

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, September 21, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

DOD sending more troops to Mid East

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
AND CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon will deploy additional air defense forces to the Middle East due to a “significant escalation of violence” by Iran, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said Friday.

Esper said intelligence clearly indicated Iran was responsible for a drone and cruise missile attack Sept. 14 on two key Saudi Arabian oil facilities, which made significant impact on the global market. He described the added troops as “defensive in nature” and said they primarily would provide additional air and missile defense capabilities.

Esper and Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, the chair-

man of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made the announcement of President Donald Trump’s decision to deploy new forces to the Middle East late Friday in a rare briefing at the Pentagon. They called on Iran to return to the negotiating table with American diplomats, saying the United States had exercised restraint in its responses to the escalation of violent acts by Iran and its proxy forces across the Middle East.

“As the president has made clear, the United States does not seek conflict with Iran,” Esper said Friday. “That said, we have many other military options available should they be necessary. We urge the Iranian leadership to cease their destructive and destabilizing activities and to move forward on a peaceful diplomatic path.”

The secretary also asked other nations to “stand up and condemn these attacks” and to contribute defensive capabilities to the region.

It was not immediately clear Friday evening how many troops or what equipment would be sent to the Middle East or when they would be deployed. Their destinations appear likely to include Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, both of which Esper said requested support following the Sept. 14 attacks. The United States maintains a small military footprint in both of those nations.

Dunford described the planned deployment as “moderate” in size, saying it would not number in the thousands of troops. The general said specific units had not been selected

for deployment as of Friday, and promised to release additional information this week.

Esper’s announcement followed a move by the Treasury Department to place sanctions on Iran’s central bank and sovereign wealth fund, The Washington Post reported. “We’ve now cut off all source of funds to Iran,” Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said.

Although the sanctions against the wealth fund are new — and potentially freeze tens of billions of dollars in Iranian national assets held or invested overseas — the central bank sanctions largely duplicate existing measures. In both cases, they prohibit U.S. and foreign entities and individuals using U.S. financial institutions from engaging in transactions with the Iranian institutions.

13 Marines charged in human smuggling probe

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Thirteen Marines suspected of participating in human smuggling operations were formally charged after spending nearly two months detained at Camp Pendleton, Calif., officials announced Friday.

The charges against the Marines — all of whom are lance corporals serving in two battalions of the 1st Marine Division — vary, but include larceny, perjury, drunkenness and failure to obey an order, according to a news release from the 1st Marine Division. Some of the Marines also face a general article charge, a catch-all violation of the Uniformed Code of Military Justice that for this investigation relates to allegations of transporting or conspiring to transport undocumented immigrants.

Two of the charged Marines — Lance Cpls. Byron D. Law and David J. Salazar-Quintero, both members of 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment — were named in

the news release because they face similar charges in the federal court system. The remaining Marines charged will face Article 32 hearings, which is an investigative hearing to determine whether charges against a servicemember warrant a court-martial. The Marines will be named if the charges lead to a court-martial, said Maj. Kendra Motz, a division spokeswoman.

The criminal activity within the division came to light when U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents arrested Law and Salazar-Quintero on July 3 for attempting to smuggle three people from Mexico across the U.S. border. Aside from federal human smuggling charges in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California, both Marines now face a general article charge from the Marine Corps.

During the investigation into Law and Salazar-Quintero, officials discovered other Marines were involved in illegal activity and on July 25, 16 Marines were detained during morning formation, ac-

ording to information previously released by the division.

One Marine with 1st Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, who was detained by border patrol personnel on July 10, has been charged with failure to obey an order, endangerment offenses and a general article, according to the new release.

The remaining 10 Marines facing charges are members of 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, and were detained by Naval Criminal Investigative Service during the July morning formation. The charges for that group include one Marine charged with drunkenness, one Marine with perjury, five charged with a general article and one charged with failure to obey an order, larceny and a general article.

None of the Marines arrested or detained for questioning served in support of the military mission along the U.S.-Mexico border, according to the release.

VA says veteran suicide rate recalculated to 17 per day

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs has altered how it calculates the average number of veteran suicides each day, meaning the 20-per-day statistic — widely known and often cited by elected officials — has changed to 17.

The VA released its annual National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report on Friday, tracking the changes from year to year. The 2019 report includes data from 2017, the most recent available.

More veterans died by suicide in 2017 than the previous year, the report shows. There were 6,139 veteran suicide

deaths in 2017, an increase of 129 from 2016.

However, the new report lists the daily average of veteran suicides at 17, down from the 20 per day reported in previous years. The VA explained that it removed servicemembers, as well as former National Guard and Reserve members who were never federally activated, from its count.

It was revealed last year that the 20-per-day statistic was misunderstood and included the deaths of active-duty servicemembers and members of the Guard and Reserve, not just veterans.

At the time, Craig Bryan, a psychologist and leader of the National Center for Veterans

Studies, said the distinction could help advocates in the fight against military and veteran suicide.

“The benefit of separating out subgroups is that it can help us identify higher-risk subgroups of the whole, which may be able to help us determine where and how to best focus resources,” Bryan said.

