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Saudis: Iranian weapons used in attack

Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Saudi Arabia alleged Wednesday that Iranian cruise missiles and drones attacked the heart of the kingdom's oil industry, showing journalists the remains of the weapons while stopping short of directly accusing Iran of launching the assault. Iran denies being involved and has threatened the U.S. it will retaliate "immediately" if Tehran is targeted over the attack, which was claimed by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

The news conference by Saudi military spokesman Col. Turki al-Malki comes after a summer of heightened tensions between Iran and the U.S. over President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrawing America from Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

While the U.S. has said Iran was behind the attack on Saudi oil installations this weekend, al-Malki made a point not to directly accuse Iran of firing the weapons or launching them from inside of Iranian territory. The kingdom has sought help from international investigators and the United Nations, both lengthening the probe and internationalizing its conclusions.

"The attack was launched from the north and was unquestionably sponsored by

Iran," al-Malki told journalists.

By stopping short of saying the missiles were launched from Iran, the kingdom potentially avoids a response that could lead to war among the heavyweight countries of the region and international superpower, the United States. However, not retaliating to the strikes also carries the risk of leaving Saudi Arabia exposed to continued attacks.

The news conference took place with a backdrop of broken and burnt drones and pieces of one cruise missile allegedly collected from the attacks.

Al-Malki described the drones as "delta wing" models, which looked like large triangles. The cruise missile had a small jet engine attached to it, he said.

Eighteen drones and seven cruise missiles were launched in the assault, al-Malki said, with three missiles failing to make their targets. He said the cruise missiles had a range of 435 miles, meaning they could not have been fired from inside Yemen. He played surveillance video he said showed a drone coming in from the north.

"This is the kind of weapon the Iranian regime and the Iranian IRGC are using against the civilian object and facilities infrastructure," he said, using an acronym for Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

Iran sent a note to the U.S. via Swiss dip-

lomats in Tehran on Monday, reiterating that Tehran denies being involved in the Saudi attack, IRNA reported. The Swiss have looked after American interests in Tehran for decades.

"If any action takes place against Iran, the action will be faced by Iran's answer immediately," IRNA quoted the note as saying. It added that Iran's response wouldn't be limited to the source of the threat, suggesting it would inflict damage beyond what it had suffered.

IRNA separately reported Wednesday that Iran's first delegation for the annual U.N. General Assembly meeting had not left Iran because the U.S. has yet to issue them visas. Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif was to travel to New York on Friday, with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani following Monday, according to the agency. The U.N. meeting had been considered as an opportunity for direct talks between Rouhani and Trump.

The U.S. State Department did not respond to requests for comment Wednesday.

Trump separately tweeted: "I have just instructed the Secretary of the Treasury to substantially increase Sanctions on the country of Iran!" He did not elaborate. National Security Council officials declined to comment.

US Navy says it's tracking flying objects

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — Strange flying objects captured on video by Navy fighter pilots off the coast of San Diego in 2004 and in Atlantic waters in 2015 were acknowledged by the Navy as "unidentified aerial phenomena" last week, the first time the service has acknowledged the objects are real.

The three videos, published by former Blink-182 guitarist Tom DeLonge's "To the Stars Academy," appear to show small, airborne craft flying and maneuvering at high speeds. The videos were shot by the

Advance Targeting Forward Looking Infrared pods on Navy F/A-18s.

The news was first reported by The Black Vault, a website that publishes declassified government documents.

A Navy spokesman told The Black Vault that the Navy had no "descriptions, hypothesis of conclusions" about objects in the three videos.

The Navy also told The Black Vault the dates on which each video was shot. FLIR1 was shot by an F/A-18 Super Hornet assigned to the aircraft carrier Nimitz off the coast of San Diego on Nov. 14, 2004. The

other two videos were shot on Jan. 15, 2015. On the "Gimbal" video, one pilot says on the radio "Look at that thing, dude."

Politico reported in April that the Navy was drafting new guidelines for pilots and other naval personnel to report such encounters and to de-stigmatize them.

The acknowledgment comes amid heightened public interest in UFOs.

A viral Facebook event, "Storm Area 51, They Can't Stop All of Us," is scheduled for Friday at the remote Nevada Air Force base. The event proposes that masses of people

"Naruto run" toward the gates of the base in order to expose any alien-technology that conspiracy theorists have long suspected exists on the base.

"Naruto running" refers to the animation in a popular Japanese animated series of the same name, in which characters are depicted running with their arms pinned back.

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Dave Goldfein told a reporter Tuesday at the Air Force Association's Air, Space & Cyber Conference that the Air Force was taking the "Storm Area 51" event "very seriously."

Afghanistan government office attacked

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Militants in Afghanistan attempted to storm a government office in an eastern provincial capital Monday, with a suicide bombing sparking a running gunbattle with security forces, Afghan officials said.

The attack in Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar province, comes a day after the Taliban launched two separate suicide attacks — one targeting President Ashraf Ghani's election rally in a northern province and another in the heart of the Afghan capital. Those attacks killed at least 48 people and wounded scores more, in the deadliest single day since a peace agreement with Taliban insurgents was declared dead.

Fighting was still ongoing as of Wednesday evening, said Atahullah Khogyani, spokesman for Nangarhar's governor.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for Wednesday's attack, but both the Taliban and Islamic State are active in eastern Afghanistan.

