single off Seth Lugo (6-4) with two outs in the ninth to put the NL West champions in front.

The Mets dropped four games behind the Chicago Cubs for the second NL wild card to with 13 to go. Milwaukee is three games ahead of New York.

Brewers 7, Cardinals 6: Ryan Braun overcame a 4-3 deficit with a grand slam off Junior Fernandez with two outs in the ninth, and visiting Milwaukee won for the ninth time in 10 games and closed within three games of the NL Central-leading Cardinals.

Blue Jays 6, Yankees 4: At Toronto, pitchers Dellin Betances and Jordan Montgomery made their season debuts for the Yankees after lengthy layoffs.

Betances, a 31-year-old right-hander, recovered from a strained lat muscle and struck out Reese McGuire and Brandon Drury, his only two batters. New York hopes Betances will be a factor in the playoffs, joining an already strong bullpen.

Red Sox 6, Phillies 3: Christian Vazquez homered twice, including his first career grand slam, and drove in a career-high five runs for visiting Boston.

Rhys Hoskins homered for Philadelphia, which fell 4½ games behind the Cubs.

Reds 3, Diamondbacks 1: Eugenio Suarez homered twice

to tie the New York Mets' Pete Alonso for the major league lead with 47, and Trevor Bauer (11-12) held his former team to one run and four hits in eight innings as host Arizona dropped 5½ games behind the Cubs in the chase for an NL wild card.

Orioles 8, Tigers 2: Edwin Jackson (3-10) allowed five runs in five innings for host Detroit (44-104), which lost two of the first three games of the four-game series against the Orioles (49-100) and opened a 4½-game advantage for the worst record in the major leagues.

Nationals 7, Braves 0: Anibal Sanchez (9-8) allowed three hits in seven innings to beat his former team for the third time this season.

Howie Kendrick homered and drove in three runs as host Washington clinched its eighth winning season in a row.

Astros 12, Royals 3: Wade Miley (14-5) allowed two runs in six innings, rebounding from a pair of bad starts, and visiting Houston tied the Yankees for a big league-leading 98 wins.

Josh Reddick's five hits included a two-run homer.

Athletics 6, Rangers 1: Sean Manaea (2-0) limited host Texas to three singles in six scoreless innings, Marcus Semien became the third Oakland slugger with 30 homers and the Athletics

won their sixth straight to move 1½ games ahead of Tampa Bay for the first AL wild card.

Angels 6, Rays 4: Albert Pujols hit a three-run homer off Ryan Yarbrough (11-4) in the fifth inning and drove in four runs, cutting visiting Tampa Bay's lead over Cleveland for the second AL wild card to 1½ games.

Indians 7, Twins 5: Roberto Perez hit a three-run homer for the host Indians, who lost two of three to Minnesota and trail the AL Central-leading Twins by 4½ games

Eddie Rosario homered twice and Miguel Sano and rookie LaMonte Wade Jr. connected.

Giants 2, Marlins 1: Mike Yastrzemski scored the go-ahead run in the eighth on Ryne Stanek's second wild pitch for host San Francisco.

Rockies 10, Padres 5: Ryan McMahon hit two home runs and drove in four runs as host Colorado finished a three-game sweep.

Mariners 11, White Sox 10: Jose Ruiz (2-2) walked Tom Murphy with the bases loaded in the ninth, giving host Seattle its second straight walk-off win. Kyle Lewis hit a three-run homer in the eighth that cut the Mariners' deficit to 10-9, the fourth homer during his first week in the major leagues.

Truex races into second round of playoffs

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Martin Truex Jr. clearly had one of the best teams this season as he rolled to four victories before the end of June.

Then he hit a slump of sorts, going nearly three months without a win, but his Joe Gibbs Racing team remained confident it would challenge for the championship.

A win in the opening race of NASCAR's playoffs solidified their beliefs.

Truex won for the fifth time

this season Sunday at Las Vegas Motor Speedway and earned an automatic berth into the second round of the playoffs. He's won the playoff opener in three of the last four seasons, including 2017 when he won the Cup title.

"Welcome back," Truex screamed to his team over his radio as he crossed the finish line. He later added "I feel awesome" about his chances to make the final four and race for the championship in the November finale at Homestead-

Miami Speedway.

"If we can get to Homestead, we are going to be tough to handle. But we've got to get there first," he said.

The Truex victory on an up-and-down day for Joe Gibbs Racing still cemented the Toyota team as the organization to beat for the Cup in this 10-race playoff series. JGR has 14 wins this season through 27 races.

Truex chased down Kevin Harvick, who was slowed by traffic, to cut into Harvick's lead and eventually make the pass

for the win — and the automatic second-round spot — on the outside with 20 laps remaining.

"I was able to hustle the car there at the end and get the lead and drive away," Truex said. "These next two weeks are all about bonus points. This is big today to get six (points)."

Las Vegas was a brutal opener for a handful of title contenders, including Kurt Busch, who crashed when his tire went flat and he finished last in the field.