The new report shows that suicide among veterans continues to be higher than the rest of the population. The suicide rate among male veterans was 1.3 times the rate for other adult men in 2017. For women, the contrast is even more stark. The rate among female veterans was 2.2 times the rate for other adult women that year.

Trump again says he could end Afghan War ‘quickly’

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Friday that the United States could end the nearly 19-year war in Afghanistan “very quickly” if he chose to do so but that it would involve killing “tens of millions” of people.

Trump’s comments came at a joint news conference with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison as he relayed that Afghanistan was among the issues that the two men discussed in their meeting at the White House.

“We’ve been very effective in Afghanistan, and if we wanted to do a certain method of war, we would win that very quickly, but many, many, really, tens of millions of people would be killed, and we think it’s unnecessary,” Trump said. “But Australia’s been a great help to us in Afghanistan.”

He made similar comments in July during an Oval Office meeting with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan. At that point, Trump claimed he could win the war “in a week” but said he did not want to go that route, because “I just don’t want to kill 10 million people.”

He later clarified that he had plans in reserve to drop enormous bombs on the country in an all-out military onslaught.

The U.S. military’s role in Afghanistan has been a continuing sore spot for Trump.

Recent developments have left uncertain the administration’s strategy for achieving a political solution to the war and the U.S. troop withdrawals Trump has promised.

Earlier this month, Trump decided to call off a secret meeting he planned with Afghan and Taliban leaders to secure a peace deal, after an American soldier was killed in a Taliban attack.

Court case tests military’s deployment restrictions for HIV-positive troops

The Washington Post

RICHMOND, Va. — Federal judges pressed the Defense Department on Wednesday to justify the U.S. military’s refusal to deploy — and decision to discharge — certain servicemembers who test HIV positive.

The lawsuit was filed by two airmen slated to be forced out of the Air Force after receiving results of their tests during health screenings last year. The Pentagon’s policy, they say, unlawfully discriminates against servicemembers based on a medical condition.

The Defense Department restricts newly diagnosed servicemembers from deploying to combat zones such as Afghanistan. The risk of HIV transmission, the government says, is heightened on the battlefield, where it may be more difficult to maintain treatment.

The Richmond-based U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit was reviewing an earlier ruling from federal court in Alexandria that temporarily blocked the military from enforcing its policy nationally and from discharging the two airmen.

At least four other active-duty Air Force members face discharge because of the restrictions and hundreds of others could be affected by the

policy, according to lawyers for the two airmen. A separate case pending in Virginia challenges the U.S. Army’s similar HIV-related policy.

In court Wednesday, Judge James Wynn asked why the military would refuse to deploy servicemembers with HIV but not those with other chronic conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Justice Department lawyer Lewis Yelin told the court that although the risk of transmission is low, “it is not nonexistent” and that the policy accounts for the “rigors and chaos” of combat that heighten the risk of blood-to-blood contact or a disruption in the supply of necessary medicine.

Wynn seemed concerned the policy has become more restrictive in the last two years despite the low risk of transmission with treatment.

After the two men tested positive, doctors determined they were physically fit to deploy and their commanding officers backed their continued service. But last November they were told they would be discharged.

The Air Force concluded that the men could no longer perform their duties because officials said their medical condition prevented them from deploying to the areas where most airmen are expected to go.

Trump reportedly urged Ukraine to probe Biden's son

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump urged the new leader of Ukraine this summer to investigate the son of former Vice President Joe Biden, a person familiar with the matter said.

Democrats condemned what they saw as a clear effort to damage a political rival, now at the center of an explosive whistleblower complaint against Trump.

It was the latest revelation in an escalating controversy that has created a showdown between congressional Democrats and the Trump administration, which has refused to turn over the formal complaint by a national security official or even describe its contents.

Trump is defending himself against the intelligence official's complaint, asserting that it comes from a "partisan whistleblower," though the president also says he doesn't know who had made it. The complaint was based on a series of events, one of which was a July 25 call between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, according to two people familiar with the matter. The people were not authorized to discuss the issue by name and were granted anonymity.

In a tweet Saturday, Trump referred to "a perfectly fine and routine conversation I had" with Ukraine's leader. "Nothing was said that was in any way wrong."

Trump, in that call, urged Zelenskiy to probe the activities of potential Democratic rival Biden's son Hunter, who worked for a Ukrainian gas company, according to one of the people, who was briefed on the call. Trump did not raise the issue of U.S. aid to Ukraine, indicating there was not an explicit

quid pro quo, according to the person.

In an interview with Ukrainian outlet Hromadske that was published Friday evening, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Vadym Prystaiko said his country was not interested in taking sides in U.S. politics, but that Zelenskiy had the right to keep the contents of his conversation with Trump secret.

Biden said that if the reports are true, "then there is truly no bottom to President Trump's willingness to abuse his power and abase our country." He said Trump should release the transcript of his July phone conversation with Zelenskiy "so that the American people can judge for themselves."

