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Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and South Korean Defense Minister Suh Wook agreed to update the policy that guides their respective militaries, the Strategic Planning Guidance, following their annual security meeting Thursday in Seoul.

But whether the amended plans will alter the way the allies exercise their forces together was left unanswered. North Korea, which views the annual joint military exercises as a precursor to a full-scale invasion of its country, repeatedly calls for the allies to halt them.

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**US, South Korea to update joint wartime plans as reaction to North Korea’s new weapons tests**

**By David Choi**

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**See plans on Page 6**

**A ticking time bomb**

By Kristin M. Hall,
Justin Prichard and James LaPorta

Associated Press

The Marine Corps demolition specialist was worried — about America, and about the civil war he feared would follow the presidential election.

And so, block by block, he stole 13 pounds of C4 plastic explosives from the training ranges of Camp Lejeune.

“The riots, talk about seizing guns, I saw this country moving towards a scary unknown future,” the sergeant later wrote in a seven-page statement to military investigators. “I had one thing on my mind and one thing only, I am protecting my family and my constitutional rights.”

His crime might have gone undetected, but authorities caught a lucky break in 2018 as they investigated yet another theft from Lejeune, the massive base on coastal North Carolina. In that other case, explosives ended up in the hands of some high school kids.

These are not isolated cases. Hundreds — and possibly thousands — of armor-piercing grenades, hundreds of pounds of plastic explosives, as well as land mines and rockets have been stolen from or lost by the U.S. armed forces over the past decade, according to an ongoing Associated Press investigation into the military’s failure to secure all its weapons of war. Still more explosives were reported missing and later recovered.

Troops falsified records to cover up some thefts, and in other cases didn’t report explosives as missing, investigative files show.

**See Ticking on Page 7**
EUROPE GAS PRICES

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<th>Country</th>
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(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. For most local currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in the United Kingdom), contact your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

INTEREST RATES

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The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

Round-the-world news for America’s military.

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Petroleum detected in school’s water system near Hawaii military housing

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes
FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Preliminary tests disclosed the presence of petroleum in tap water from an elementary school near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, the Hawaii Department of Health said Wednesday.

Samples collected Tuesday from Red Hill Elementary School, which is near military housing and uses the Navy’s water system, were tested at a lab at the University of Hawaii and found positive for a “petroleum product,” the health department said in a news release.

Samples have been sent to Eurofins Scientific in California for further analysis, the health department said.

Residents of several military housing communities on and around the joint base began complaining of foul-smelling tap water on Sunday. Some have complained of an oily sheen. Others have complained of illnesses and rashes.

The Navy and the health department have tested scores of water samples arising from residents’ complaints, said during the town hall meeting Tuesday night that Navy technicians had sampled and flushed lines from the three wells that supply water to roughly 7,000 homes.

The Navy had tested another 90 samples arising from residents’ complaints, he said during the August 26 meeting at Moanalua Terrace, one of the affected Navy housing communities.

No trace of “hydrocarbons” was found in any of the samples, he said.

The Navy sent samples to a lab in Washington state where more sensitive testing could detect much more minute levels of “hydrocarbons, fuels and oils.” They expected results as early as Wednesday.

The Navy set up three water distribution sites on or near affected neighborhoods.

Early Wednesday morning, about a dozen cars pulled up to the huge water tanker over a 30-minute span, where sailors filled one and five-gallon jugs for residents of affected communities.

Nadine Johnson, who lives in Onizuka Village on the joint base, popped open the back of her SUV for a five-gallon container.

“We have an odor,” she said. “Not strong, but definitely noticeable. It’s some kind of chemical smell.”

They first noticed it Sunday night.

“Our kids came out of the bathroom and said there’s something wrong with the water,” Johnson said.

One resident attending Tuesday’s town hall asked Kott whether the water might have been contaminated on purpose given the communities’ connection to the military.

“We see no indications of a chemical attack,” Kott said. “I can understand why you may think that.”

Some residents wonder whether leakage from the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility might be to blame for the befouled water.

The World War II-era tanks have long been a source of contention, with some arguing that the site should be permanently shut down. The Navy has maintained that it is essential to national security.

The commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet, Adm. Samuel Paparo, on Monday ordered a command investigation of a leak of a water-fuel mixture earlier this month from a fire suppression drain line downhill from the facility. He also ordered a review of a May incident in which about 1,600 gallons of jet fuel leaked out of a pipeline at the facility.

“I know there’s frustration,” Kott said at the town hall. “I know there’s disappointment. The bottom line is that we just do not have any testing that has revealed the source of the smell or the odor.”


Rand says US Army has to ‘thread the needle’ with Russia

“U.S. Army moves to shore up Europe’s deteriorating security situation could help solve the dilemma of how to check Russian aggression without sparkling a dangerous escalation,” the Rand Corp. think tank says in a new report.

The report argues that the Army will need to find a balance between deterrence and provocation in its approach to great-power adversaries like Russia.

“For example, the Army could take the lead in examining potential constraints in the deployment, posture and capabilities of ground forces in the European region in ways that would enhance stability,” Rand wrote in the report, which is titled “Stabilizing Great-Power Rivalries.”

Ground forces, with an emphasis on light units over heavy tank brigades, could “thread the needle” in the tensions with the Kremlin, according to Rand. A step too far would be to put armored brigades in the Baltic states, the report contends.

It calls armored brigades “among the most provocative capabilities to rivalries.”

The study, which traces the history of rivalries between large powers and examines the factors that can provoke conflict, says there are “serious grounds for concern” over the stability of American relations with both Russia and China.

The report focuses on recommendations for the Army. It comes as the United States and fellow NATO members deal with a sharpened rivalry in tensions with Russia, which the West fears is poised to reinvade Ukraine.

“The Army, like all services, will serve the nation’s interests most effectively if it continuously thinks in terms of stabilization of the rivalries rather than merely providing capabilities that threaten the adversary,” says the report.

It goes on to say that the military will need to look beyond just adding military capabilities in both Europe and the Pacific if it wants to avoid risky provocation.

“The deterrent effect of capability decisions is only half of the equation,” Rand wrote. “When making decisions about posture or capability development, the United States should also consider the effects of provocations. One factor driving U.S.-Russia tensions is conflicting views over what amounts to escalatory behavior in Ukraine, which Russia invaded in 2014. It seized Ukrainian military bases and eventually annexed the Crimean Peninsula.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly complained that a U.S. and allied military presence in and around Ukraine amounts to a “red line,” implying that such activity could be grounds for another invasion.

Meanwhile, the U.S. and NATO reject the notion that Ukraine is part of Russia’s sphere of influence. They contend that Kyiv has the right to integrate more with the West.

“The post-2014 breakdown in relations is traceable directly to the culmination of competition for influence over an area that is far more central to Russia than to the United States,” Rand said.

Among military security analysts, there is a long-running debate on whether the U.S. should forward-deploy military bases in the Baltic and Poland.

Some proponents of such action say a permanent tank presence could offer a better deterrent against Russia.

Rand’s latest study, however, says the Army should emphasize light units and take advantage of recently established Security Forces Assistance Brigades, which specialize in training partners and are a “useful way of enhancing deterrence without deploying provocative capabilities forward.”

The Army could also develop concepts that would enable smaller, lighter units to better defend against enemy heavy armor or maritime assault forces, Rand said.

“The report concludes that the military ‘will increasingly have to think in terms of stability as it understands the need for capability without deploying provocative capabilities forward.’”

Rand says US Army has to ‘thread the needle’ with Russia

“The deterrent effect of capability decisions is only half of the equation.”

Rand Corp.

“Stabilizing Great-Power Rivalries”
Operation Christmas Drop marks 70th year

By Seth Robson

Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — U.S. soldiers of the 2nd Infantry Division marched on Sunday with rucksacks filled with toys and other gifts to donate to South Korean orphanages for Christmas.

The temperature at 6:30 a.m. stood at 23 degrees Fahrenheit when about 60 soldiers and their family members began their 3-mile trek at Camp Humphreys, the largest U.S. military base overseas.

The marchers filled their rucksacks with the gifts they planned to donate, then shouldered their loads and hiked to 2nd ID headquarters.

They left their gifts under a Christmas tree in the lobby.

Some participants wore the Army’s duty uniform during the march, while others wore festive hats and Christmas-themed outfits that included flashing lights.

One person wore a sweatshirt that said, “Merry Christmas You Filthy Leg,” an apparent reference to a quote from the holiday movie “Home Alone 2” and the:enjoying member for troops who are not Airborne qualified.

Amanda Nguyen, an adviser for the 2nd ID Soldier and Family Readiness Group, reached out to local orphanages and organized the event.

Nguyen, who grew up in a military family, said she was gifted toys through a similar event as a child because her family could not afford them.

“I love giving back this way,” she told Stars and Stripes on Thursday. “I think it was great, especially for our first year of doing it here. I love how many people turned out; I love how hard that they worked. And I love how genuine they were.”

Inside the rucksacks were toys, books, crayons and other items for children. The gifts are expected to be donated to local orphanages based on age groups by this week, Nguyen said.

Army Capt. Shawn Droge, the battalion chaplain, brought two of his kids to the ruck march and said it was “a great way that we can all come together and celebrate the season.”

“I really enjoy that,” she said. “It’s really good for the community; it shows that we’re not just here.”

Air Force recovers 2 fuel tanks that fell from F-16 on Japanese town

By Joseph Ditlzer

Stars and Stripes

The Air Force has located two external fuel tanks that repeatedly fell from an F-16 fighter onto a coastal town in northeastern Japan earlier this week, according to a statement Thursday from Misawa Air Base.

The pilot jettisoned the tanks from the Fighting Falcon during an in-flight emergency before landing at Aomori Air Base around 6 p.m. Tuesday, the 35th Fighter Wing at Misawa said. The wing said the tanks will be returned to Misawa.

The plane made the emergency landing without incident, but one of the tanks came down near homes and the town hall in Fukaura, roughly 100 miles west of the base, according to local police and the Tohoku Defense Bureau. No injuries were reported, although police said a sidewalk handrail was damaged.

The wing first reported the tanks fell into a nonresidential area but later Wednesday acknowledged one tank apparently fell near homes.

“The first fuel tank was found in the town of Fukaura” on Wednesday, according to the wing on Twitter. “The second fuel tank was found in a wooded area in the town of Fukaura, and will be returned to Misawa AB by the recovery team.”

On Tuesday, the 35th Fighter Wing at Misawa said the 2 fuel tanks that fell from the F-16 to the ground in Fukaura, roughly 100 miles west of the base, according to local police and the Tohoku Defense Bureau. No injuries were reported, although police said a sidewalk handrail was damaged.

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“The first fuel tank was found in the town of Fukaura” on Wednesday, according to the wing on Twitter. “The second fuel tank was found in a wooded area in the town of Fukaura, and will be returned to Misawa AB by the recovery team.”

The aircraft remains parked at Aomori Airport west of Misawa Air Base undergoing inspection and repairs by a team from the 35th Maintenance Group, according to the wing. It did not disclose the nature of the in-flight emergency.

The wing did not respond Thursday to a call the previous day by Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi to ground its F-16s temporarily until it confirms the fighter jets are safe to fly.

“We have maintenance, safety and environmental experts working to check around the clock to bring these fuel tanks and our aircraft back to Misawa safely,” Col. Timothy Murphy, the 35th Fighter Wing vice commander, said in a statement Thursday. “We appreciate the continuous cooperation and understanding from our neighbors in Japan as we work through this incident.”

The incident is under investigation, according to the wing. It said further details are forthcoming.