The violence comes as Afghanistan prepares for presidential elections on Sept. 28, a vote the Taliban vehemently oppose. The insurgent group has warned Afghans not to vote in the election and said their fighters would target election campaigns as well as polling stations.

Khogyani said Afghan security forces had rescued at least 10 government employees and other civilians from inside the center, which issues electronic national IDs, since the attack began in the early afternoon.

Dozens more civilians, including women and children, were still trapped inside the building, said a provincial official who spoke anonymously because they were not authorized to talk to reporters.

Two attackers had been killed by forces, according to Nasrat Rahimi, spokesman for the interior ministry.

Sealift readiness test launched

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The U.S. military has ordered dozens of ships to sea in a massive stress test to determine if reserve transport vessels — crucial for mobilizing large numbers of troops and forces in a conflict — are up to the job.

U.S. Transportation Command began the sealift readiness exercise Monday in what amounts to one of the largest such no-notice "Turbo Activation" drills since the exercises began in 1994.

"These exercises typically involve only a few ships but this event targets 28 vessels for activation to provide a better assessment of the readiness of U.S. sealift forces than can be accomplished with fewer activations," TRANSCOM said in a statement Tuesday.

The activated ships are required to shift from a reduced operating status to a fully

crewed status, with the quarters made habitable and cargo gear ready, within five days.

For the military, an aging transport fleet has been an area of concern, particularly as the military emphasizes the need to adapt to rising threats posed by China and Russia. In the event of a large conflict, the military would be called upon to mobilize forces and heavy equipment, much of which would need to move by sea.

Lawmakers have issued warnings that with no clear plan to replace decades-old transport ships, the military may not be able to get forces across oceans in the event of a fight with Russia or China.

Among the concerns is a rapidly aging Ready Reserve Force of 46 transport ships, which are on average about 44 years old. The Navy's plans for extending the service life of the ships, such as procuring used vessels and devising a new construction strategy, hasn't yet

delivered.

"The steel is rotting," said retired Rear Adm. Mark Buzby, administrator of the Maritime Administration, in testimony during a congressional hearing on the issue earlier this year.

TRANSCOM chief Gen. Stephen Lyons has said improving sealift capability is a top priority for his command.

In 2017, the Government Accountability Office found that the Navy may not be able to support its warships in combat if it doesn't upgrade a fleet of supply ships that are growing old and losing their ability to quickly provide food, fuel and equipment.

And last year, a special task force of retired admirals and generals organized by the Defense Department warned of "significant shortfalls that, if left unaddressed, will put at risk U.S. ability to project power and sustain the fight against a strategic competitor."

Protesters prevent boat launch on Okinawa

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND AYA ICHIHASHI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A U.S. Marine Corps truck delivering a boat to a local port for routine training Tuesday was met by about 100 Okinawan demonstrators and turned away after a nine-hour protest, according to a local newspaper report.

The incident started at approximately 7 a.m. when a Marine truck towing a 32-foot boat arrived at Motobu Port from Camp Schwab, the Marine base in Henoko, The Okinawa Times reported.

The truck and boat were met by peaceful protesters who blocked their entry by sitting in front of the gate. Others gathered across the street, according to a video of the scene posted on YouTube.

The video shows what appears to be a contingent of Japanese police in a tempo-

rary line between the boat and the protesters. Motobu police were unavailable for comment Wednesday. No arrests were reported.

The truck and boat remained at the gate until approximately 4:40 p.m., when they departed, The Okinawa Times said.

Port officials said the status of forces agreement between the U.S. and Japan allows the U.S. military to use Japanese ports. The Marines on Sept. 10 notified port officials they planned to launch the boat at Motobu, a port spokesman said. The boat was to be used in parachute training at nearby Ie Island, according to the Japan Ministry of Defense.

Okinawa prefectural officials said Wednesday they asked the Marines not to use the port, but when their request went unheeded, they released the information to local media.

The prefectural officials said while they honor the SOFA,

launching the boat at Motobu could worry locals and interfere with commercial ships.

Japanese Defense Minister Taro Kono, who was appointed Sept. 11, said at a press conference Tuesday a misunderstanding contributed to the protest.

He said the U.S. military was moving its parachute training back to Ie Island as a result of complaints from an Okinawa citizen and the prefectural government about parachute training on Kadena Air Base. Motobu Port, on the northwestern coast of Okinawa's main island, is about five miles from Ie Island.

"Due to bad weather and high waves, it's hard to conduct the training at Ie Island," Kono said. "With that boat, they can practice much less on Kadena and do so in Ie Island."

Marine officials did not respond to requests seeking comment Wednesday.

Lewandowski questions Dems' motives at hearing

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The first impeachment hearing held by House Democrats quickly turned hostile on Tuesday as their sole witness, former Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski, stonewalled many of their questions and declared they were “focusing on petty and personal politics.”

Lewandowski, a devoted friend and supporter of President Donald Trump, followed White House orders not to discuss conversations with the president beyond what was already public in former special counsel Robert Mueller's report. Trump cheered him along as he testified, tweeting that Lewandowski's opening statement was “beautiful.”