The U.S. government's intelligence inspector general has described the whistleblower's Aug. 12 complaint as "serious" and "urgent." Trump dismissed it all Friday, insisting "it's nothing."

"I have conversations with many leaders. It's always appropriate. Always appropriate," Trump said.

When questioned whether he had brought up Biden in the call, Trump said, "It doesn't matter what I discussed." But then Trump urged the media "to look into" Biden's background with Ukraine.

There has yet to be any evidence of any wrongdoing by Biden or his son regarding Ukraine.

The standoff with Congress raises fresh questions about the extent to which Trump's appointees are protecting the Republican president from oversight and, specifically, whether his new acting director of national intelligence, Joseph Maguire, is working with the Justice Department to shield the president.

Houston sees relief from lethal Imelda

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Emergency workers used boats Friday to rescue about 60 residents of a Houston-area community still trapped in their homes by floodwaters following one of the wettest tropical cyclones in U.S. history.

At least four deaths have been linked to the remnants of Tropical Storm Imelda, which deluged parts of Texas and Louisiana and drew comparisons to Hurricane Harvey two years ago. Officials took advantage of receding floodwaters to begin assessing how many homes and cars were flooded.

Almost 16 feet of standing water was reported in Huffman, northeast of Houston, when a nearby bayou overflowed. The Harris County Sheriff's Office deployed its marine unit to evacuate the around 60 residents.

East of Houston in Jefferson County, which got hit by more than 40 inches of rain, officials also began taking stock of their damage. They also announced the death of Malcolm Foster, 47, a Beaumont resident whose body was found inside his vehicle.

The heaviest rainfall had ended by Thursday night in Southeast Texas, but forecasters warned that parts of northeast Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Louisiana could see flash flooding as Imelda's remnants shifted to the north.

Officials in Harris County, which includes Houston, said there had been a combination of at least 1,700 high-water rescues following Thursday's torrential rainfall.

"The water is getting lower and it's time for assessment and to move into recovery," said Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, the county's top administrator.

Most of the Houston-area roads that became water-logged after heavy rainfall Thursday and resulted in more than 1,650 vehicles being abandoned and later towed were mostly dry on Friday.

But parts of one of the major thoroughfares that passes through Southeast Texas — Interstate 10 — remained closed Friday due to floodwaters from torrential rain in the Beaumont area. Another freeway section, closer to Houston, was also shut down as officials assessed damage to its bridges over the San Jacinto River after they were hit by two barges that broke free of their moorings.

Nearly 123,000 vehicles normally cross the bridges each day, according to the Texas Department of Transportation.

Officials say two of the deaths from Imelda happened in the Houston area: an unidentified man in his 40s or 50s who drowned Thursday while driving a van through 8-foot-deep floodwaters and a man whose body was found in a ditch Friday and is believed to have drowned.

In Jefferson County, besides Foster's death, officials say a 19-year-old man drowned and was electrocuted Thursday while trying to move his horse to safety.

The National Weather Service said preliminary estimates suggested Jefferson County was hit with more than 40 inches of rain in a span of just 72 hours, which would make it the seventh-wettest tropical cyclone to hit the continental U.S.

"The issue is that you can't get 40 inches of rain in a 72-hour period and be fully prepared for that," Jefferson County spokeswoman Allison Getz told The Associated Press on Friday.

Getz said dozens of people have traveled to the county with boats in tow from Louisiana and other parts of Texas to assist with rescue efforts.

In nearby Chambers County, preliminary estimates indicate about 800 homes and businesses sustained some level of damage from floodwaters, county spokesman Ryan Holzaepfel said. Emergency personnel rescued about 400 people during the deluge, mostly from homes, he said.

Walmart to halt e-cig sales

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Walmart is getting out of the vaping business.

The nation's largest retailer said Friday that it will stop selling electronic cigarettes at its namesake stores and Sam's Clubs in the U.S. when it sells out its current inventory.

The nation's largest retailer said the move is due to "growing federal, state and local regulatory complexity" regarding vaping products. It also comes after several hundred people have mysteriously fallen ill after vaping, and eight have died.

Walmart's decision is the latest blow to the vaping industry, which has tried to position its products as healthier alternatives to smoking cigarettes, which are responsible for 480,000 deaths a year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But the industry has come under increased scrutiny after the deaths and illnesses — along with a surge in underage vaping.

President Donald Trump has proposed a federal ban on flavored e-cigarettes and vaping products. Michigan banned the sale of flavored e-cigarettes last week. In June, San Francisco became the first major U.S. city to ban the sale of electronic cigarettes.

The bulk of e-cigarettes are sold through vape

shops, which number about 115,000 nationwide, with additional outlets including drug stores, grocery stores and tobacco outlets, industry experts say.

E-cigarettes represent a very small part of Walmart's nicotine business, which also includes traditional cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and nicotine gum, so the impact on the retailer will be small.

But, it will be difficult for vaping companies to replace that access to shoppers given Walmart's size, said Greg Portell, global lead partner in the consumer and retail practice of A.T. Kearney, a strategy and management consulting firm. Walmart operates more than 5,000 stores under its namesake and Sam's Club in the U.S.