Tuesday evening, an airport spokesman said. Commercial flights resumed Wednesday morning, he said.

Air Force recovers 2 fuel tanks that fell from F-16 on Japanese town

By Seth Robson

Stars and Stripes

Operation Christmas Drop will soon return to Micronesia, which opted out of the Defense Department’s longest running humanitarian-assistance mission last year due to concerns about the coronavirus.

During the annual, weeklong operation — now in its 70th year — C-130 Super Hercules cargo planes drop large bundles of food, tools, clothing, toiletries, toys and other supplies to thousands of people living on tiny South Pacific islands.

Airmen in Santa hats are scheduled to fly the season’s first sorties on Sunday out of Andersen Air Base, Guam.

The Defense Department of Micronesia — Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Kosrae — along with the Republic of Palau are among more than 55 remote islands that will receive 400- to 600-pound bundles during this year’s drops, which run through Dec. 13. Pacific Air Forces said in a recent statement.

Palau received extra aid last year when Micronesia decided not to participate because of COVID-19.

The primary participants are the 36th Wing at Andersen, the 374th Airlift Wing out of Yokota Air Base, Japan, and the 15th Wing from Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, the statement said.

They’ll be joined by the Japan Air Self-Defense Force, which is participating for the seventh time, and the South Korean air force, which is joining for the first time, Staff Sgt. Juan Torres, a spokesman for the 374th Airlift Wing, said in an email Wednesday.

Four Guam-bound Super Her- cules, which will deliver 200 bundles of aid, departed Yokota on Wednesday to join in the effort, Torres said.

Operation Christmas Drop began unofficially during yuletide season in 1951 when the crew of a B-29 Superfortress bomber noticed people waving at them from Kapin- gamarangi in Micronesia. They parachuted a bundle of supplies to the denizens of the isolated island, and a tradition was born.

The mission inspired the 2020 Netflix love story “Operation Christmas Drop,” which is centered on the annual military tradition and was filmed at Andersen. Shots from the 2019 operation were used in the film, and its Hollywood crew volunteered to sort donations on their days off.

The aerial deliveries also enable aircrews to develop and maintain combat readiness while delivering items provided by private donors, charitable organizations and the University of Guam to more than 22,000 residents across the remote islands, the statement said.

“This training mission is not only a tradition but provides relevant and real training necessary for our Airmen and partner nations in the Indo-Pacific region,” PACAF commander Gen. Ken Wilsbach said in the statement.

All pilots and crewmembers ar- riving on Guam are fully vaccinat- ed and anyone handling donations will wear gloves and masks, according to the statement. All donation boxes will be left open and untou- ched for hours before they’re packed.

March of soldiers ends with piles of Christmas presents in S. Korea

By David Choi

Stars and Stripes

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Inside the rucksacks were toys, books, crayons and other items for children. The gifts are expected to be donated to local orphanages based on age groups by this week, Nguyen said.

Army Capt. Shawn Droge, the battalion chaplain, brought two of his kids to the ruck march and said it was “a great way that we can all come together and celebrate the season.”

“With this being a [ruck march] for toys, this gives us an opportu- nity to bring some toys and give to the community just to show our appreciation and our love,” Droge said. “This was a great opportuni- ty for high morale and do some- thing different; kind of loosen up for a bit.”

Army Pfc. Sigourney Guyer- melli of the 2nd ID Headquarters Support Company, said she was glad she made the march, despite the morning’s freezing tempera- tures.

“It’s really good for the commu- nity; it shows that we’re not just here,” she said. “We actually care about the people around here and we really enjoy that.”

U.S. military units throughout South Korea have sponsored simi- lar events to give back to commu- nities outside their gates.

U.S. Forces Korea, the com- mand responsible for roughly 28,500 troops in the country, part- nered with the Korean National Red Cross to donate blood during a time of need amid the COVID-19 pandemic. About 65 people sta- tioned at Humphreys donated their blood during a drive in July.
A joint U.S.-Canadian military organization that monitors potential threats from the air and sea is readying its beloved annual ritual of tracking Santa Claus’ journey around the world on Christmas Eve.

On Wednesday, the North American Aerospace Defense Command launched its Santa-tracking website, which will provide live updates on his whereabouts beginning Dec. 24.

In the meantime, visitors to noradsanta.org can find a countdown to Christmas, festive games, a Christmas song playlist — including some performed by military musicians — and other features in several languages.

A NORAD Tracks Santa app is also available in the Apple App and Google Play stores, while additional tracking opportunities can be found on various social media accounts run by the organization.

CONAD personnel provided live updates on his location, and thus the tradition was born.

The phone line will be open this year, too. But callers to 877-446-6723 might get a recorded message instead of speaking to a live operator.

“Due to COVID concerns, the NORAD Tracks Santa Operations Center will have fewer phone operators, so callers who do not reach a volunteer will hear a regularly updated recording as to Santa’s current location,” the NORAD statement said.

Millions of people around the world who want to know Santa’s whereabouts visit the NORAD Tracks Santa website every year, the organization said.

By Philip Walter Wellman
Stars and Stripes

ALEXANDRA M. LONGFELLOW/U.S. Air Force

The NORAD Tracks Santa Operation Center on Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., on Dec. 24, 2019, the last Christmas before the coronavirus pandemic.
Ramstein spent over $56M on Afghan refugees in 2 months

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes
WASHINGTON — The air wing at Ramstein Air Base in Germany reported spending $56.3 million on its efforts to house and process Afghan refugees at the base between Aug 18 and Sept. 14, when officials for the inspector general made a visit to the base to investigate conditions there.

More than 120,000 people were evacuated from Afghanistan by American personnel in the final weeks of the 20 years that U.S. forces fought in that country. The last U.S. forces left Afghanistan on Aug. 30.

Those costs at Ramstein were in part attributed to $38 million in “contracting costs,” $5.3 million owed to reimburse a supply chain operations wing for equipment pulled from war reserve material and about $6.5 million in food and labor expenses, according to the report.

“All fiscal 2021 costs they incurred were replenished with overseas humanitarian disaster and civic aid funding,” according to the report. “[The air wing] stated that they received funding from the White House, the U.S. European Command, the Secretary of the Air Force and others were coordinating to identify funding to cover fiscal year 2022 costs.”

Ramstein was one of the major U.S. bases overseas to host and screen refugees before they could be transported to one of eight military installations in the United States to continue their visa processing. Other screening locations included Rhine Ordnance Barracks in Germany, Naval Station Rota in Spain, Naval Air Station Sigonella in Sicily, Camp As Sayliyah in Qatar and Camp Buehring in Kuwait.

While Ramstein was first told to prepare to receive about 2,500 evacuees on Aug. 18, that number grew to 28,517 by Aug. 31, according to the report. About 96% of the evacuees were Afghans, and 742 were American citizens.

Ramstein received the first group of evacuees on Aug. 18, Air Force Gen. Glenn VenHerck, the top commander for U.S. forces in North America, told reporters at the Pentagon on Aug. 25.

“Upon landing, evacuees were subject to standardized in-processing by military personnel before being assigned to a living area on the facility,” according to the IG report.

The base provided medical and security screenings, checking all evacuees for wounds, disease, contraband and weapons. All evacuees older than 12 were also biometrically screened, with troops collecting their personal information, fingerprints, iris scans and photographs.

The information was electronically compared to Defense Department, Department of Homeland Security and FBi databases.

“At the peak of the initial eva- cuations in late August, in-processing took nearly two days from the time an Afghan evacuee arrived on the flight line until the Afghan evacuee was cleared for lodging,” according to the report. “At one point, there were over 1,500 Afghan evacuees in line (for screening) and an additional 13,000 Afghan evacuees either in the waiting area or still waiting to de- plane.”

To help address the backlog, Ramstein personnel worked 24 hours a day, with all 86th Air Wing troops supporting the effort mandated to work 12-hour shifts, six days each week, according to the report.

On Aug. 26, the air wing’s com- mander also canceled all military leave through the end of September “to maximize available sup- port” and canceled or suspended base events, “including youth sport seasons,” according to the report.

The personnel provided Afghans resources including food and water, clothing, bathrooms, showers, medical tents, worship areas and housing, according to the report.

That housing included more than 200 large tents pulled from war reserve stocks that were set up on a flight line.

The report details some chal- lenges in the first days and weeks of the Ramstein operation. For example, while all military personnel were required to wear masks to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, IG investigators “did not see any Afghan evacuees wearing masks during our walk-through.”

Further, some brawls were re- ported among the evacuees as tensions ran high over meal shortages and morale was hurt by a policy separating women from men in housing areas. “Afghan evacuees in food lines were unhappy with the distribution methods, resulting in very tense environments involving physical altercations,” the report states. “There were some difficulties with assimilating various tribes in the tents, which resulted in various disagreements and is- sues.”

There were also “significant challenges related to the bath- room,” as evacuees were “urinating and defecating on the floor of living and shower areas, causing health concerns in the pods,” according to the report.

These problems were later re- solved with some policy shifts, moderating the food distribution process and providing education on proper bathroom usage, the report states.

The IG report, however, was overall complimentary to the air wing, noting the challenges inher- ent to “having only a few days to figure out how to house and sus- tain more than 30,000 Afghan eva- cuees when the initial estimate was for a small number of eva- cuees — mostly Americans.”

Still, the report noted the “sig- nificant costs to the command” to execute the mission.

In addition to the tens of mil- lions spent, the operation strained Ramstein’s staffing with 80% of its security forces staff, 71% of its communications team and 38% of its U.S. forces police squadron pulled from their regular duties to support the mission.

“The [air wing] reported that it canceled, suspended or altered many other important activities that support its mission, including training and exercises,” according to the report.

Readiness was also hurt when the air wing had to use tents, sleep- ing bags, medical equipment and other supplies from its own stock, the IG investigators concluded.

“By using its organic equipment and supplies, the [air wing] may not have sufficient resources available for future rapid re- sponse missions,” according to the report.

While the report only provided a snapshot of overall relocation ef- forts by focusing on the operations at Ramstein, the Defense Department Inspector General’s Office will issue a report on each site vis- ited that was involved in the evacu- ation.

U.S. airmen hand out meals to evacuees from Afghanistan as part of Operation Allies Refuge at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, on Aug. 27.

FROM PAGE 1

Plans: Policy update follows North Korea’s 5 weapon tests since September

FROM PAGE 1

ture plans but noted that any changes “will be made together.” He described the joint exercises, which were scaled back to virtual settings rather than involving large numbers of troops in the field, as both effective and a prior- ity.

The strategic plan, first signed in 2010, “was revised to address emerging threats and situational changes,” Suh said at the briefing.

“The changes have been changes to the threats that we face, as well as changes to our military organiza- tion,” Suh said through a transla- tor, “… as well as changes in the combined defense structure.”

A ministry official, speaking on a customary condition of anonym- ity, told Stars and Stripes on Thursday that the two militaries agreed to update the plan and spe- cific details were yet to come.

A joint statement from the U.S.- South Korean Security Council on Thursday specified that the up- dated strategic plan would “deter North Korea’s threats … and pro- vide guidelines to military operational plans for responses in case of crisis or conflict.”

Since September, North Korea conducted five weapon tests that renewed tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

The regime separately fired a ballistic missile from a train launched a long-range cruise mis- sile, test-fired a hypersonic short- range missile, claimed to have launched a sub-sonic aircraft supersonic to face-to-air missile and said it fired a “new type” of submarine-launched ballistic missile.

North Korea has also made re- cent missile advances. In Sep- tember, it became the first coun- try without nuclear weapons to successfully test-fire its own sub- marine-launched ballistic missile.