The hearing underscores what has been a central dilemma for the House Judiciary Committee all year as they investigate — and potentially try to impeach — Trump. Many of the Democrats' base supporters want them to move quickly to try to remove Trump from office. But the White House has blocked their oversight requests at almost every turn, declining to provide new documents or allow aides and associates to testify.

On Tuesday, Lewandowski, who is considering a run for U.S. Senate in New Hamp-

shire, defiantly made clear he wouldn't make life easy for the Democrats. He eventually began to answer some questions — he told the committee that he doesn't think Trump “asked me to do anything illegal” — but still stuck mostly to what was already in the report, giving Democrats little new information to go on. And he made clear his dislike for the House majority in the opening statement, calling them petty and asserting that investigations of the president were conducted by “Trump haters.”

Lewandowski was a central figure in Mueller's report, which the committee is examining as part of its impeachment probe. The report, which said Trump could not be exonerated on obstruction of justice, detailed two episodes in which Trump asked Lewandowski to direct then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions to limit Mueller's investigation. Trump said that if Sessions would not meet with Lewandowski, then Lewandowski should tell Sessions he was fired.

Lewandowski never delivered the message but asked White House aide Rick Dearborn, a former Sessions aide, to do it. Dearborn said he was uncomfortable with the request and declined to deliver it, according to the report.

O'Brien is national security adviser pick

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Wednesday he's naming hostage negotiator Robert O'Brien, who Trump had monitor the criminal case in Sweden against American rapper A\$AP Rocky, as his new national security adviser.

Trump tweeted the announcement from California.

“I am pleased to announce that I will name Robert C. O'Brien, currently serving as the very successful Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs at the State Department, as our new National Security Advisor,” he said. “I have worked long & hard with Robert. He will do a great job!”

Trump announced that O'Brien will become his fourth national security adviser a week after he ousted John Bolton. O'Brien was among five candidates the Republican president had said Tuesday were being considered for the post, which does not require Senate confirmation.

As the special presidential envoy for hostage affairs at the State Department, O'Brien worked with the families of American hostages and advised administration officials on hostage issues. He previous-

ly helped lead the department's public-private partnership for justice reform in Afghanistan during the Bush and Obama administrations.

Earlier this year, Trump dispatched O'Brien to Sweden to keep tabs on the criminal case there against A\$AP Rocky, who a judge and jury ultimately found guilty of assault in August, several weeks after a street brawl in Stockholm. Trump tried to intervene in the case by calling Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven in July and offering to personally guarantee bail for the rapper. Lofven told Trump he couldn't interfere in a legal matter.

From 2008 through 2011, O'Brien was a presidentially appointed member of a government committee that advises on issues related to the trafficking of antiquities and other cultural items. In 2005, President George W. Bush nominated O'Brien to be U.S. Representative to the U.N. General Assembly, where he worked with Bolton. Earlier in his career, O'Brien was a senior legal officer for the U.N. Security Council commission that decided claims against Iraq that arose from the Gulf War. He was a major in the U.S. Army Reserve.

Dems push ahead with short-term bill to avoid shutdown

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democrats controlling the House are steering clear of controversy in a short-term, government-wide spending measure that's needed to prevent a government shutdown at the end of September.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has agreed to a White House request to replenish funds for bailout payments to farmers absorbing heavy losses as a result of President Donald Trump's trade battles with China. She has also rejected suggestions

from House liberals to try to use the must-pass stopgap measure to try to reverse the president's controversial moves to raid military base construction projects to pay for the border wall,

The temporary spending bill would keep the government running through Nov. 21. House and Senate votes are expected well in advance of the Sept. 30 deadline to avert a shutdown, though its release remained held up over a relatively minor but complicated set of issues.

The Senate, meanwhile, remains wrapped around the

axle in its efforts to advance the 12 annual spending bills that would fill in the blanks of this summer's bipartisan budget and debt deal.

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has set up a procedural vote for Wednesday on a huge measure to fund the Pentagon, foreign aid, and domestic agencies like the energy and education departments, but Democrats appear likely to filibuster the measure to protest what they say is a raid on health and education programs to pay for more border wall projects. Next steps are unclear

at best, and fears are growing that most of the government, including the Defense Department, will have to run on autopilot at current funding levels.

“Of course Democrats oppose taking funds from Congress for our military to use on the president's border wall. Everyone knows that,” Schumer said Tuesday. “McConnell has been accusing Democrats of threatening to block military funding because we don't want to pass a bill that steals money from the military.”

Storm could bring heavy rainfall to Houston

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Imelda is threatening to dump up to 18 inches of rain in parts of Southeast Texas and southwestern Louisiana as the tropical depression moves inland over the next few days.

Jeff Lindner, a meteorologist and director of flood operations for the Harris County Flood Control District in Houston, said the main threat from Imelda remained the potential for heavy rainfall and flooding.

“We have a few things in our favor. The ground is dry. It’s been dry for a while here as we’ve come through summer,” Lindner said. “The initial parts of this rainfall will go toward saturating the ground.”

Ken Graham, director of the National

Hurricane Center, said the Houston area and parts of the upper Texas coast and East Texas could get significant rainfall through Thursday as the storm moves north. Imelda’s rain bands were also stretching into Louisiana.

The National Hurricane Center said early Wednesday that Imelda had weakened to a tropical depression and was located about 25 miles north-northwest of Houston.