"Walmart's size and scale makes their decisions about what products to carry meaningful for the impacted products," Portell said. "Vaping companies will be especially challenged given the lack of direct consumer access."

More than 500 people have been diagnosed with breathing illnesses after using e-cigarettes and other vaping devices, according to U.S. health officials. An eighth death was reported last week. But health officials still have not identified the cause.

Area 51 events mostly peaceful

Associated Press

HIKO, Nev. — Events involving thousands of Earthlings answering an internet buzz about an invitation to "Storm Area 51" in the Nevada desert have been mostly festive, with crowds numbering in the low thousands and few arrests, officials said.

Three people were arrested Friday on the remote once-secret military base, Lincoln County Sheriff Kerry Lee said, bringing to five the tally since Thursday of accused trespassers during "Alienstock" and "Area 51 Basecamp" events and festivals in the tiny desert towns of Rachel and Hiko.

Several minor injuries were reported, and one man was treated for dehydration by festival medics in Rachel before returning to the party.

Lee said a man reported missing Friday morning after heading Thursday from a festival campground in Hiko toward an Area 51 gate was found safe Friday evening. Details weren't immediately made public, but his disappearance was not believed to have been an abduction.

Almost 100 people went at 3 a.m. Friday to the best-known "back gate" of the legendary former top-secret U.S. Air Force base, near the tiny town of Rachel, and another 40 made a more difficult trek to a lesser-known gate in Tikaboo Valley, Lee said.

About 300 went to the Tikaboo gate during daylight, and another 800 people made the dusty 8-mile drive to the Rachel gate during the day, Lee said.

Two men were arrested after military security officers found them in the mountains inside the perimeter of the base somewhere between the two gates, Lee said.

US, El Salvador sign asylum deal

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The United States on Friday signed an agreement that paves the way for the U.S. to send many asylum-seekers to one of the world's most violent countries, El Salvador.

But both countries must first take necessary legal actions and implement major border security and asylum procedures before it would go into effect, according to a draft copy of the agreement obtained by The Associated Press.

The deal is the latest ambitious step taken by the Trump administration to lean on other nations — many of them notoriously violent — to take in immigrants to stop the flow of migrants to the U.S.-Mexico border.

U.S. immigration officials also are forcing more than 42,000 people to remain in Mexico as their cases play out

and have changed policy to deny asylum to anyone who transited through a third country en route to the southern border of the U.S.

Curbing immigration is a signature political issue for Trump and one that thrills his supporters. But the U.S. is also managing a crush of migrants at the border that has strained the system.

Acting Homeland Security Secretary Kevin McAleenan and El Salvador's foreign minister, Alexandra Hill Tinoco, signed the "cooperative asylum agreement" in a live-streamed press conference on Friday.

They lauded the two countries for working together to stem migration to the U.S. but provided few details about the agreement.

Condemnation from migrant and refugee advocates was swift.

"Where will they declare a

haven for asylum seekers next? Syria? North Korea? This is cynical and absurd. El Salvador is in no way safe for asylum seekers," said Refugees International President Eric Schwartz.

Meghan Lopez, country director for El Salvador at the International Rescue Committee, said the U.S. government is "attempting once more to turn its back on extremely vulnerable people."

"El Salvador is not safe for many of its own nationals and is struggling to meet their needs, which is why many seek asylum in the United States. It is unrealistic to expect El Salvador to be able to offer protection to asylum-seekers fleeing conditions comparable to those in El Salvador."

El Salvadorans are excluded from the agreement, according to the draft.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

3 pit bulls help man capture home invader

PA PHILADELPHIA — Police said a Pennsylvania man captured a home invader with the help of his three pit bulls.

Investigators said the 30-year-old homeowner and another resident were inside their North Philadelphia home around 8:45 p.m. when two men entered, announcing a robbery.

The homeowner wrestled one of the suspects to the ground while the other shot him in the left thigh before fleeing the scene. As the homeowner continued fighting with the first suspect, the three pit bulls joined in and attacked the intruder.

The dogs and second resident were not injured during the incident, and nothing was stolen.

Car smashes into lobby of Trump Plaza

NY NEW ROCHELLE — Police said a car smashed through the glass-doored front lobby of the Trump Plaza in New Rochelle.

Authorities told WABC-TV the incident does not appear to be intentional. They said there are no indications it was anything more than an accident.

The driver was injured and was questioned by police. Two pedestrians in the lobby of the 40-story luxury residence in Westchester County were also hurt.

Woman's good deed leads to rat infestation

MA LYNN — No good deed goes unpunished.

That was what one Waitt Road resident found out when her efforts to feed the area's

wildlife led to a rat infestation in the neighborhood.

Ward 2 Councilor Rick Starbard said he was notified of the problem two months ago by multiple neighbors. Only in the past couple of weeks has the infestation calmed down due to mitigation efforts.

"The infestation is the cause of one very sweet, well-intentioned lady who not only had multiple bird feeders around her property but also dumped peanuts in her yard to feed other animals," Starbard wrote in his Ward 2 newsletter.