The United States has also changed its military stance in South Korea.

The battalion-sized 5-17th Heavy Armed Reconnaissance Squadron, which was on rotation- al deployments to South Korea, is expected to be permanently sta- tioned on the peninsula by next year.

The Headquarters and Head- quarters Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division Artillery from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., moved to South Korea in September.

Austin and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley trav- eled to Seoul this week to meet with South Korean leaders. The two sides reaffirmed the military alliance as well as ongoing plans to relocate U.S. assets from Seoul to Pyeongtaek’s Camp Humphreys, the largest U.S. military base overseas.

“The two leaders underscored the importance of conducting the [U.S.-South Korea Military Com- mittee] meeting in-person to demon- strate the strength, credibility and flexibility of the military alli- ance, “ the Defense Ministry said in a statement referring to Milley and his Korean counterpart, Gen. Won In-choul. “Gen. Milley em- phasized the United States’ comm- itment to [South Korea] and its continued commitment to provid- ing extended deterrence.”

Reading:Recht/86th Airlift Wing/Public Affairs

TARS AND STARS AND STRIPES
Friday, December 3, 2021
Ticking: In many cases, military doesn’t know explosives are missing

FROM PAGE 1
Sometimes, they failed to safeguard explosives in the first place. The consequences of those failures can be deadly.

In August, an artillery shell exploded at a Mississippi recycling yard. Chris Smith suddenly found himself caring for a co-worker who was bleeding profusely from his leg. The man died right there.

“No reason at all,” Smith said in an interview.

Two days later, an intact shell was found at the scrap yard.

The AP unearthed dozens of explosive investigations by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, Army Criminal Investigation Command and Defense Criminal Investigative Service. In the majority of these cases, the military didn’t realize explosives were gone until someone recovered them where they shouldn’t be.

These were not rusty war trophies cast out of grandpa’s attic. They were taken from military shipments or bases.

Military officials said thieves in the ranks are a small minority of service members and that — compared to overall stockpiles — the amounts of lost or stolen explosives are minuscule.

“We want to get the number to zero, so there is no loss, but it doesn’t mean that we don’t take seriously losses that happened,” Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Uriah Orland said.

The AP’s AWOL Weapons investigation has shown that poor accountability and insider thefts have led to the loss of more than 20,000 military firearms since 2010. Some guns were used in civilian crimes, found on felons or sold to a street gang.

In response, Congress is set to require that the military give law makers detailed loss and theft reports every year.

One thing those reforms won’t do: Make it harder to steal explosives such as C4.

Explosives already are harder to account for than firearms.

While troops check guns in and out, explosives are distributed with the presumption they will be detonated. Although at least two people are supposed to sign consumption reports, it’s an honor system

Spokespeople for the four armed services described explosives security as a high priority and said they could account for nearly all of the stock.

The amounts that are missing add up, however, given the military’s vast stockpiles.

AP sought detailed loss or theft data from 2010 through 2020.

The Army provided a chart that totaled nearly 1,900 entries for missing explosives, about half of which it said were recovered. The majority was described as C4/TNT. Other categories included artillery, mortars, land mines, grenades, rockets and armor-piercing 40 mm grenades shot from a launcher.

Despite a painstaking, manual records review, Army researchers couldn’t always determine amounts, spokesman Lt. Col. Brandon Kelley said. So, for example, it was not possible to know exactly how many pounds of C4/TNT were represented in the 1,066 entries, Kelley said.

The Air Force provided a chart that reported about 50 pounds of C4, more than 800 feet of detonating cord and several dozen 40 mm armor-piercing grenades had disappeared without being recovered.

The Navy said that only 20 hand grenades have been stolen, with all but two recovered. When the AP produced military investigative records showing an additional 24 grenades were reported missing from a ship’s armory in 2012, Navy spokesman Lt. Lewis Aldridge said the case was “beyond the 2-year local records retention requirement.”

The Marine Corps released data that was too unclear to calculate a precise tally. AP’s rough analysis showed that thousands of armor-piercing grenades and hundreds of pounds of plastic explosives were reported lost or stolen.

“Some of it was later recovered and often these reports are attributed to human error, such as accounts or improper documentation,” Capt. Andrew Wood said.

Naval Criminal Investigative Service files obtained under the Freedom of Information Act gave an inside picture of the two insider theft cases at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune.

As demolition experts, both had exceptional access to C4.

During the summer of 2016, Sgt. Travis Glosser feared Hillary Clinton would beat Donald Trump in the presidential election, and society might disintegrate. So he began accumulating leftovers until he had what he described as “a respectable amount” of C4 — 10 blocks, weighing nearly 13 pounds.

“I mean, you know how crazy the world is nowadays,” Glosser told an NCIS agent in June 2018, when he surrendered.

After Trump won, he buried the explosives until word began circulating that another demolition specialist and sergeant, Alex Krasovec, was being investigated for explosives theft.

Glosser eventually confessed, then led bomb handlers to the munitions.

Both Krasovec and Glosser pleaded guilty to theft of military property. Each was sentenced to less than two years of confinement in military prison, and both were knocked down in rank. Krasovec was booted from the service with a bad conduct discharge; Glosser is appealing his case.

Glosser’s wife told the AP he would not comment. Under questioning from authorities, he insisted he never planned to wreak havoc and said he had no ties to a militia.

“At no time did I ever intend or even think about selling, giving, or even showing anyone” the explosives, he wrote. “I also have never had any intent to harm anyone.”

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McConnell slow walks defense spending bill

By David Catanese

WASHINGTON — Back in early October, Mitch McConnell took to the Senate floor to thrash Democrats for leaving the annual bill that funds national defense “in procedural limbo for months.”

His No. 2, Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, joined him weeks later to complain, “We can’t afford to wait any longer to deal with it.”

Yet now, as Democrats attempt to push through the $768 billion bill for the Pentagon as the year careens toward a close, it’s McConnell who wants to slow things down, requesting a “reasonable number of amendments” during a “normal process” on the Senate floor.

“The Democratic Leader wants to block the Senate from fully and robustly debating a number of important issues,” McConnell charged. “The [National Defense Authorization Act] is not finished yet. So the Senate cannot be finished yet either.”

Democrats have a hunch as to why the Republican leader is pumping the brakes on legislation he’s even said must pass — and eventually will pass. The same time Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer is consuming with hammering out an agreement on the defense appropriation, the less time he has to muscle through President Joe Biden’s largest legislative prize: the $2.2 trillion Build Back Better social spending bill, which cleared the U.S. House just before Thanksgiving.

“When we tried to get consent to move on this package of [NDAA] amendments, our Republican colleagues came down to the floor and objected not once but seven times,” Schumer complained on Tuesday. “So we have had ample debate. This has been a fair and bipartisan and reasonable process that has showed respect to the other side. But this is a new Republican Party, unfortunately.”

McConnell was here before — potentially significantly more than the 18 amendments originally agreed to by the chair and ranking Republican member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, even though there were only seven amendments in 2020, when McConnell was majority leader.

That rolling amendment process could jumpstart if an agreement is worked out. The impetus for an accord could simply be the other more imminent deadline: the expiration of government funding on Friday, which both parties have pledged to avoid.

If the overall NDAA gets stuck, there is likely to be an escape hatch through a continuing resolution that funds the nation’s defense for the interim. But foreign policy experts contest the main consequence from the standoff is how it is viewed by U.S. allies and foes.

“If the NDAA is the one bill that people always expect to pass, Congress hung a lot of amendments on it — like the CHIPS Act — that are themselves important for national security,” said James Lewis, the director of the Strategic Technologies Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

“Not passing these amendments creates problems and probably confirms the Chinese in their belief that we are dysfunctional.”

The CHIPS Act, for instance, includes $50 billion for domestic semiconductor research, design and manufacturing, meant to keep competitive pace with rival nations. It should easily clear the Senate, if it can earn a vote.

McConnell has cited other issues he believes should be debated as part of the defense bill, including Russian President Vladimir Putin’s aggression towards Ukraine and the consideration of sanctions against the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, a Russian gas line.

Even if the NDAA gets delayed and possibly dragged into after the New Year, it wouldn’t be unprecedented.

US, Japanese forces rehearse defending Japan during exercise

By Seth Robson

CAMP ZAMA, Japan — The U.S. and Japan are holding a large-scale command post drill involving thousands of troops, a year after holding a scaled-back, mostly virtual version of the exercise.

The two-week Yama Sakura drills began Thursday with 3,500 U.S. and Japanese troops at locations across the Pacific. The exercise runs through Dec. 13 and is designed to increase the combat-readiness and control-skills they’d need to respond to a crisis.

The training also prepares the forces for the start of the training.

There are 3,000 Japanese and 1,500 U.S. participants partnering at multiple levels, said USAJX spokesman Maj. Elias Chelala.

For example, I Corps is working with Japan’s Ground Component Command; the Hawaii-based 25th Infantry Division is working with Japan’s Middle Army; and the Okinawa-based 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade is working with Japan’s Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade, he said in an email Wednesday.

On Monday, 170 soldiers and equipment from the 25th Infantry Division arrived at Camp Itami in Hyogo prefecture for the exercise, according to a Facebook post by I Corps that day.

“This exercise effectively demonstrates to regional adversaries the readiness, commitment and capability of the U.S. and Japanese military forces to defend Japanese sovereignty and maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific,” Chelala said.

Troops will train at Itami and Zama, Joint Base Lewis-McCord, Wash., and Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, he said.

“There is also an Australian contingent of around 30 personnel that are here to observe the exercise,” he said. “Although it is a command-post exercise through computer simulations, the participants practice the latest concepts involving multidomain and cross-domain operations through live, virtual and constructive aspects.”

Retired general files legal petition against congressman in T-shirt row

By Rose L. Thayer

A retired two-star Army general filed a petition in a Texas court against a member of the House Armed Services Committee, claiming the freshman congressman is withholding information on shared businesses that sell T-shirts to troops at Fort Benning.

The disagreement between retired Maj. Gen. Timothy Haake and Rep. Pat Fallon, R-Texas, arose shortly after Fallon was elected to Congress, according to court documents filed in Denton County, Texas.

Fallon, a former Air Force officer, and Haake began a business deal in 2009. But Fallon requested last year to buy Haake’s portion of the two companies as part of Fallon’s financial divestment to meet House ethics rules before being sworn into office in January 2021, according to the court documents.

“Fallon explained to [Haake] that the purpose of the ‘buy-out’ was part of a larger transaction wherein he would liquidate all of his ownership interests in the [Fort] Benning companies and sell such interests to his relatives,” according to court documents filed by Fallon.

Haake then pressed Fallon to see the companies’ financial records, but he said Fallon has declined to do so for more than nine months.

Fallon’s petition calls for Fallon and his wife, Susan Fallon, to be deposed and for the couple to provide documents related to the businesses.

Austin Hagginbotham, a spokesman for Fallon, said he had no comment on the petition, but he said Fallon’s “transfer of all personal interests” in the businesses was worked out. The impetus for the House Ethics Committee.

In their 2008 agreement, Haake was granted 10% of “profits interest” in two businesses, Recon Sportwear and Jackets, LLC, and American Airborne Store, according to the court documents, which were filed Oct. 29. The two companies sell T-shirts at Fort Benning.

Fallon has similar businesses that operate at Sheppard Air Force Base and Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland Air Force Base, both in Texas, Keesler Air Force Base, Fairchild AFB and Fort Jackson, S.C., according to court documents.