Imelda is the first named storm to impact the Houston area since Hurricane Harvey, according to the National Weather Service. Harvey dumped nearly 50 inches of rain on parts of the flood prone city in August 2017, flooding more than 150,000 homes in the Houston area and causing an estimated \$125 billion in damage in Texas.

While there could be some isolated structure flooding in the Houston area, widespread house flooding from Imelda “doesn’t look likely at this point,” Lindner said.

However, he said residents who live in flood prone areas should still be mindful and take extra precautions.

Officials in the Houston area were preparing high-water vehicles and staging rescue boats Tuesday.

The storm, which formed Tuesday, made landfall near Freeport, Texas, with maximum sustained winds of 40 mph. Some parts of Harris County and neighboring Galveston County had already received about 4 inches of rain through Tuesday afternoon.

Election deadlocks Israel’s 2 main parties

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israel’s two main political parties were deadlocked Wednesday after an unprecedented repeat election, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu facing an uphill battle to hold on to his job.

The election’s seeming political kingmaker, Avigdor Lieberman, said he’ll insist upon a secular unity government between Netanyahu’s Likud and Benny Gantz’s Blue and White parties, who based on partial results, are tied at 32 seats each out of the 120 in parliament.

Without Lieberman’s endorsement, both parties appear to have fallen well short of securing a parliamentary majority with their prospective ideological allies.

With results still pouring in, Lieberman insisted the overall picture was unlikely to change. He also demanded a secular “liberal” government shorn of the religious and ultra-Orthodox allies the prime minister has long relied upon.

“The conclusion is clear, everything we said throughout the campaign is coming true,” he said outside his home in the West Bank settlement of Nokdim. “There is one and only option: a national unity government that is broad and liberal and we will not join any other option.”

That could spell serious trouble for the continuation of Netanyahu’s lengthy rule.

Gantz, a former military chief, has ruled out sitting with a Netanyahu-led Likud at a time when the prime minister is expected

to be indicted on corruption charges in the coming weeks. It raised the specter of an alternate Likud candidate rising to challenge Netanyahu, though most of its senior officials have thus far pledged to stand solidly behind their leader.

Netanyahu, the longest serving leader in Israeli history, had desperately sought an outright majority with his hard-line and ultra-Orthodox allies in hopes of passing legislation to give him immunity from his expected indictment.

Israel’s attorney general has recommended charging Netanyahu with bribery, fraud and breach of trust in three scandals, pending a long-awaited hearing scheduled in the coming weeks.

Woman’s engagement dream has ring of truth to it

The Washington Post

It was hard for Jenna Evans to figure out when the dream ended and real life began. She and her fiancé, Bobby Howell, were on a high-speed cargo train. The bad guys were coming. To protect her engagement ring, Howell told her, there was only one thing she could do: Swallow it.

“So I popped that sucker off,” Evans remembered in a Facebook post that’s since gone viral, “put it in my mouth and swallowed it with a glass of water” — right about the time

she woke up.

Something didn’t feel right. Did she really just throw back her 2.4-carat diamond ring like a pill? No, she thought, of course not. It was just a dream.

She closed her eyes. When she woke up again, she saw it clearly in the light: The ring was really gone.

“When I woke up and it was not on my hand, I knew exactly where it was,” Evans, who has a history of sleepwalking, told KGTV. “It was in my stomach.”

Last Wednesday, the 29-year-old San Diego resident and her

befuddled but very concerned fiancé rushed to the emergency room around 8 a.m., “where I struggled to explain why I was there.”

Doctors soon discovered what Evans’s dream had already told her: She really did swallow her engagement ring in her sleep.

The specialists had a plan: Evans would undergo an upper endoscopy later that morning. They would pluck it out of her.

They said, “don’t worry it’s not a big deal,” Evans wrote, “but please sign this release

form just in case you die.”

Once she was out, the doctors snaked a little camera down her throat, past her stomach — and then they saw it: a glowing, shiny object on its way into the small intestine.

Evans opened her eyes again. The ring wasn’t on her finger.

This time, Howell had it.

“Bobby finally gave my ring back this morning,” Evans wrote in her post on Thursday. “I promised not to swallow it again, we’re still getting married and all is right in the world.”

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Pig's escapades cause owner to face citations

SC COLUMBIA — This little piggy should have stayed home.

The State newspaper reported that for the fourth time, Leroy — a Vietnamese pot-bellied pig — wandered over to Brennan Elementary School in Columbia, leading officials to slap McGregor Wallace with citations for owning a pig within city limits and having a fugitive pet.

Wallace said Leroy is his emotional support animal meant to help him deal with PTSD from domestic trauma.

Wallace said he got Leroy several months ago to replace a standard pig that grew too big.

He said Leroy knows how to open the home's gate when Wallace isn't home.

The 7-month-old swine is now at Columbia's animal shelter.

Teen drives 8 blocks with sister on car hood

PA EASTON — Authorities said a man drove about eight blocks with his sister on the hood of a car, but was stopped when she called her stepfather and he stopped the driver.

Easton police said Rahmir Coley, 18, was charged with child endangerment.

Authorities said Coley was driving the stepfather's car when he picked up his sister. The stepfather told the girl to drive because he didn't want Coley operating his vehicle.