Dillinger family applies again to exhume grave

IN INDIANAPOLIS — Family members of 1930s gangster John Dillinger submitted a new application to exhume his Indianapolis gravesite.

The Indiana State Department of Health said it received the latest application last week.

Dillinger's family first applied to exhume the remains in July as part of a planned History Channel documentary. The deadline to exhume and return the remains was Sept. 16, and the exhumation did not occur.

The History Channel dropped out of a planned documentary on Dillinger that would have included the exhumation. Family members said they have evidence Dillinger's body may not be buried in Crown Hill Cemetery.

Nazi flag found on pole at elementary school

MI BATTLE CREEK — Police in southern Michigan are on the lookout for suspicious activity after a Nazi flag was raised on an elementary school flag pole.

The Battle Creek Enquirer reported construction crews at

Riverside Elementary School in Battle Creek discovered the flag. They alerted Lakeview School District employees, who called police.

Superintendent Blake Pre-witt said in a statement the flag "represents beliefs that in no way reflect our values as a district" and it's "disturbing that an individual would use school grounds as a platform to promote such ideals."

Rabbi tricked boy into sending nude photos

NY NEW YORK — Federal authorities said a rabbi and associate principal at a Jewish private school in the Bronx was arrested for tricking a 14-year-old boy into sending him nude photos of himself.

Jonathan Skolnick was arrested on charges of child enticement, production, receipt and possession of child pornography and sending extortionate communications.

Prosecutors said Skolnick allegedly posed as several teen-aged girls online to communicate with the victim.

Store pays \$1.2M to settle assault claims

CA REDDING — A Northern California store agreed to pay \$1.2 million to settle claims that a supervisor sexually assaulted employees in a walk-in freezer.

The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing announced a settlement with 99 Cents Only Stores.

The agency began investigating after two former employees said they were assaulted and harassed by an assistant manager at a store in Redding.

The employees also alleged that they had their hours reduced in retaliation after reporting the harassment.

No one claims last slave ship 'Clotilda'

AL MOBILE — Alabama's state historical commission apparently will retain control of the last U.S. slave ship, the Clotilda.

The deadline for any potential owners to claim the wreckage of the wooden schooner, which was burned near Mobile after illegally bringing about 110 captives to Alabama from Africa in 1860, was Sept. 13.

Because no one claimed the ship's remains, the state can now move forward in federal court to take permanent possession.

Officials said they're unsure how much of the Clotilda remains, but they believe at least some of the hull could be intact in the muddy bottom of the Mobile River near an island.

Bride, groom visit hurt grandma in hospital

FL MIRAMAR BEACH — When her grandmother broke her hip the day before her destination wedding, the bride and groom showed up at the hospital to surprise her.

Kasey Samuels says Rita Scanlon "was pretty much in tears" when Samuels and her groom Tyler showed up at Sacred Heart Hospital in Florida's Panhandle dressed in wedding attire. She said her grandmother knew they'd visit, but didn't expect they'd arrive in a wedding gown and tuxedo.

The Northwest Florida Daily News reported Scanlon slipped and fell in her condo just before the rehearsal dinner. She called her son, John, who is Kasey's father. He called Samuels, who is a nurse in Dallas.

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Rooney wants playoffs in final season

Associated Press

As his Major League Soccer career draws to a close and he prepares to return home to England, Wayne Rooney would like one more shot at the playoffs.

The longtime Manchester United and English national team striker is in the final regular-season stretch with D.C. United, which is 12-10-9 this season for fifth in the Eastern Conference. There are three games to go, including Sunday's match at home against the Sounders.

"I know mathematically it doesn't put us in a playoff spot just yet, but I think we have to lose every game and the teams outside the playoff spots have to win every game, and if that happens then we don't deserve to be in it," Rooney said.

Rooney is playing out the season with United before the next stop in his storied career: he's taking over second-tier Championship team Derby County as a player-coach in January.

His return to England will end an MLS stint that began in June 2018 when he agreed to a deal with United worth a re-

ported \$13 million.

Rooney left Manchester United after 13 seasons in 2017 and spent a year with Everton, where he started his career. He is the all-time top scorer for England (53) and Manchester United (253). He scored 208 goals in Premier League play, second only to Alan Shearer's 260.

After winning just nine matches and finishing outside of the playoffs in 2017, United was sparked by Rooney's addition midway through the 2018 season — as well as the opening of Audi Field — and wound up fourth in the East. The team's playoff run was short, however, as United was eliminated on penalties after a 2-all draw with the Columbus Crew in the knockout round.

Currently NYCFC sits atop the East as the season winds down. Major League Soccer went to single-elimination playoff rounds this year and expanded the postseason to include 14 teams, seven from each conference. The all-knockout postseason replaces the two-legged format for the conference semifinals and fi-

nals that the league started using in 2003.

"I think we know we're not the best football team in the league. We like to try to make games a bit scruffy at times and work hard and dig in and try and make the three points," Rooney said. "That's how we've won most of our games this season, so we all need to work together to do that. It will be tough, of course, but if we do that we'll give ourselves a good chance."