The deal also entailed Haake to 10% of “capital interest” in any subsequently formed businesses operating at Fort Benning. Haake said he now believes Fallon has other businesses operating at the Georgia base and he is owed money as part of their agreement.

Virtus Apparel LLC is one of the companies from which Haake might be entitled to profits, according to the petition. Fallon earned more than $221,000 in a year from Virtus Apparel, according to a financial disclosure form that Fallon filled in August with the House ethics committee.

He listed earned income from two additional clothing companies that totaled more than $280,000 for the same year.
Biden launching winter booster, testing campaign

By Zeke Miller
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden was set to kick off a more urgent campaign for Americans to get COVID-19 booster shots Thursday as he unveils his winter plans for combating the coronavirus and its omicron variant with enhanced availability of shots and vaccines but without major new restrictions.

The plan includes a requirement for private insurers to cover the cost of at-home COVID-19 tests and a tightening of testing requirements for people entering the U.S. regardless of their vaccination status. But as some countries close their borders or reimpose lockdowns, officials said Biden was not moving to impose additional restrictions beyond his recommendation that Americans wear masks indoors in public settings.

Biden said Wednesday that the forthcoming strategy, which was to be unveiled during a speech at the National Institutes of Health, would fight the virus “not with shutdowns or lockdowns, but with more widespread vaccinations, boosters, testing and more.”

The White House released details of Biden’s plan early Thurs- day in advance of the speech.

The Biden administration has come to view widespread adoption of booster shots as its most effective tool for combating COVID-19 this winter. Medical experts have said boosters provide enhanced protection against COVID-19, including new variants.

“Americans need to get booster doses, the White House COVID-19 response coordinator Jeff Zients said Thursday on CBS. Much remains unknown about the omicron variant, including whether it is more contagious, whether it makes people more seriously ill and whether it can thwart the vaccines.

About 100 million Americans are eligible for boosters under current U.S. policy, with more becoming eligible every day. Convincing those who have already been vaccinated to get another dose, officials believe, will be far easier than vaccinating the roughly 43 million adult Americans who haven’t gotten a shot despite widespread public pressure campaigns to roll up their sleeves.

And while Biden’s vaccination-or-testing requirement for workers at larger employers has been held up by legal challenges, the president on Thursday planned to renew his call for businesses to move ahead and impose their own mandates on workers so they can stay open without outbreaks.

In an effort to encourage more people to take the booster doses, the Biden administration is stepping up direct outreach to seniors — the population most vulnerable to the virus. The Centers for Medi- care & Medicaid Services will send a notice to all 63 million Medicare beneficiaries encouraging them to get booster doses, the White House said. The AARP will work with the administration on education campaigns for seniors.

So far about 42 million Ameri- cans, about half of them seniors, have received a booster dose. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this week broadened its booster dose recommendation to cover all Americans aged at least 18 starting six months after their second dose of the mRNA vaccines from Pfizer or Moderna.

Beginning next week, the White House said, all travelers to the U.S., regardless of nationality or vaccination status, will need to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test within one day of boarding their flights. That’s down from the first day right now for those who have been vaccinated, in an added precaution against the omi- cron variant.
Deal reached on spending measure

Associated Press
WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders reached agreement Thursday on a stopgap spending bill to keep the federal government running through Nov. 15, though a temporary shutdown was still possible with some Senate Republicans holding out over the Biden administration’s COVID-19 vaccine mandates for some workers.

The House was expected to take up the spending measure later in the day. It would extend spending to Feb. 18, keeping it at current levels, though $7 billion is included to support Afghanistan evacuees. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, had been pushing for the legislation to cover a much shorter time period, but Republicans were insistent that more time was needed to work out differences on a spending bill covering the entire fiscal year.

“The end date is February 18. While I wish it were earlier, this agreement allows the appropriations process to move forward toward a final funding agreement which addresses the needs of the American people,” DeLauro said in a statement.

If the House approves the measure, as expected, the bill would then be considered by the Senate for passage ahead of a midnight Friday deadline. But conservative Republicans opposed to Biden’s vaccine rules want Congress to take a hardline stand against the mandated shots, even if it means shutting down federal offices over the weekend.

One GOP senator after another left a private lunch meeting Wednesday voicing concern they will be blamed for even a short shutdown of the federal government that will not play well with the public. In the Senate, any single senator can hold up proceedings to stall a vote.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Democrats are prepared to support the funding bill and urged Republicans not to engage in shutdown politics.

“Our Republican colleagues, meanwhile, can either work with us to move the process quickly through the chamber, or they can engage in obstructive tactics that will make a government shutdown about a certainty,” said Schumer, D-N.Y.

Political backlash over the Biden administration’s coronavirus vaccine mandates has been building for months. The White House sees the vaccinations as the quickest way to end the pandemic that has claimed more than 790,000 deaths in the U.S. Wednesday sparked fresh fears, with the country’s first detected case of a troubling new variant. During the last government shutdown battle in September, Republicans also tried to halt the vaccine mandate.

As the political arguments mount over slapping vaccine requirements on some groups of workers, so too have legal challenges. Courts have been knocking back the Biden administration’s vaccine mandates — including a ruling this week blocking enforcement of a requirement for some health care workers.

For some Republicans, the court cases, along with their own worries about a potentially disruptive government shutdown, are shifting them away from engaging in a high-stakes shutdown.

“One of the things I’m a little concerned about is: Why would we make ourselves the object of public attention by creating the spectacle of a government shutdown?” said Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, a party leader.

Minority leader Mitch McConnell has been publicly upbeat that there will be no shutdown of the federal government.

“We’re going to be OK,” McConnell, R-Ky., told reporters in the halls of the Capitol.

Michigan teen, 15 is charged in shooting at Oxford High School

Associated Press
OXFORD TOWNSHIP, Mich. — The parents of a teenage accused of killing four students at a Michigan high school were summoned to discover his behavior just a few hours before the violence, a sheriff said.

The disclosure was made Wednesday as Ethan Crumbley, 15, was charged as an adult with two dozen crimes, including murder, attempted murder and terrorism for a shooting Tuesday at Oxford High School in Oakland County.

“He deliberately brought the handgun that day with the intent to murder as many students as he could,” assistant prosecutor Marc Keast said while successfully arguing for no bail for Crumbley and a transfer to jail from a juvenile facility.

No motive was offered. But prosecutor Karen McDonald said the shooting was premeditated, based on a “mountain of digital evidence” against Crumbley.

Investigators found that he had recorded a video the night before the bloodshed in which he discussed killing students, Lt. Tim Willis of the sheriff’s office said.

“This was not just an impulsive act,” McDonald told reporters. During his arraignment, Crumbley replied, “Yes, I do,” when asked if he understood the charges.

Defense attorney Scott Kozak entered a plea of not guilty.

Earlier, Sheriff Mike Bouchard told reporters that Crumbley’s parents were called to the school Tuesday “for behavior in the classroom that was concerning.” The teen remained in school, however, and the shooting occurred a few hours later.

Bouchard didn’t say what had worried school officials. He said investigators believe the gun was already in the 1,700-student school.

“There is nothing that he could have faced that would warrant senseless, absolutely brutal violence on other kids,” the sheriff said, noting that Crumbley had an additional 18 rounds of ammunition when he was arrested.

In court, Keast said Crumbley entered a bathroom with a backpack and came out with a semi-automatic handgun, firing at students while moving down the hallway.

The four students who were killed were 16-year-old Tate Myre, 14-year-old Hana St. Juliana and Daeyon Baldwin and Justin Shilling, both 17.

Three students were in hospitals Wednesday night, including a 17-year-old girl in critical condition, the sheriff’s office said. Others who were injured were discharged.

Deputies rushed to the school around lunchtime Tuesday and captured Crumbley within minutes of the shooting. His father bought the 9 mm Sig Sauer gun last week, according to the sheriff.

It was the deadliest school shooting since the Santa Fe, Texas, High School massacre in 2018, according to The Associated Press/USA TODAY/Northeastern University Mass Killings database. The U.S. had 31 mass killings this year of which 28 involved firearms.

McDonald said charges were being considered against Crumbley’s parents.

Christmas tree buyers face reduced supplies plus higher prices

Associated Press
ALAMEDA, Calif. — Even Christmas trees aren’t immune to the pandemic-induced shortages and inflation plaguing the economy.

Extreme weather and supply chain disruptions have reduced supplies of both real and artificial trees, this year’s American shoppers should expect to have fewer choices and pay up to 30% more for both types this Christmas, industry officials said.

“It’s a double whammy — weather and supply chain problems are really hampering the industry,” said Jami Warner, executive director of the American Christmas Tree Association, an industry trade group. “Growers have been hard hit by floods, fires, smoke, drought, extreme weather conditions, and more.

Record-breaking heat and wildfires in late June took a heavy toll on Christmas tree farms in Oregon and Washington, two of the nation’s largest growers.

Warner could not provide an estimate of how many fewer trees there will be this year but because it takes up to 10 years to grow, the crop loss will be felt for many seasons to come.

The shortage of truck drivers is making it harder and more expensive to transport live trees from farms to stores and tree lots.

Warner’s advice: “Shop early. If you see something you like, buy it.” At Crystal River Christmas Trees, owner Dale Pine and his nephew Stacy Valenzuela struggled to get enough trees to sell at their tree lot in Alameda. Many of its suppliers in Oregon lost trees in the triple-digit heat wave.

“It was looking pretty grim for a while,” Valenzuela said. “Every single day you’re on the phone checking, ‘Hey, you got anything?’ If you do, send it my way.’ So a lot of work to get these trees on the ground this year.”

Crystal River had to raise prices this year because the costs of trees, labor and truck delivery have all gone up, Valenzuela said.

Alameda resident Ian Stepowski came to Crystal River lot to buy a Silvertip tree with his wife and two young kids the day after Thanksgiving.

“We’re having shortages of everything and of course it had to be Christmas trees,” Stepowski said. “Definitely noticing everything’s a bit more expensive this year already.”
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Police: Bank robber out of jail, robs again

**FL** BELLEAIR BEACH — A serial Florida bank robber once dubbed the “I-4 bandit” was arrested for a new holdup just months after his release from prison, police said.

David Marc Ratcliffe, 55, was caught after a brief chase in the Gulf Coast town of Belleair Beach following a robbery at a Wells Fargo branch in nearby Clearwater, authorities said.

Ratcliffe was released from federal custody in June after serving most of a 25-year prison sentence for committing a string of bank robberies in the late 1990s, according to federal Bureau of Prisons records.

Those earlier 19 robberies were linked by Interstate 4, which bisects central Florida, giving him the “bandit” nickname.

**MO** ST. LOUIS — A 3-year-old girl was hailed as a hero after he caught a 3-year-old girl tossed by her mother from the second-floor window of a burning home.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that the fire broke out in an apartment building in north St. Louis. Authorities said Arnez Merriweather, 30, lives in the complex in a building next to the one that caught fire.

Smoke was so thick that Merriweather and others couldn’t get inside to help with the rescue, so a woman came to the window and tossed the child to him.

The girl and her mother were taken to a hospital for treatment of minor injuries.

**AK** ANCHORAGE — A holiday tradition in Alaska's largest city for more than 60 years got off to a dim start this year.

A 300-foot wide, brightly illuminated star situated high above Anchorage in the Chugach Mountains is traditionally lit the day after Thanksgiving. However, when military crews arrived to light the star, only about half of the 350 or so bulbs worked.

Airmen worked for three days in extreme conditions and cold temperatures before finding the cause of the problem.

A small avalanche rained down rocks and snow on the star, which is situated at about the 4,000-foot level of Mount Gordon Lyon, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson spokesperson Erin Eaton told The Associated Press.