Coley refused to leave the car. The girl then sat on the hood and Coley allegedly drove off.

Authorities say the stepfather was driving nearby and saw the girl on the car. He was soon able to get Coley to stop.

No injuries were reported.

Swingers club owes models for using images

FL MIAMI — A Miami swingers club must pay 32 models a combined \$892,500 for using their images without permission. The Miami Herald reported a jury agreed on the payment, which totals much less than the models' desired \$5.3 million.

Miami Velvet caters to couples who share partners and have group sex.

The women filed suit in 2015 after advertisements featuring their photos appeared on Miami Velvet's website.

A judge ruled in favor of the women in 2017. This month's trial was held to determine damages.

Police say girlfriend scorched ex's home

AL PLEASANT GROVE — Authorities in Alabama said a woman admitted to setting her ex-boyfriend's house on fire the day after he broke up with her.

News outlets reported Ashlee Mack, 33, was charged with second-degree arson and third-degree burglary.

Pleasant Grove police Lt. Danny Reid said the man broke up with Mack earlier this year. Reid said Mack broke into the man's home the next day, doused his belongings in gasoline and set everything on fire.

Reid said no one was injured but the house was a total loss. He said police were working the case for months until Mack admitted to starting the blaze.

Man accused of stealing from cancer charity

NC ASHEVILLE — Police in North Carolina arrested a man who they say

broke in to several churches and stole thousands of dollars' worth of items from a breast cancer charity.

The Asheville Police Department said in a news release that Conner Lee Fewell, 25, was charged with breaking into two churches, a dentist's office and an aesthetic plastic surgery office.

The Asheville Citizen-Times reported Fewell stole cash and electronics from a nonprofit supporting women with breast cancer that was located inside one of the churches. The items were valued at \$7,500.

Bell missing from historic church found

MS WATER VALLEY — Authorities in Mississippi said they've recovered a bell reportedly stolen from a church on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Oxford Eagle reported Michael Lippert, 33, was booked in the Lafayette County Detention Center and charged with grand larceny.

The newspaper said the bell was found Monday. The bell was reported missing Sunday from Sand Springs Presbyterian Church in Orwood, a ghost town. The church is about 16 miles southwest of Oxford.

Lafayette County Sheriff's Office Major Alan Wilburn said it's not clear how the bell was moved. A motive for the act hasn't been announced.

Woman left wallet, meth at cash register

LA CALHOUN — Authorities in Louisiana said a wallet forgotten at a cash register was filled with more than just old receipts.

The Monroe News-Star reported the wallet contained a bag of crystal methamphet-

amine and an insurance card belonging to Alicia A. Pitre, 23. The newspaper said Pitre was charged with possession of a schedule II controlled dangerous substance.

An arrest report says an employee noticed the wallet at the register in July and looked through it to find an ID, she instead found meth. The report says deputies took Pitre's name from the insurance card and matched it to previous booking photos. It says the photos resembled a woman seen on store surveillance video.

US bodybuilder wins Mr. Olympia title

TN NASHVILLE — A bodybuilder from Nashville won the 2019 Mr. Olympia competition and the title's \$400,000 prize.

The Tennessean reported Brandon Curry, 36, is the first bodybuilder from Tennessee to win the premier competition, which started in 1965. The newspaper said Curry is only the 10th American to claim the title of Mr. Olympia.

Couple's castle to reopen for public tours

IL SAVANNA — An Illinois couple's home that they turned into a castle will reopen for tours next month.

People can tour Alan and Adrienne St. George's Havencrest Castle in Savanna during weekends in October.

The 63-room castle has many rooms decorated in traditional Victorian designs. Other rooms feature Chinese, Persian, Egyptian and Indian themes. A medieval hall and a conservatory with Chicago-style architecture are also open to visitors.

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Freshman to lead Auburn against A&M

Associated Press

AUBURN, Ala. — Texas A&M quarterback Kellen Mond can relate to the emotions Auburn's Bo Nix must be feeling heading into the Aggies-Tigers showdown this weekend.

Mond was once the youthful starter leading his team into big SEC road games.

Nix, a freshman, will be the center of attention when he takes the field for the No. 8 Tigers in the Aggies' backyard. He does have some experience in this situation, albeit as an eighth-grader. Nix had only three or four starts under his belt going into a playoff game against eventual state champion Clay-Chalkville, but passed for five touchdowns among his eight completions in an 85-50 loss in 2014.

"As an eighth-grader, that was just intense," he said. "That was my first time I was playing (on a) higher level as a younger kid. That was tough and it was just my second year of live football. But it was fun. I had a blast."

Nix leads Auburn onto a much bigger stage Saturday in College Station, Texas, against Mond and the No. 17 Aggies.

Mond has been where Nix is, starting most of his freshman season at Texas A&M. Now, Mond, a junior, is one of the Southeastern Conference's most experienced quarterbacks and well understands how difficult Kyle Field and its 102,000-plus fans can be for opposing quarterbacks.

"I think it's shocking for a lot of quarterbacks, obviously for a freshman who is probably playing on the road for the first time at a place like this with the 12th Man and Kyle Field," Mond said. "So, it's definitely going to be something he's never seen before."