United coach Ben Olsen said it's hard to understate Rooney's contributions to the team. Rooney leads United with 11 goals and seven assists this season. He had 12 goals last season.

"Last year with the addition of the stadium, that brought a new energy to the fan base and community. Wayne doubled down on that and has energized the fan base, the team and the organization," Olsen said. "He continues to be a big piece of this. He's been a joy to manage so far and we're looking forward to the little time we have left with him."

The team is already building

toward a future without Rooney. This week, United announced the return of midfielder Yamil Asad for the 2020 season. Asad played for United in 2018 on loan from a first-division club in his native Argentina, and he had nine goals, including the team's first goal in the opening game at Audi Field.

Rooney's new job will present different challenges for the 33-year-old. Derby has been out of the Premier League since 2008 and lost a playoff final in May to return to the top division. His former England teammate, Frank Lampard, was in charge of Derby last season before moving to manage Chelsea.

Rooney said he's relished his chance to play in MLS. He's been getting cheers on the road for the past couple of weeks since he announced his move.

"I've always enjoyed playing football, whether that's in England or over here. I love the game. I love playing so my enjoyment for the game hasn't changed from obviously the moment I got here to now. It's what I do," he said. "I know I love playing football and until my body tells me I can't, I'll keep doing it."

Pats release Brown after 2nd sexual assault allegation

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Antonio Brown was released by the New England Patriots on Friday after a second woman accused him of sexual misconduct — the third team in seven months to tire of the off-field behavior that has overshadowed his accomplishments as one of the NFL's most prolific receivers for a decade.

The defending Super Bowl champions announced the move in a statement emailed to reporters, three minutes after Brown posted on Twitter: "Thank you for the opportunity @Patriots #GoWinIt."

Already facing a civil suit claiming that he raped a former trainer, Brown was accused in a Sports Illustrated story pub-

lished on Monday of exposing himself to an artist he hired to paint a mural at his home. He has denied both allegations.

But the Patriots cut ties with the four-time All-Pro after just one game.

The statement attributed to "a Patriots spokesperson" said, in its entirety: "The New England Patriots are releasing Antonio Brown. We appreciate the hard work of many people over the past 11 days, but we feel that it is best to move in a different direction at this time."

Patriots coach Bill Belichick and quarterback Tom Brady both avoided questions about Brown during their scheduled media availability Friday, a few hours before Brown was released. Belichick said dur-

ing the morning that the team was looking into "some things," then cut off his news conference when reporters continued to ask about Brown.

Asked if he expected Brown to play in Sunday's game against the New York Jets, Belichick said, "He's on the roster."

About five hours later, he wasn't.

"It's unfortunate things didn't work out with the Patriots," Brown's agent, Drew Rosenhaus tweeted. "But Antonio is healthy and is looking forward to his next opportunity in the NFL. He wants to play the game he loves and he hopes to play for another team soon."

The NFL said it will continue to investigate Brown's behavior, as it has with stars like Ray

Rice and Kareem Hunt and lesser players who have run afoul of the personal conduct policy — whether they were convicted of a crime, or even charged.

The league said in a statement late Friday that Brown could be placed on the commissioner's exempt list if he is signed by another team and could also be suspended once the investigation concludes, casting doubt on whether he will play again this season.

"We have as yet made no findings regarding these issues," the statement said. "Upon the conclusion of the investigation, he may also be subject to discipline if the investigation finds that he has violated the law or league policies."

Fink leads USC to upset of No. 10 Utah

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Matt Fink decided to stay at Southern California even after finishing third in the Trojans' four-man quarterback competition in training camp last month.

A few weeks later, Fink found himself passing for 351 yards, leading a victory over No. 10 Utah at the roaring Coliseum, and sitting between Reggie Bush and Matt Leinart for a postgame interview on national television.

Fink didn't give up on his USC dream, and the Trojans are grateful they had such a talented backup to their backup.

Michael Pittman Jr. caught 10 passes for a career-high 232 yards and a touchdown from Fink in USC's 30-23 victory over the Utes on Friday night.

Fink went 21-for-30 with three touchdown passes for USC (3-1, 2-0 Pac-12) after tak-

ing over when freshman Kedon Slovis left with a possible concussion on the second play of the game. Fink mostly looked sharp as the third quarterback to play important snaps in four games for the Trojans, who lost starter J.T. Daniels to a season-ending knee injury in their opener.

"I don't think this moment was too big for me," Fink said. "I've been in the era of Sam Darnold, and I've seen things that are much crazier. Getting in today and showing what I can do is what I really wanted to do by staying here."

After barely playing the past two seasons, Fink nearly went to Illinois as a graduate transfer last spring. The Los Angeles-area native instead decided to stay home and wait for a chance, however remote.

"In a world where everybody goes different places, this one

stayed for his family, waiting for his moment, waiting for his memory," USC coach Clay Helton said. "And what a memory it was tonight. When his number was called, he made the most of it tonight."