**NC** WILSON'S MILLS — A driver stole a trailer loaded with lumber from a North Carolina construction site and led law enforcement officers on a high-speed pursuit on Thanksgiving Day, authorities said.

A Wilson’s Mills police officer stopped a pickup truck leaving a building site with a load of lumber since there had been a lumber theft at the same site a week earlier, Chief A.Z. Williams said.

After stopping in the middle of the road, the driver sped off and got on U.S. Route 70 going the wrong way, Williams said. Eventually the driver got onto the right side of the road and reached speeds of up to 100 mph, he said.

In the truck, police found a load-
ed AR-15, cocaine and marijuana, Williams said. Two men and a woman were arrested and face multiple charges, he said.

**IL** EVANSTON — A sandhill crane that couldn’t eat because a piece of plastic was wedged on its beak was placed in a cage and taken to the Wil-

**THE CENSUS**

The approximate number of acres of the Potomac River offshore that were closed to shellfish harvesting after a sewage overflow. The Maryland Department of the Environment issued an emergency order closing the offshore from the St. George Island area of St. Mary’s County after inspectors determined that sewage likely entered the river. The department estimates about 2,500 gallons entered the river and about 11,000 gallons were vacuumed from ditches. Sewage spills in the St. George Island area prompted temporary closures in St. George Creek about two weeks ago and in January.

**CA** ANTIOTCH — A 13-
year-old boy suspected in a carjacking was arrested after leading police on a chase and crashing the stolen vehicle in the parking lot of an Oakley coffee shop, police said.

Antioch police officers spotted the vehicle after it was carjacked in Oakland and when they began to follow it, it drove through Anti-

**NM** ALBUQUERQUE — Several dozen ancient alligator juniper trees were illegally cut down at El Malpais National Monument in western New Mexico, and authorities with the National Park Service are trying to find out who’s responsible.

Known for their unique fur-
rowed bark, alligator junipers grow very slowly. A seed can take up to 18 months to mature after pollination and the growth rate for young trees is about 0.6 inches per decade, slowing even further as they get older.

Officials said the trees that were cut down were likely hundreds of years old. The initial illegal tree cutting discovery was reported in 2020. But park law enforcement moni-
toring the area and over the past year have reported additional trees cut down, with the latest in-
cident happening in October.

**Blowing in the wind**

Steve Wade of Warren County, Tenn., uses a leaf blower to gather acorns at the National Cemetery in Chattanooga. Steve and his son, Chris Wade, have harvested acorns for over 20 years. According to Chris Wade, they strive for restoration of the oak tree, and other native species, in the Middle Tennessee area.

To view the original stories, please visit the respective news outlets.
THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

Peter Jackson’s exhaustive new documentary on the recording of what became the Beatles’ final album brings new clarity to the familiar narrative about the band’s breakup.

Page 30
Joy Poole of Middle River, Md., delivers bags of clean laundry to a client’s home. She is a “Sudster” on the SudShare app, a gig worker who picks up laundry from clients and washes it at her home.

Maryland father and son roll out laundry service app nationwide

By Lorraine Mirabella
Baltimore Sun

A 14-year-old Jewish boarding high school student and his father, Nachshon Fertel co-founded a business that grew out of the piles of laundry his mother did for her family of seven in Pikesville, Md.

His mom, Ari Fertel, spent way too many hours washing, drying and folding. She challenged her son, then a high school sophomore with a knack for technology, to reimagine the time-consuming chore. She envisioned a laundry service version of Uber. He created a mobile app.

SudShare, which he launched four years ago with his father, is an on-demand pickup — of laundry, towels, paid by the pound, to wash clothes. The service employs an army of gig-economy contractors, paid by the pound, to wash other people to wash their clothes. The service employs an army of gig-economy contractors, paid by the pound, to wash other people’s laundry.

“Our competition is your washer and dryer,” said Mort Fertel, Nachshon Fertel’s father and SudShare’s CEO. “The vision is to change America’s experience with laundry and to make the washer and dryer obsolete.”

Why do laundry, he said, when you can “just tap the app, take the laundry bag and put it on your patio and you’re done.”

Like Uber, SudShare works through a scheduling app and on-demand pickup — of laundry, that is. For $1 per pound and a $20 minimum, customers can leave bags of clothes at their doors to be picked up, washed, dried, folded and delivered the next day.

The contractors who take on laundry jobs, called “Sudsters,” can accept or decline work in their communities as they see fit. The company says it has 54,000 contractors in cities and towns across the U.S. who earn 75 cents, plus tips, on the dollar. SudShare keeps the rest.

Doing laundry has changed little since the automatic washing machine debuted in middle-class homes in the 1950s, but the Fertels believe the timing for an app-based laundry delivery service is right. Consumers use app-based services to pay others to grocery shop, deliver meals from restaurants and drive them places, and the coronavirus pandemic accelerated those trends.

During the health crisis, people found themselves reevaluating how they spend their time, and “I don’t know too many people wanting to spend it doing laundry,” Mort Fertel said.

Joy Poole, a 28-year-old Middle River, Md., resident, started SudShare gig work last year after her hours at Middle River Aerostructure Systems were reduced at the start of the pandemic. She lost not only regular hours but also the overtime she counted on, and needed the extra income.

Now she works at the plant by night, installing parts for Boeing 747 aircraft engines, and washes clothes for customers at home by day.

Poole’s sister told her about SudShare, and it appealed to her because she always has enjoyed doing laundry for herself and her son and daughter.

“It’s like a hobby, almost,” she said. “Once my hours picked up at work, I couldn’t stop. I became used to it and had gained relationships with customers.”

The app lets customers request particular “Sudsters” and rate them. Poole said she gets a lot of requests and accepts about two jobs per day, which vary in load size. Poole said she has customers of all ages, families, single people and even an Airbnb business.

Nachshon Fertel, one of a set of triplets, said SudShare has developed the active noise cancellation to adapt to the users’ volume level and the person’s ears. Their proprietary HEarID technology studies how sound waves move within your ears as well as the level of in-ear pressure. It then creates a tailored profile that optimizes noise reduction for you, your ears and your surroundings.

A big concern I often hear about true wireless earbuds is the fear of them falling out and being lost. Soundcore goes the extra mile to give you the right fit with a three-point ergonomic shape, and built-in ear pressure relief, which adds up to comfort. In the box are four sizes each of flexible ear wings and liquid silicone ear tips. The air-filled wings are perfect for an extra level of security and comfort.

A compact storage and charging case is included. A single charge is good for up to six hours with the ANC on, eight hours with it off. The compact USB-C charging case will yield another three full charges to extend the playtime even further. Recharge the case with the included USB-C cable;

Noise-canceling earbuds a great choice for gift-giving

By Gregg Ellman
Tribune News Service

True wireless earbuds are undoubtedly going to be a popular item on this year’s holiday gift lists. Soundcore’s Liberty 3 Pro true wireless noise-canceling earbuds are a great choice for that list.

The earbuds can be customized, but right out of the box the sound is great with clear audio, the right amount of bass and noise cancellation. Listening to everything from eclectic playlists to Sunday football on a dog walk was great at all volume levels.

Inside each Bluetooth earbud is a 10.6mm coaxial dual driver and personalized active noise-canceling. Soundcore has developed the active noise cancellation to adapt to the users’ volume level and the person’s ears. Their proprietary HEarID technology studies how sound waves move within your ears as well as the level of in-ear pressure. It then creates a tailored profile that optimizes noise reduction for you, your ears and your surroundings.

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For calls, the Liberty 3 Pro earbuds have six microphones with AI-uptick noise reduction, which translates to crystal-clear hands-free calls.

Tap controls on the earbuds are responsive for play, pause and ANC controls. The tap controls can be customized with the free Soundcore app along with options for equalizer presets, 3D surround sound and noise-canceling profiles.

The Liberty 3 Pro comes in gray, black, frost white and dusk purple.

Online: us.soundcore.com; $169.99

ONANOFF BuddyPhones are kid-safe headphones with volume limitation settings.

To help prevent irreversible hearing loss issues, the over-the-head BuddyPhones feature three SafeAudio settings (94dB TravelMode, 85dB KidsMode and 75dB ToddlerMode) to protect children from hearing damage. The settings limit the volume settings to safe recommended levels.

In a recent press release touting the safety of the headphones, ONANOFF shared that the CDC estimates 12.5% of children and adolescents aged 6-19 years have suffered permanent damage to their hearing as a result of earphones and devices turned to a high volume.

I enlisted my neighbor’s daughter for testing. After a few days of use, she said she loved them and wouldn’t give them back. There were no complaints from the 8-year-old on the volume level limitations, and she loved the comfort and sound.

Other features include Study-Mode, which helps isolate voices from other sounds, producing crisper, clearer vocals that make for a much-improved listening experience. With BuddyLink, the BuddyPhones are perfect for sharing one device to view and learn together.

A detachable beam microphone with passive noise cancellation is included for online communication. The wireless headphones have a 20-hour battery life, an adjustable headband and feature ear cushions made with hypo-allergenic sweat-resistant fabric. A soft travel bag is included for the foldable headphones.

Online: buddyphones.com; $59-99 for wireless, $29-99 for wired, both available in blue, green, pink and yellow.

Soundcore’s Liberty 3 Pro true wireless earbuds have active noise cancellation. Soundcore/Th5
Is Battlefield 2042 worth playing now?

Latest entry to the military shooter franchise needs work but, like past titles, will likely be good after a few updates

By Gieson Cacho
The Mercury News

W hen perusing a game on the shelves or a digital shop, players face three decisions: They can buy it, forget it or wait on it. Few titles are worth the immediate purchase, and plenty more can be ignored altogether. The last category is more complicated, and that’s where Battlefield 2042 sits.

It’s clearly not a finished project with the bugs and glitches that have plagued the early access period of its launch, but that’s expected for Electronic Arts’ military shooter. The past few iterations have never been complete on release day, but DICE and the other developers behind the series tend to improve on the title so that it ends up being the game they envisioned.

Near-future warfare
Battlefield 2042 takes place in the near future in a world devastated by climate change. Sandstorms have taken over Doha, Qatar. Container ships have been abandoned for scrap along the coast of Alang, India. Even Antarctica has become a battleground as the warmer climate has made the continent more inhabitable and exploitable for resources.

In this dire landscape, players take on the role of non-patriated people or No-Puts. These are refugees from collapsed nations where extreme weather has created famine and other catastrophes. These are people without a country and they become mercenaries aligned with either the U.S. or Russia as the two superpowers engage in another conflict.

It’s a different take on World War III, and one that acts as a strong scaffolding for the multiplayer-only game. First off, players choose from 10 No-Put specialists who have a unique perk and a gadget. Their characteristics make them suited for different roles in a fight. Assault classes are built to attack and outflank opponents. Engineers specialize in defense and controlling areas. Recon acts as scouts, spotting advancing enemies and weakening them from the shadows. Support specialists bolster the squad, resupplying or healing them.

These are general roles, with each specialist having a unique way of fulfilling their niche. Players can further customize the specialists by configuring them with different weapons, grenades and tools. It’s possible to create an assault trooper who has explosives or a support medic who can also repair vehicles.

Initially, players have access to a limited number of specialists, weapons and vehicles, but as they level up by playing matches, they earn more options and gain access to more characters. The progression feels balanced so that players will earn several pieces of gear over an hour-long session.