Mond has played in plenty of big games. He and the Aggies fell short in the biggest one so far this season, a 24-10 loss to No. 1 Clemson in which Mond threw for 236 yards with an interception.

Auburn coach Gus Malzahn

has seen him mature as a quarterback over the past three seasons. Mond has passed for 747 yards and five touchdowns with three interceptions.

"He looks like he's in command of his offense this year," Malzahn said.

Nix is where Mond once was, growing into the job on the field.

Mond played in the Aggies' 2017 opener at UCLA but got his first start in an opponent's stadium in the seventh game of the season at Florida. He put up modest numbers, but Texas A&M won 19-17.

Nix would probably rather walk out of College Station with a victory and modest numbers than throw five touchdown passes and lose like he did as an eighth grader.

He made his college debut in another big game against No. 16 Oregon in Arlington, Texas, leading the Tigers to a comeback victory capped by his touchdown pass in the final seconds. Teammates have

praised his poise and maturity, and both were on display in his level-headed reaction to that kind of finish.

"It wasn't hard because I know it's a long season and I didn't play that great," Nix said. "So I just wanted to get better. I still want to get better."

Malzahn believes that experience will help, even though he acknowledges it was an Auburn-leaning crowd.

Texas A&M coach Jimbo Fisher was the position coach at Auburn for former Tigers quarterback Patrick Nix, Bo's father and high school coach. Bo Nix emerged as one of the nation's top quarterback prospects and an immediate starter.

Fisher said he has known Bo Nix "for a long time."

"His dad's a winner," Fisher said. "He's a great coach, coached in college, coached in high school. So, he'll (Bo) have a lot of intangibles in his blood that some other freshman may not just from the experience of being around those things."

Sooners' ball-hawking defense supporting offense

Associated Press

NORMAN, Okla. — It is a small sample size, but the numbers say Oklahoma's defense has improved this season.

The Sooners fielded one of the worst defenses in the nation last season. Just a good defense with Oklahoma's historically good offense and Heisman winner Kyler Murray might have produced a national title.

This season, the offense is just as good, leading the nation with 676.7 yards per game. But now, with it comes an aggressive, ball-hawking defense led by new coordinator Alex Grinch that has done its part in the 3-0 start for the fifth-ranked Sooners.

Grinch talked in the offseason about instilling a new attitude in the defense. So far, so good for Oklahoma — the Sooners allowed 408 yards to

Houston in the opener, then 339 yards against South Dakota and 311 yards against UCLA.

"I think it's tangible," Grinch said. "You can only do it on game day. You can talk about it. You can get a sense after a Tuesday in the spring kind of the progress. You can take practice seven in fall camp, just a random practice in fall camp — you can leave the facility at night and feel like you're making progress, but is it going to show on game day?"

It has. Last season, Oklahoma ranked 114th out of 129 schools in total defense and 101st in scoring defense. This season, the Sooners rank 46th nationally out of 130 teams in scoring defense and 58th in total defense.

Grinch has put an emphasis on forcing turnovers, and Oklahoma is plus-1.0 per game in turnover margin, tied for 21st

nationally heading into a bye week.

With the improvement has come a swagger that has been missing in recent years.

"Playing with confidence," linebacker Kenneth Murray said. "And that just comes from coach Grinch and his staff, they pride themselves on keeping things simple, and I think that's really the biggest thing. We've gotten out there and we've made a couple plays now. We've gotten a chance to go against a couple of different teams. Now we're just creating confidence and we're able to go out there and fly around and do what we do."

Murray leads the way with 22 tackles. Defensive end Jalen Redmond leads the team with 2.0 sacks, 2.0 quarterback hurries and 4.5 tackles for loss. Defensive back Brendan Radley-Hiles has an interception

return for a touchdown and a fumble recovery. Defensive linemen Neville Gallimore and Ronnie Perkins have created havoc all season.

The Sooners also are building depth, a weakness last season. Murray, for example, is playing fewer snaps than he did last year. Riley said that's a credit to recent recruiting success.

"That's all part of starting to establish the culture that we want defensively," Riley said. "That was part of the plan all along, is to play a lot of guys and to create competition and create depth and create development of other players."

There's still plenty of work to do — the Sooners rank 85th in pass efficiency defense and 85th in red zone defense. But Grinch said he sees the right mentality to get things turned around.

Mariota trying to fix issues from loss

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Marcus Mariota has looked at the tape, and the Tennessee Titans quarterback is ready to move on.

Up next is a quick turnaround with the Titans visiting Jacksonville on Thursday night, and a chance for Mariota and Tennessee to fix some of what went wrong in a 19-17 loss to Indianapolis.

“I love playing when the lights are on, and I look forward to these challenges,” Mariota said Tuesday. “I look forward to these division games. And our guys I think will be ready to go. It’s going to be a challenge, but we’re looking forward to it.”

Playing in prime time could help Mariota and the Titans (1-1), who have some areas to fix already this young season.

After watching tape, Mariota said staying out of third-and-long would help. They have converted only 3 of 20 third

downs, and Mariota has been sacked four times in each of the first two games.

The fifth-year quarterback struggled against the Colts, appearing to miss wide-open chances to check down to a nearby receiver and avoid a couple of sacks.

Blame Mariota trying to be too aggressive.