Tyler Vaughns, Amon-Ra St. Brown and Pittman all caught TD passes from Fink, while Pittman had the fifth-biggest receiving yardage game in USC history. His remarkable 42-yard catch in the fourth quarter eventually led to a 4-yard TD run by Markese Stepp, who celebrated by handing the ball to Bush, the Trojans great attending the game as a broadcaster despite his NCAA-mandated disassociation from his school.

Devontae Henry-Cole rushed for an early touchdown and Cole Fotheringham caught a TD pass for the Utes (3-1, 0-1), who struggled after star run-

ning back Zack Moss left in the first half with an apparent shoulder injury. Utah still has never won at the 96-year-old Coliseum.

Tyler Huntley passed for 210 yards and ran for 60 more, but the Utes committed 16 penalties for 120 yards and struggled to get key defensive stops against a green Trojans quarterback and his stellar receivers.

"Mostly we had no answer for their receiving corps," Utah coach Kyle Whittingham said. "Michael Pittman did a number on us. We just didn't do a good enough job on him. We've got to rethink some things coaching-wise."

With Bush and Urban Meyer watching at the Coliseum as part of Fox Sports' broadcast crew, USC's roller coaster season went on the upswing again after last week's embarrassing overtime loss at BYU.

College football roundup

Boise State pulls away from Air Force in second half

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — Hank Bachmeier's arm and poise carried No. 20 Boise State until Robert Mahone took over in the fourth quarter.

And the Broncos' defense? It continued to stymie opponents in the second half, even if it finally gave up some points.

"The second half we just went out there and tried to put the game away," Mahone said. "It was a close game, but the second half we knew we had to finish and that's what we did."

Bachmeier threw for 263 yards and two touchdowns, Mahone rushed for a pair of scores in the fourth quarter, and Boise State pulled away in the second half for a 30-19 win over Air Force on Friday night.

Bachmeier's arm made up for a Broncos running game that was ineffective until the fourth quarter. He hit CT Thomas on a 36-yard touchdown pass

in the first half while getting crunched by a defender, and added a 28-yard TD toss to tight end John Bates late in the third quarter to give the Broncos a 17-13 lead.

Mahone added a pair of 10-yard TD runs in the fourth as the Broncos (4-0, 1-0 Mountain West) won their 20th straight conference opener.

Bachmeier was 19-for-26 passing in another impressive performance by the freshman in just his fourth start.

"He came back in the second half even better. He's a strong kid back there in the pocket. He took a couple of licks, but he gets right back up," Thomas said.

Air Force quarterback Donald Hammond III had an 8-yard touchdown run in the first half and threw a 31-yard TD to Geraud Sanders late in the fourth quarter. Taven Birdow led Air Force (2-1, 0-1) with 67

yards rushing, but the second-best rushing attack in the country was held to 242 yards, more than 100 yards under its season average.

"They've got a really, really good team," Air Force coach Troy Calhoun said.

Bachmeier also got help from his receivers, who made terrific catches. Thomas, who had a career-high 119 yards receiving, made a diving 29-yard catch to set up Eric Sachse's 40-yard field goal in the first half. John Hightower made a juggling reception surrounded by two defenders on a key third down in the fourth quarter, and Mahone scored on a 10-yard TD run on the next play to give the Broncos a 23-13 lead.

"We knew coming into the game Air Force does a great job being physical," Thomas said. "Our mindset was we had to compete for the ball, every ball that comes our way."

Louisiana Tech 43, Florida International 31: Justin Henderson rushed for 141 yards and three touchdowns, Bailey Hale tied a program record with five field goals and the host Bulldogs beat the Panthers.

Hale kicked field goals of 41, 25 and 29 yards in the fourth quarter to give Louisiana Tech a 36-24 lead with 2:17 remaining. FIU snapped Louisiana Tech's 16-0 scoring run with an 8-play, 72-yard scoring drive to get within 36-31 with 51 seconds left. But Amik Robertson ran back the ensuing onside kick 30 yards for a TD to seal it.

J'Mar Smith was 27-for-41 passing for 290 yards for Louisiana Tech (3-1, 1-0 Conference USA), which entered ranked 26th in the nation for passing offense at 294.7 yards per game. Hale also made five field goals last season against North Texas.

Braves clinch 2nd straight NL East title

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Freddie Freeman didn't care that his eyes kept tearing up from all the beer and champagne soakings.

It seemed like every teammate stopped by to blast him, and he loved every minute of it.

"This is the first step of hopefully a few celebrations to come," he said with a big, wet smile. "We're excited. We've got a really good ballclub. We're just getting started."

The Atlanta Braves clinched their second straight NL East title as Ronald Acuna Jr. hit his 41st homer in a 6-0 win over San Francisco on Friday night that eliminated the Giants from postseason contention in Bruce Bochy's last year as manager.

Acuna scored three runs to back Mike Foltynewicz (8-5), who allowed three hits in eight innings. Atlanta's 19th division title tied the New York Yankees for the most since Major League Baseball split into divisions for the 1969 season.