Bigger than ever
What makes Battlefield different from other military shooters is the size and scale of the battles. Competitors such as Call of Duty and Halo have a more arcade-like flow to the confrontations. Matches are fast-paced with threats constantly around the corner. On the other hand, Battlefield 2042 has enormous maps, ones that now accommodate 128 players. With so much space and so many players, players often have to travel to the action and approach objectives from different angles. It takes a few matches to adjust to the combat loop and constantly changing conflict.

Taken altogether, Battlefield 2042 matches are 85% chaos. That’s made worse by the lack of voice chat at launch. Helicopters will fire down on squads holding a capture point. Trucks will roar through the battlefield, running over friends and foes alike. Explosions will erupt unexpectedly as players rush a building. Ten percent of matches (it could be higher depending on the diverse battlegrounds) will be gunfights in close quarters. It’s the type of fighting that Call of Duty fans will be familiar with.

Chotic serendipity
The other 5% are the “what the heck” moments. Every so often, players will see that attack chopper explode and its flaming wreck fall on a squad creating an orgy of death. Other times a tank rushing to a control point can crush enemies after falling off a cliff. These emergent gameplay moments are what the franchise is built on, and Battlefield 2042 tries to expand on that by introducing weather-fueled moments to the maps.

Players will find tornadoes tear through the landscape in India. They cut out communications and introduce more chaos as players try to avoid the natural disasters. In Hourglass, sandstorms reduce visibility and force players to take cover.

Last squad standing
This all-out warfare is the foundation of Battlefield 2042. DICE also incorporated a new mode called Battlefield Hard Zone, which is comparable to a battle royal rule set. Players jump into a four-member squad and they’ll have to compete against eight other units. The group will have to collect intel and survive together until they can extract that data. Rival squads are also going after the data and players will have to battle them. If a squad is wiped out, they’re out.

Battlefield 2042 has the same tense moments as a battle royal, as the number of squads go down and players have to use teamwork to survive. If allies go down, they can still be resurrected by redeploy machines scattered on the map or purchased beforehand. Hard Zone as a mode has potential but again it’s hamstrung by an incomplete game that lacks voice chat and polish.

Lastly, Battlefield Portal is an option that lets players create their own rule set using assets and maps from different franchise eras. Players won’t get a huge number of options, but this lets players who want a trip down memory lane to experience older maps through new lenses. The same shooting and mechanics from Battlefield 2042 stick around but players can create interesting scenarios such as VIP Fiesta, where one team has to eliminate the mark on the rival team. In a twist, dying gives players a different gear set each time.

Like the rest of Battlefield 2042, this mode has potential but players will have to wait and see if this mode and the rest of the game pans out.

Platforms: PC, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5
Online: ea.com/games/battlefield/battlefield-2042

EA/THS
Christmas classics to watch this year

Here's a guide to holiday favorites, both new and old, and where to stream them

By Adam Graham

Before what to watch, an old-time favorite or a new-school entry in the Christmas canon? There are plenty of both available across the top streaming services, and that's without resorting to watching the latest big-city-ad-exec-comes-home-for-the-holidays-and-learns-the-true-meaning-of-a-small-town-Christmas tale on the Hallmark Channel (although there's something to be said for the comfort of those, as well).

Here are 10 Christmas favorites — some new, some old — and where to stream them this holiday season:

‘Elf’
Will Ferrell is Buddy, an overgrown elf, who exists on sugar — the more the merrier — in Jon Favreau's 2003 holiday hit that made Ferrell, who had just left “Saturday Night Live” at the time, a big-time movie star in his own right. Buddy the Elf has since become a veritable brand — catch his likeness on three different flavors of International Delight coffee creamer — and it all comes back to the joyful de-light of Ferrell's performance in this cuddly holiday comedy. (HBO Max)

‘Die Hard’
Welcome to the party, pal. The 1988 Bruce Willis classic’s Christmas status has been debated so much that even President Obama once weighed in (he said it wasn't a Christmas movie, and he was wrong), but this action classic is every bit a Christmas movie (as is its sequel, 1990's underappreciated “Die Hard 2”) and is worth celebrating every year because just like the best holiday traditions, it never gets old. (available for rental on Amazon Prime Video)

‘Jingle Jangle: A Christmas Journey’
A joyous, spirited, inventive Christmas musical, writer-director David E. Talbert’s holiday fantasy stars Forest Whitaker as Jeremiah Jangle, an inventor and toymaker whose creations are the stuff of childhood dreams. When his apprentice, Gustafson (Keegan-Michael Key), steals his book of ideas, well, it's time for a Christmas miracle to save the day, and this festive, fantastical tale delivers the goods. (Netflix)

‘Home Alone’
There's a new version on Disney+ this year that isn't half bad, but the original is tough to top. Macauley Culkin — whose broth-er, Kieran, plays the biggest jerk in an entire cast of jerks on HBO's "Succession" — gets left home alone for the holidays and has the time of his life, until a pair of pesky robbers come knocking at his door. Violence ensues, but it's the sweet heart at the center of this Christmas tale that makes it stand the test of time. (Disney+)

‘Miracle on 34th Street’
What did they watch on Christmas before this 1947 holiday classic? Edmund Gwenn stars as a department store Santa at Ma-cy's who claims he's the real McCoy and is put on trial to find out the truth. Writer-director George Seaton's warmhearted tale was nominated for Best Picture — it lost to “Gentleman's Agreement” — but went on to earn Academy Awards for Best Supporting Actor and a pair of writing awards, on its way to becoming an all-time Christmas classic. (HBO Max)

‘It's a Wonderful Life’
The story of George Bailey (James Stewart), an average man who gets the chance to see what life would have been like without his existence, is one of those movies that's on TV so often it can feel like you see it every year even if you don't actually sit down and watch it. But the 1946 Christmas staple still has plenty to offer, including a message of togetherness and a lesson that "each man's life touches so many other lives," which is still impor-tant to remember today. (Amazon Prime Video)

‘National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation’
He's just a family man who wants everyone to be together at the holidays. Is that so much to ask? The 1989 Chevy Chase vehicle grows in stature every year because it acknowledges every-thing that makes the holidays the holidays, from the alternating stress and warmth of family to the feeling of accomplishment of hanging your Christmas lights just so. (HBO Max)

‘Kiss Kiss Bang Bang’
Writer-director Shane Black is a real sucker for the holidays, and he's used Christmas as a backdrop for his movies includ-ing "Lethal Weapon," "The Long Kiss Goodnight," "Iron Man 3" and "The Nice Guys." Here, he casts a pre-"Iron Man" Robert Downey Jr. alongside Val Kilmer in a black comedy crime noir with plenty of flash, style and, oh yeah, holiday cheer. (available for rental on Amazon Prime Video)

‘Fatman’
Mel Gibson plays a grizzled, hard-nosed Chris Cringle, a workin' stiff just like the rest of us, in this hard-boiled Christmas tale that prefers a shot and a beer to a glass of egg nog. Walton Goggins is a riot as a psychotic hit man who wants Santa dead, leading to a bloody showdown in the snow in writer-directors Esthom and Ian Nelms' comedic action drama, which puts a mod-ern spin on familiar holiday happenings. Ho ho holy cow, this movie is nuts. (Peacock)

‘Klaus’
There's lots to love in this sweet, nostalgic, hand-drawn animated tale, with J.K. Simmons as the voice of Santa Claus and Jason Schwartzman as a postman who befriends him. But perhaps most welcome, at least this holi-day season, is the fact that it employs the voice talents of the late Norm MacDonald, who died this year at age 61, who plays a vey boat captain who sounds exactly like, well, Norm Mac-donald. And Christmas could use a little more Norm. (Netflix)
10 destinations inspired by TV, film

BY NATALIE B. COMPTON
The Washington Post

Movies and TV offer an escape from our normal lives, but sometimes they can inspire an actual escape. Media has the power to create in-demand travel destinations. Just look at Croatia and its “Game of Thrones” tourism surge, or New Zealand’s “Lord of the Rings” fame.

As people begin plotting their trips for 2022, we put together some ideas based on what people are watching in 2021.

‘Searching for Italy’

These dreaming of traveling, eating and drinking like Stanley Tucci are encouraged to book a flight to Italy (obviously). Where you go can be based on your favorite episode, such as Florence to see the wine windows built between the wrath of the Black Death in the 1300s and the Italian Plague in the 1600s, or Modena to taste the world's greatest balsamic vinegar.

For a trip with the best chance for a direct flight, head to Rome to hunt for its favorite episode, such as Florence to see the wine windows built between the wrath of the Black Death in the 1300s and the Italian Plague in the 1600s, or Modena to taste the world's greatest balsamic vinegar.

‘Dune’

Space travel may only be viable for the super rich, but “Dune” fans can pretend to have an interstellar adventure by visiting two of the movie’s epic filming locations.

For the much greener Caladan experience, plan a trip to Norway to see the Nordfjord coast, Kinn Island (you can take a boat from Floro to get there) and Myrersanden beach on the Stadlandet Peninsula. A boat from Floro to get there)

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‘Emily in Paris’

Part of the appeal of Netflix’s “Emily in Paris” is the show’s backdrop, particularly during its debut in October 2020 when Americans couldn’t travel to the titular city.

With Season 2 coming out this December and France open for tourism, the series provides inspiration for a trip perfect for influencers-in-training. That means planning stops to Instagram-worthy places featured in the show, such as Café de Flore (one of the oldest cafes in the city), the Palais Garnier opera house, the Pont Alexandre III bridge and Hotel Plaza Athénée.

‘Jungle Cruise’

The on-screen adventures of Dr. Lily Houghton and skipper Frank Wolff are based on one of Disney’s most famous rides. Fans can travel to Disneyland in Southern California and board the original ride, which debuted in 1955, or plan a vacation to Orlando’s Disney World. Recently, Disney announced updates to the ride, saying it will remove “negative depictions of natives.” Both parks will also look a little different during the pandemic; expect new rides and COVID-19 protocols.

The hotel staff in “The White Lotus” wave to guests in the first episode. Fans can stay at the Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea, which was featured in the show, for $1,500 a night or at a more affordable, locally owned property on the island.

The city where the coming-of-age tale takes place is based on the Italian coastal destination Cinque Terre. It is worthy of a visit even if you’re not a rambunctious little boy trying to find your place in the world. Note that pre-pandemic, the destination was struggling with overtourism, so a trip outside of peak summer travel would help you avoid crowds and respect locals. Before you go, get to know Italy’s travel restrictions for foreign visitors.

Additionally, if you choose to hike between the picturesque towns, do not wear flip-flops on the trail; you can face fines or be banned. Improper footwear has resulted in numerous accidents that required mountain rescue teams.

‘The French Dispatch’

Wes Anderson’s latest movie is described as a 20th-century “love letter to journalists” set in a charming, fictional French city. The director found the charm and preserved architecture for the project in Angoulême, which has a population of about 42,000.

Nicknamed the “balcony of the southwest,” Angoulême is an hour away by train from Bordeaux. The city is known for its classic car race, the Circuit des Remparts, which takes place annually on the third weekend of September.

‘Ted Lasso’

AppleTV’s “Ted Lasso” won people’s hearts over for being nice. No violence, no depressing plotlines — just a pleasant story about an American football coach in London trying to do his best.
Nestled among the pines
Designer camper cabins offer chic overnights among the trees in Minnesota

By Rachel Hutton
Star Tribune

When the morning sun peeked into our camper cabin at Whitetail Woods Regional Park, I almost thought I’d awakened as a bird. My nest was, in fact, a boxy, dumbbunkhouse, cantilevered into the stand of evergreens. I looked through the cabin’s glassy back wall and watched the thin, towering swanks sway in the barest breeze. I never would have noticed their invisible rhythm if not for my uncommon perch.