“Part of it was trying to make a big play,” Mariota said. “I felt we needed a spark and instead I didn’t check the ball down, and it was on a couple sacks. And that’s stuff that I got to do a better job of. But at the same time, you just got to have an aggressive mindset and see what you can do.”

Mariota, 28-29 as a starter, is 33-for-52 for 402 yards with four touchdown passes and no interceptions in a pivotal season for a quarterback in the final year of his rookie contract.

The Titans team, from coach Mike Vrabel and first-year offensive coordinator Arthur

Smith to Mariota and his teammates, all pointed the finger at their struggles on third downs for their offensive issues. Too many times the Titans have failed to pick up a first down because they faced third-and-10 — or longer.

Smith took all the blame on himself, saying he must call better plays.

Asked if he might be struggling working through his progression for throwing options, Mariota said he didn’t think so, though that might be a better question for the coaches.

“I feel like I’m seeing it,” Mariota said. “When the time comes and the journey’s ending in the pocket, just to get the ball out.”

Mariota was listed as not practicing with an injured quad Monday during a walk-through. He said he felt good Tuesday before practicing fully.

Through two games, the Titans are averaging 167.5 yards passing, putting them 27th in

the NFL. That’s up two slots from last season, but less than the 185.9 yards passing for all of 2018.

Derrick Henry ranked second in the AFC with 1,059 yards rushing last season, and he’s averaging 4.9 yards per carry this season and 87 yards per game. Henry said he can help by being more efficient when running and feels as if he hasn’t made all the plays he can.

“I can be better and be more efficient in the run game ... in those third-down situations we’ve got to get those third downs so we can extend drives and not be three-and-out,” Henry said. “You can’t get started going three-and-out. Nobody gets opportunities that way.”

Defenses focused on Henry means Mariota has opportunities to throw, which means making plays.

“We definitely have to execute better,” Mariota said.

Steelers begin post-Ben life by acquiring Fitzpatrick

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Pittsburgh Steelers have no plans to bail on the season with Ben Roethlisberger out until 2020 with an elbow injury.

“Our level of expectations in terms of our performance will not change,” coach Mike Tomlin said Tuesday.

A day removed from announcing Roethlisberger’s aching right elbow will require surgery that will sideline him for the rest of the year, the Steelers (0-2) began the process of moving on by upgrading their uneven defense and bringing in some depth behind new starting quarterback Mason Rudolph.

Pittsburgh sent three draft picks — a first-rounder and a fifth-rounder in 2020 and a sixth-rounder in 2021 — to Miami for defensive back Minkah Fitzpatrick and a 2020 fourth-round pick. The Steel-

ers also signed former Denver backup Paxton Lynch to the practice squad behind Rudolph and second-stringer Delvin Hodges.

Fitzpatrick, the 11th overall selection in the 2018 draft, had grown frustrated with his role for the rebuilding Dolphins. Miami began shopping him after a Week 1 loss to Baltimore and found a willing partner in the Steelers, who will be without starting safety Sean Davis for at least the next two months after Davis sustained a shoulder injury against Seattle last Sunday. The team placed Davis on injured reserve, though Tomlin said there’s a chance Davis could return later in the season.

Tomlin admitted the coaching staff became enamored with Fitzpatrick in the lead-up to the 2018 draft, but knew any chance at getting Fitzpatrick was a “pipe dream” with the Steelers drafting 28th. Miami

took Fitzpatrick 17 spots higher, with Pittsburgh taking safety Terrell Edmunds later in the opening round. Now Edmunds and Fitzpatrick will line up alongside each other on Sunday in San Francisco.

Though Fitzpatrick played a variety of positions in Miami, including cornerback, slot cornerback and linebacker in some substitution packages, he will begin his tenure in Pittsburgh at safety.

“He’s a multi-talented player, and at some point we’re going to utilize those talents as an asset to us,” Tomlin said. “But we’re going to get him started on a stable ground this week in terms of his contribution. And that means playing one position.”

Fitzpatrick had two interceptions in his rookie year for Miami and collected six tackles and a forced fumble last weekend against New England. He goes from a team that might be

the worst in the NFL to a club that began the season expecting to be in the playoff mix. That status is uncertain with Roethlisberger out and the offense now in the hands of the 24-year-old Rudolph.

A third-round pick in 2018 who beat out Josh Dobbs during training camp to be the primary backup behind Roethlisberger, Rudolph played well during a half of work against Seattle, completing 12 of 19 passes for 112 yards with two touchdowns and an interception that came off a tipped pass. Tomlin doesn’t expect the offense to change with Rudolph taking over.

“From a team perspective, we’ve got a great deal of confidence in Mason (Rudolph). It’s the natural process that is team sport,” Tomlin said. “One man goes down; the next man steps up.”

Yankees' Severino sharp in first start

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Luis Severino got Albert Pujols to reach for a slider with runners at the corners and ground into a double play that ended the first inning of his season debut, then punched the pocket of his glove to celebrate.

New York's ace was back on the mound, in time to make an impact in the postseason.

Severino pitched four dominant innings and reached 98.8 mph in an 8-0 win over the Los Angeles Angels on Tuesday night that moved New York to the brink of clinching its 21st postseason appearance in 25 years.

"It was exciting. It was fun going out there and hearing the fans," Severino said.