Atlanta's win ensured it will finish ahead of second-place Washington and will start the NL Division Series at home on Oct. 3, most likely against the NL Central champion.

Braves players ran onto the infield to celebrate as soon as Acuna caught Alex Dickerson's game-ending flyout.

Atlanta (95-60) moved into sole possession of first place for good on June 12. Led by Acuna, Freeman, Josh Donaldson and an offense that has produced a franchise-best 241 homers,

its lead swelled from 5½ to 10 games in six days, ending with a 9-4 home win over Washington on Sept. 7.

"Last year I kept running around with blinders on wondering if we were good enough to pull it off," Braves manager Brian Snitker said. "This year, as went, it was like we're pretty good. Nobody gave us a chance early, and it was good to see these guys get on a roll. Just took care of business, winning a lot of first games and winning a lot of series. That was big."

MLB roundup

Indians down Phillies, keep pace in AL wild-card race

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The Indians are thriving under the pressure of playoff-race baseball.

Philadelphia? Not so much.

Carlos Carrasco got his first save in five years, and Cleveland beat the Phillies 5-2 Friday to remain tied with Tampa Bay for the second AL wild card at 91-63.

Cleveland trails AL Central leader Minnesota by four games.

"It's what we come to the ballpark to do and what we play for," All-Star MVP Shane Bieber said. "It's a special time of the year. I know I'm one of the guys to be truly extremely excited about the position we're in."

Bieber (15-7) allowed two runs and seven hits in 7⅓ innings with seven strikeouts. Rookie Oscar Mercado drove in a first-inning run with a double and added an RBI single in the seventh.

"You're so many games in, guys tend to feel a little tired, but you go out there and every game is important," he said. "That adrenaline kicks in. It's awesome to be a part of this especially in my first year."

Cleveland's fifth straight win eliminated the defending World Series champion Boston Red

Sox from postseason contention and dropped Philadelphia five games behind Milwaukee for the second NL wild card with 10 games left. The Phillies lost for the fourth time in six games.

"Got to win. Period," Jay Bruce said. "Can't worry about anything else. You listen, you read and concern yourself too much about it, it doesn't do you any good. So we have to win and see what happens. There are no promises, but we know we can't get where we want to go if we don't win."

Cardinals 2, Cubs 1: Yadier Molina had three of his team's four hits, including a two-run single, and visiting St. Louis held off fading Chicago.

Carlos Martinez got the final two outs. The Cardinals' NL Central lead is three games over Milwaukee and five over Chicago. The Cubs are two games behind the Brewers for the second NL wild card.

Rays 5, Red Sox 4 (11): At St. Petersburg, Fla., World Series champion Boston was mathematically eliminated in the late innings, then lost to Tampa Bay when Willy Adames had an RBI single in the 11th.

A year after going 108-54 to win their third straight AL East title, the Red Sox (80-73) were knocked out during the

ninth inning when Cleveland beat Philadelphia, around the time Mitch Moreland hit his second two-run homer.

Mets 8, Reds 1: Pete Alonso hit his major league-leading 50th home run, Jacob deGrom pitched shutout ball for seven innings and New York beat host Cincinnati.

Nationals 6, Marlins 4: Trea Turner hit two solo homers as visiting Washington beat Miami.

The Nationals had dropped four of six. They maintained their one-game lead over Milwaukee for the top spot in the NL wild-card standings.

Twins 4, Royals 3: Randy Dobnak pitched 5⅓ innings for his first major league win, and host Minnesota beat Kansas City.

Brewers 10, Pirates 1: Chase Anderson pitched six scoreless innings, Trent Grisham hit a bases-loaded triple and Milwaukee routed visiting Pittsburgh to strengthen its grip on an NL wild card.

Orioles 5, Mariners 3: Felix Hernandez labored through five innings in what was likely his penultimate start with Seattle, and host Baltimore got home runs from Anthony Santander and Hanser Alberto in the win.

Blue Jays 4, Yankees 3: Star

second baseman Gleyber Torres prompted an audible gasp from the home crowd when his right leg buckled while fielding a grounder and made an early exit in New York's loss to Toronto.

White Sox 10, Tigers 1: Eloy Jimenez hit a grand slam in the fourth inning, and Yoan Moncada also went deep as Chicago breezed past host Detroit.

Astros 6, Angels 4: Carlos Correa hit two home runs, Jose Altuve and Alex Bregman also connected and Houston dropped its magic number to clinch the AL Central to one by beating visiting Los Angeles.

Athletics 8, Rangers 0: Mike Fiers struck out five and didn't walk a batter over eight dominant innings to win for the first time in four starts, and host Oakland beat Texas to maintain a two-game lead for the top AL wild card.

Diamondbacks 9, Padres 0: Rookie Merrill Kelly pitched seven dominant innings and Josh Rojas hit a three-run double in the seven-run eighth for visiting Arizona in a win over lackluster San Diego.

Dodgers 12, Rockies 5: A.J. Pollock hit a three-run homer as part of a seven-run fourth inning and host Los Angeles beat Colorado for its 99th win this season.