In late 2014, Dakota County opened the park, located between Rosemount and Farmington, Minn., and began taking reservations for its three treehouse-style camper cabins. Within 30 minutes, there were more than 200 requests for overnight stays. They’ve been booked nearly solid ever since.

The uniqueness of the cabins, designed by Minneapolis-based HGA architects, initially drew me to Whitetail Woods. But once I arrived, I discovered the park’s location and amenities were ideal for a quick, nature-intensive getaway. My family could hike and bike through the park’s 450-some acres of woods, wetlands and prairie. Then, after communing around the campfire, we’d sleep on mattresses, with roof overhead. The exurban spot was close enough to have pizza delivered, but felt far more secluded.

The Department of Natural Resources operates about 100 camper cabins across Minnesota’s state park system — rustic, one-room structures positioned somewhere between a tent and motel room. They’re sparsely furnished with bunk beds (BYO bedding) and a dining table. Most are outfitted with electric heat and power, though a few basic models supply wood stoves and oil lamps. The Department of Natural Resources operates around 100 camper cabins — some are sparsely furnished one-room structures — within the Minnesota park system.

The Pine Forest camper cabins are a signature amenity of Whitetail Woods Regional Park. The Department of Natural Resources operates around 100 camper cabins — some are sparsely furnished one-room structures — within the Minnesota park system.

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A year ago, Whitetail Woods opened two Prairie View cabins, located just a short walk away from the Pine Forest trio. The newcomers have been nearly 100% occupied, too.

The Prairie cabins share the Pine’s clean, contemporary aesthetic, but they’re sited at the top of a hill. Contrasting the forest cabins’ “portrait”-style framing of the pine plantation, the new cabins’ “landscape” orientation displays a sweeping vista of the Vermillion River Valley. The footprint and interiors are similar, save for the prairie-style’s wraparound porches, larger bottom bunks and air conditioning units.

Planners envisioned the chic little cabins as a signature amenity that could be a regional draw. “Something just beyond what you might expect,” explained Katie Pata, operations supervisor with Dakota County Parks. “With a wow factor.”

The cabins’ cool design had, indeed, lured my family to a park we wouldn’t have otherwise visited. It feels a little far from our Minneapolis home for a day trip. But the drive is relatively short for an overnight destination, and yet far enough from the city for a refreshing change of scenery.

“There’s something about staying in a space for 24 hours,” Pata said. “You feel the pulse of the park. ... It appeals to the senses in a different way.”
Where Britain's royalty resides

Chances are you aren't visiting Britain on invitation from the Queen — neither am I — but that doesn't mean you can't visit some of her residences in Great Britain. In addition to Windsor Castle, London's Kennington, Buckingham and Hampton Court palaces — and the more remote Balmoral Castle in the Scottish Highlands — are great places to put yourself in royal shoes for a day.

British royalty has been calling Windsor home since the days of William the Conqueror — almost a thousand years ago — who built the first fortified castle on a chalk hill above the Thames. Later kings added on to his early designs, rebuilding and expanding the castle and surrounding gardens. Today it's the favored castle of Queen Elizabeth II, who considers Windsor her primary residence.

Day or night, the castle — claimed to be the largest and oldest occupied castle in the world — dominates the town of Windsor. William the Conqueror built the first fortification in the late 11th century for himself and his occupying Norman forces. With easy access to London via the River Thames and a hunting forest nearby, later royals soon began enhancing the site as a sumptuous palace.

The castle's spectacular St. George's Hall is the site of state banquets, when a single table is set stretching the length of the hall, seating 160 guests. A visit to the ornate state rooms — open when the queen isn't in residence — includes an up-close peek at Queen Mary's Dolls' House.

The castle grounds are also home to St. George's Chapel, where Harry and Meghan said their vows. Dating from 1500, and one of the finest examples of Gothic architecture in England, it holds the tombs of 10 sovereigns, including Henry VIII and his favorite wife, Jane Seymour.

In London, Kensington Palace is on the royal radar because it's the home of Prince William and his family, among others. While some of the palace is open to the public, the royals' private quarters are off-limits.

Kensington Palace has long been associated with Queen Victoria, who was born here in 1819. Sitting primly on its pleasant parkside gardens in central London, the palace is immaculately restored.

Unless you're in London in August or September — or on Her Majesty's A-list — it's unlikely you'll get a peek inside the royal birthplace of Prince Charles: Buckingham Palace. The Queen opens 19 of her palace's lavish state rooms to the public — but only in late summer when she's out of town.

Fifteen miles up the Thames is Hampton Court Palace, the 500-year-old royal hangout that was a favorite of Henry VIII, Elizabeth I and Charles I. The stately palace is on the royal radar because Windsor and Hampton Court have chosen from more than 60 papier-maché models and can roam the gardens, see some 35 chocolates is the tasty reward for one's efforts.

The cost at either studio is 38 euros. Online: belgiancolateworkshop.com

Craft silver jewelry in Market Bosworth: A 3.5-hour course offered in a workshop in the market town in Leicestershire, England, allows participants to craft their own unique silver pieces. Working with a type of metal clay that becomes hallmark-quality silver, students design, create, fire and polish a piece of jewelry that will be ready to wear home at the end of the course. The course cost 60 euros and is bookable through the Airbnb experiences platform. Online: airbnb.com/experiences/2525609

Brew beer in Hamburg: The Landgang Brauerei, a brewery in Germany's second-largest city, regularly offers a six-hour course in the art of beer brewing. Under the tutelage of a craft beer expert, participants get hands-on with the brew process and develop skills that can be applied to the art of home brewing. The course is rounded out by a tour of the facilities, snacks and plenty of fresh beer to enjoy while working. The beer brewed on the day can be taken home to mature in its own time. The course fee is 159 euros. Online: landgang-brauerei.de

Handcrafted keepsakes make wonderful holiday gifts

Holiday gift shopping should never be a chore but rather a joy of the season. Master craftsmen and enthusiastic amateurs alike offer a range of hands-on activities year-round that result in items sure to be treasured by their makers and ideally suited to gift giving. Those with craft-loving friends or family members might instead wish to gift them an experience that allows them to conjure up a master work of their very own. Here are just a few items one might choose to experience and then take home.

Make chocolate in Brussels or Bruges: The Belgian Chocolate Workshop offers a 2.5-hour workshop allowing participants to create two types of chocolates, filled pralines or mendiants, in which dried fruit pieces are mounted on chocolate discs. The skills introduced include how to temper chocolate, craft pralines and make a chocolate ganache filling. The workshop concludes by making a cup of hot chocolate from the leftover bits. A box containing some 35 chocolates is the tasty reward for one's efforts.

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Grasse, France, is known as the world's perfume capital. Galimard's Studio des Fragrances offers a two-hour perfume workshop to create one's own signature scent.

Venetian carnival tradition is the wearing of a mask to disguise one's identity. The Atelier La Bauta in Venice offers various courses, including an hourlong course in which participants can paint and decorate the mask they have chosen from more than 60 papier-mâché models and take their finished works home. The experience costs 40 euros per person and is available on a drop-by basis. A 90-minute course in creating the papier-mâché mask itself is also available; advance recommendations are recommended. Online: labauta.com/workshop/laing-en

Paint a mask in Venice: An essential element of the

TARS AND S

Handcrafted keepsakes make wonderful holiday gifts
There are destination restaurants, out-of-the-way and often over-priced fine-dining joints run by celebrity chefs who attract limos full of foodies and their followers.

Then there is Sa Foradada. It supposedly had some of the best paella in Mallorca, Spain’s largest island. And my wife and I were determined to try it on a recent trip.

But the tiny, rustic eatery clings to a wind-swept rocky promontory jutting into the western Mediterranean, a site so remote that you can only reach it by sea or on foot. (More information at restaurantesaforadada.com)

We tried booking a water taxi from Port de Sóller, about five miles up the coast. It was supposed to drop us at a secluded cove where we could climb steep stone stairs to the restaurant. But the captain decided the seas were too rough, and he again canceled when we retried three days later.

So we hiked in. We had been told to climb over a metal gate off a side road at Son Marroig, the former estate of an Austrian archduke, to find the unmarked trail. From there, we zigzagged down a mountain track for nearly an hour, through terraces of gnarled olive trees and lush pines, and onto a narrow rocky spit flanked by crashing surf.

We finally reached what looked like a shack on a cliff. Just below it, a chain with a red stop sign blocked the path. A woman dressed in black appeared. “Do you have a reservation?” she asked pleasantly.

We did, and we were given a table along the rail, overlooking the turquoise sea. Sunlight dappled through a roof of matted reeds. A jagged precipice across the cove was pierced by a natural hole, like a dragon’s eye, the forat in the local Catalan dialect that gives the hole-in-the-wall restaurant its name.

We ordered a pitcher of sangria with cava, Spanish sparkling wine, and settled in for an extraordinary three-hour lunch.

Paellas simmer over the wood fire in the open-air kitchen at Sa Foradada. The tiny, rustic eatery clings to a wind-swept rocky promontory jutting into the western Mediterranean. The only way to get there is to walk or take a water taxi.

“It can’t go,” my wife had declared after she tried to check in online the day before our flight to Madrid. “They won’t accept my name.”

The problem was that her U.S. passport was in her maiden name, while her vaccination records showed her married name. Because they didn’t match, the Spanish online health portal wouldn’t issue her the QR code required to board the flight or enter the country.

A day of increasingly frantic calls and emails to health agencies and government offices led nowhere. Then the Spanish consulate sent an unsigned email suggesting we try our luck at the airport.

At the Iberia counter, a very patient ticket agent spent more than an hour reviewing our documents, consulting her supervisors and tweaking the app until

SEE MALLORCA ON PAGE 21
Mallorca: The paella alone is worth the trip to Spain’s largest island

The QR code magically appeared on my wife’s phone. We had to show that QR code at four checkpoints after we landed in Palma, Mallorca’s largest city. And every restaurant, shop and other indoor site we entered during our two-week stay required masks. I rarely saw anyone defy the rule.

Mallorca is best known as a playground for the super-rich, and a local English-language website, the Majorca Daily Bulletin, did not disappoint in its coverage. Headlines announced that Prince Albert of Monaco had arrived, as had the “world’s most avant-garde super yacht.” However, mostly German and English tourists flock here. They are the latest in a very long line of foreign invaders: the Phoenicians came in around 8th century B.C., followed by Roman legions, marauding Vandals, Moslems, Ottoman Turks and others.

With so much history, and 1,400 square miles, there’s lots to see. Barbary corsairs built coastal watchtowers in the 17th century that still flank several harbors. We walked across the Pont Romà, an arched stone bridge in Pollença that the Romans built 2,000 or so years ago and is still in use. In Palma, we admired the immense Cathedral of Santa Maria, which dates to the 13th century and is one of the tallest Gothic structures in Europe. The honey-colored basilica, which took 400 years to build (and was rebuilt after an earthquake in 1851), was erected over a Moorish mosque, which itself sat on a Roman fortification. (More information at catedraldemallorca.org/en)

Today, La Seu, as the cathedral is known, looms over Palma’s Old Town, a busy warren of handicraft shops, tapas bars, historic palaces and sunny plazas. After wandering the cobbled streets one morning, we ducked into the Mercat de l’Olivar, a vast indoor food market, and found high-table seats at Ostras, one of the stalls along the wall.

Soon we were gorging on heaping plates of grilled razor clams, cockles, octopus with potatoes, shrimp and more. The bill for three, including a bottle of cava, was $98.