But another bizarre injury struck the Yankees. After the game New York announced

reliever Dellin Betances partially tore the Achilles tendon in his left foot when he hopped on the mound after striking out Brandon Drury, the second and final batter he faced in his season debut Sunday at Toronto.

"It's about as freak as it can be," manager Aaron Boone said.

Betances' season appears over after eight pitches. He and Severino spent much of the summer rehabbing together. A two-time All-Star, Severino got hurt while warming up before his first scheduled spring training appearance on March 5.

He began tentatively in game 152, opening with a 12-pitch walk to Brian Goodwin, but got sharper and allowed just a pair of singles.

"All his pitches were nice and crisp," the Angels' Luis Rengifo said.

Severino walked two and

struck out four, throwing 47 of 67 pitches for strikes and leaving to an ovation from fans tracking his pitch count.

"Looked pretty good out there, pretty sharp," catcher Austin Romine said. "We need Sevy where we're going. He's pitched some big games for us, and we look forward to him pitching some more big games for us."

Severino had seven swings and misses on fastballs and two on sliders.

"My fastball command I think was great. I still need to work a little bit more in sliders to left-handers," he said.

Severino's return gives the Yankees a plethora of postseason rotation choices from a group that includes James Paxton (14-6), Masahiro Tanaka (10-8), Domingo German (18-4), CC Sabathia (5-8) and J.A. Happ (12-8).

Severino was 19-8 with a 3.39 ERA in 32 starts last year but struggled late in the season. The Yankees at first diagnosed Severino with shoulder inflammation, but when the 25-year-old right-hander failed to improve he was sent for an MRI on April 9 that revealed a strained latissimus dorsi muscle. He didn't throw off a mound again until a bullpen session on Aug. 9 and made three minor league injury rehabilitation appearances from Sept. 1-11.

He started in a groove.

"Another huge step back for him," Boone said.

New York lowered its magic number to one over Cleveland to clinch the Yankees' 55th postseason appearance — 22 more than any other team. New York's magic number dropped to one over Tampa Bay to wrap up the Yankees' 19th AL East title.

MLB roundup

Moustakas, Cain lift Brewers into tie for wild card

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Mike Moustakas used one swing of the bat to give the Milwaukee Brewers' playoff push a big boost.

Moustakas hit his 35th home run of the season, Lorenzo Cain also homered and the Brewers beat the San Diego Padres 3-1 on Tuesday night, their 11th win in 12 games.

"Moustakas, he's always coming up with big homers," Cain said. "I've been seeing it for a long time now, especially back in our KC days. He has the power. He always hits 20, 30 homers every single year. So, I don't expect anything less. He's definitely been huge for us all year long."

The Brewers pulled even with the Chicago Cubs for the NL's second wild card and both trail first-place St. Louis by two games in the NL Central.

Manager Craig Counsell likes how everybody is contrib-

uting during this late-season charge.

"We're doing our jobs," he said. "You feel like if we post a good record, a good game every day for these last 11-12, we'll find ourselves in a pretty good spot."

Reds 4, Cubs 2: Sonny Gray and two relievers shut down host Chicago, dropping it into a tie for the second NL wild card with Milwaukee.

Giants 7, Red Sox 6 (15): Mike Yastrzemski rounded the bases to the cheers of the Fenway Park fans after hitting a solo homer for San Francisco — like his grandfather Carl Yastrzemski heard numerous times during his Hall of Fame career with Boston.

Blue Jays 8, Orioles 5: Rookie Cavan Biggio hit for the cycle and drove in four runs, leading visiting Toronto to the win.

Nationals 6, Cardinals 2: Patrick Corbin struck out 11 in

six innings, and Howie Kendrick had three hits for visiting Washington, which increased its lead for the NL's top wild card to 1½ games over the Cubs and Brewers.

Dodgers 7, Rays 5: Corey Seager drove in four runs, including a go-ahead, two-run double in the seventh, and host Los Angeles rallied to beat Tampa Bay.

Twins 9, White Sox 8 (12): Ronald Torreyes was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded in his team's three-run 12th inning, and host Minnesota maintained its five-game lead in the AL Central.

Indians 7, Tigers 2: Adam Plutko pitched six effective innings, rookie Oscar Mercado homered and host Cleveland beat Detroit for the 15th straight time.

Astros 4, Rangers 1: Justin Verlander picked up his major league-leading 19th win, and Yuli Gurriel, Alex Bregman

and Yordan Alvarez homered for host Houston.

Marlins 12, Diamondbacks 6: Miguel Rojas had a career-high six RBIs, including a three-run double, and visiting Miami rallied past Arizona.

Athletics 2, Royals 1: Matt Olson hit a tying homer for host Oakland leading off the seventh, and Seth Brown hit a go-ahead double two batters later.

Phillies 5, Braves 4: Rhys Hoskins and Jose Pirela hit two-run homers off Dallas Keuchel in visiting Philadelphia's five-run fourth inning.

Mets 6, Rockies 1: Marcus Stroman pitched seven shutout innings, and visiting New York beat Colorado to boost its flickering playoff hopes.

Mariners 6, Pirates 0: Marco Gonzales pitched seven innings, helping Seattle win after host Pittsburgh closer Felipe Vazquez was arrested on multiple felony charges earlier in the day.