One could fashion a tour to Mallorca just to visit the best-known monasteries, the Sanctuary of Sant Salvador. It was built atop a mountain during the Black Death, the 14th-century pandemic that wiped out much of Europe’s population, when friars believed the cool air at about 1,500 feet would keep the plague at bay. It didn’t. But the views are breathtaking.

Beaches are a big draw on Mallorca, although be forewarned: In many places, that means spreading your towel around the first dizzying switchback. Then another. And another. We dodged bicyclists, oncoming cars and the odd goat for more than an hour on the wild, winding road. Then, to my amazement, a tiny red Fiat passed me, buzzing by before disappearing around a blind turn. I realized I was driving so slowly, I was blocking traffic. My ego quickly deflated.

At the bottom, we parked and walked down to the Bar Playa La Cabrola, one of several seaside cafes in the tiny settlement. We grabbed a table on the veranda and ordered restorative cortados and apple cake. My ears perked up when the tinny sound system played the theme from “Mission: Impossible.” I felt better.

A nearby path led to two dimly lit tunnels carved through solid rock and out to a small, pebbly beach. Familiar and couples sunned on blankets or swam in the tiny cove that once sheltered smugglers and pirates. We instead shouldered our day packs and began hiking up a deep canyon known as the Torrent de Pareis.

The gorge is subject to dangerous flash floods when it rains, but the sky thankfully was clear. Steep limestone walls, sculpted by wind and water into twisted cracks and grottoes, soared hundreds of feet high as we clambered over, under or around huge boulders. Swallows wheeled in and out of the shadows.

After 90 minutes or so, we met three college-age hikers scrambling down. How far to the top, we asked. About four hours, one said. And 2,200 feet up, the second said.

“You’ll need ropes,” the third added helpfully. We did not have ropes. Or four hours. We settled for the picnic we had brought along — paper-thin slices of salty-sweet Ibérico ham on fresh dark bread — and turned back.

Which brings us to our lunch at Sa Foradada. Our table — one of 25 on two terraces — offered a clear view of the open-air kitchen. We watched coals juggle blackened pans of sizzling paella and other dishes on a forge-like grill set over a blazing wood fire.

It was a reminder of the dish’s humble origins. Back in the early 1800s, farmworkers near Valencia used a shallow pan to cook short-grained rice (the Moors first planted the grain in Spain) over wood fires, tossing in any ingredients they could find, for a filling one-dish lunch.

Today, paella — the word is from patella, or small pan, in Latin — is arguably Spain’s best-known culinary export. Yet the precise ingredients, and how they should be cooked, are hotly disputed.

Valencians insist their calcium-rich water is required to flavor the stubby rice. Fans farther north in Barcelona covet the socarrat, the crunchy dry crust that forms on the rice after all the water has evaporated.

Some aficionados demand mussels, clams, squid and shrimp. Others prefer chicken, rabbit, pork and snails, citing paella’s peasant roots. Peas or no peas? Spicy chorizo and crayfish have been known to join the mix.

‘They all sounded pretty good to me. So after diving into grilled red shrimp and a salad as starters, we decided on the mixed paella: saffron-flavored rice with seafood, vegetables and meat cooked over a softfire, or flavor base, of garlic, onions, tomatoes and peppers.

After 45 minutes or so, the waiter brought a steaming pan to our table and spooned the golden-hued mixture onto our plates. That’s another no-no in some parts of Spain, where it’s said paella must be eaten straight from the pan.

The dish was rich, smoky and dense with flavor, unlike any paella I had eaten before. A salty breeze from the sea only enhanced the taste. We topped off with fresh-baked coconut carrot cake to fortify ourselves for the two-mile uphill hike back.

After paying the $126 bill, I approached the manager and chief chef, Lidia Fernández Morell. We chatted under dangling ropes of garlic and peppers as she garnished five pans of paella, flipped a grilled dorado and stirred two huge pots of seafood stock, all while feeding pine boughs into the fire.

Her parents, Emilio and Magdalena Fernández, began cooking paella on the cliffs in the 1970s, she told me, and steadily built the business despite the desolate site.

Now, she and her sister supervise a staff of 10, serving lunch six days a week from April to October. (It closed for most of 2020 because of the pandemic and only opened in late July this year.) Reservations are recommended two weeks ahead in summer, and hike-ins are often turned away.

I said I was pleased her paella didn’t have a socarrat crust on the bottom, because I find the taste bitter. “We can make it, but people here don’t like it,” the chef agreed.

So is it the best paella in Mallorca, I asked. “People say so,” the chef said with a shrug. “I don’t know.”

‘Nor do I. But it hardly mattered. The experience was sublime.”
WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Telling a story of Frankfurt’s people

By Michael Abrams
Stars and Stripes

For more than 800 years, the Jewish community was a part of Frankfurt’s history. It was once the second largest in Germany, behind only Berlin. Then came the dark days of the 20th century when they were deported and murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

Today, Frankfurt again has a thriving Jewish community. Their history, from the Middle Ages to the present, can be traced at two places: the Jewish Museum and the Museum Judengasse.

The Jewish Museum first opened in 1988, housed in the 19th century Rothschild Palais on the banks of the Main River. It featured artifacts and displays of Jewish life from about 1100 to the 1950s. In 2015, the museum closed for renovations and to build an extension.

Unfortunately, technical problems with renovations kept the museum closed for five years, not reopening until late 2020. It might have been worth the wait. The museum is now modern and spacious, and includes interactive exhibits.

The new extension, dubbed the Lichtschild, was completed in 2021. It might have been worth the wait. The museum is open again and includes interactive exhibits.

The top floor starts with the present, then works its way from the past, through the Holocaust and exile. There are many videos here worth watching, including interviews with eyewitnesses to the past and present.

Also worth seeing is the painting of Moses by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim and the unusual “The Five Maccabees” Hanukkah candelabrum by Benno Elkan.

The second level of the museum is dedicated to tradition and ritual. Here you can see Torah rolls and a Talmud, a case with circumcision instruments, models of two destroyed Frankfurt synagogues and “Ask the Rabbi:”, a video installation by Timm Ringwaldt.

The bottom floor covers family and everyday Jewish life and features the history of the Rothschilds, the Frankfurt banking/industrialist family, and the Frank family, whose best-known member, Anne, brought the Holocaust to us all at a very personal level with her diary.

About a mile away from the Jewish Museum, the Museum Judengasse has a unique history and location inside the building housing the Frankfurt utilities company.

In 1987, the construction of the building unearthed the foundations of five houses and two baths of the old Jewish ghetto, the Judengasse.

SEE MUSEUMS ON PAGE 23

On the QT

Address: The Jewish Museum (Juedisches Museum) is at Bertha-Pappenheim-Platz 1, and the Museum Judengasse, is at Battonnstrasse 47, both in downtown Frankfurt.

Parking: For the Jewish Museum, it is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Tuesday to Sunday. Closed on Monday. For the Museum Judengasse, park at the Dom/Roemer (Domstrasse 1) or Konstabler (Toenges-gasse 8) garages. If the weather is nice, you can park at the Roemer and walk to both museums.

All cost 2 euros per hour weekdays and 1 euro per hour Sundays and German holidays.

Public transportation: Take subway U1 through U5 and U6, or trams 11 and 12 to the Jewish Museum. Get off at the Willy-Brandt-Platz stop. For the Museum Judengasse, take subway U4, U5 to the Konstablerwache station or tram 11 or 12 to Battonnstrasse station.

Hours: The Jewish Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday to Sunday. Closed on Monday. The Judengasse Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday to Sunday. Closed Monday.

Costs: Admission to the Jewish Museum and Museum Judengasse is 12 euros, for the museums and temporary exhibits, 14 euros. Entrance to Museum Judengasse only is 6 euros. Children and teenagers up to 17 years of age get in free. Entrance to both museums is free on the last Saturday of the month.

Food: FLOWDELI, the kosher cafe in the Jewish Museum, it is open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday.

Information: Online: juedischesmuseum.de. There is an airport-like security check at the entrance to both museums.

Michael Abrams

The foundations of houses of the Judengasse can be seen at the Museum Judengasse. The foundations were discovered during construction of the building in 1987 and incorporated into the customer service center of Frankfurt’s municipal utilities company.

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Everything it’s quacked up to be

The hunt for delicious duck in Berlin leads to Erdinger am Gendarmenmarkt

BY IMMANUEL JOHNSON
Stars and Stripes

My quest to find the best version of a duck dish from the northwestern German city of Oldenburg led me to a surprising place: the Bavarian-style Erdinger am Gendarmenmarkt, an eatery smack dab in the heart of Berlin.

For unfamiliar American readers, this is a little like looking for southern barbecue at a Tex-Mex restaurant in Boston. But it had good reviews from TripAdvisor and was recommended by staff at the hotel where I was staying, so I had to see for myself what the hype was about.

Erdinger is a popular wheat beer that has been brewed in Bavaria for more than 130 years, according to the restaurant website.

And it’s fun to get a taste of Bavaria in northern Germany, which has some fine breweries but far less domestic and international renown. Erdinger says its beer is exported to more than 90 countries. I happily enjoyed a glass while poring over the menu.

As for the aforementioned Oldenburger duck, fortunately most German food isn’t as complicated as regional specialties might be in other countries. I was impressed with it for the most part, though I thought it could have been more tender.

The bread dumplings served with the dish brought back Thanksgiving memories because they tasted similar to stuffing, and the cabbage was exceptional.

Pasta lovers should try the spaetzle, specifically the one with Allgau cheese, Zillertal mountain cheese and roasted onions. It comes with a side salad.

One portion of this will fill up most people, and the price is reasonable.

For dessert, I indulged in a treat with an Austrian twist that is a favorite at Erdinger: kaiserschmarrn. It’s basically cut-up caramelized pancake with apple sauce and vanilla ice cream.

Half of an Oldenburger duck accompanied with bread dumplings and cabbage is one of the most popular dishes at Erdinger am Gendarmenmarkt in Berlin.

Deutsche Bahn offering you a first-class upgrade for about 30 euros. The upgrade is well worth it and includes access to select DB lounges.

Should you opt to drive, parking on the street is possible, but if you’re looking to spend a night or two in the city, the train is painless minus the occasional delays.

Immanuel Johnson

PHOTOS BY IMMANUEL JOHNSON/Stars and Stripes

A cutout view of Frankfurt’s Main Synagogue at the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt, and in the background is a model of the synagogue of the Israeli Religious Society. Both were destroyed by the Nazis.

Museums: Modern buildings preserve history of Frankfurt’s Jewish community

FROM PAGE 22

When the city only wanted to document the finds and keep on building, protest erupted.

A compromise was found — the building would be constructed around the excavations. Five years later, the Museum Judengasse opened.

In 1996, French troops bombarded Frankfurt and destroyed the northern end of Judengasse. After that, the Jews were no longer forced to live there.

The ghetto was torn down and redeveloped but remained the center of Jewish life, with the city’s main synagogue there.

It was destroyed by the Nazis in November 1938, and the World War II bombings of Frankfurt demolished much of the surrounding area.

The museum was renovated and redone in 2016, its collection expanded with pre-1800 items from the Jewish Museum. Inside, you can walk through the excavations and see the relics uncovered here.

There are exhibits on the houses and the people who lived here, but also displays on how the inhabitants interacted with the outside, Christian world.

Don’t miss the video that shows the transformation of the ghetto over the centuries.

Opposite the museum’s entrance is the Old Jewish Cemetery, used from 1272 to 1828.

On its wall is the centerpiece of the Neuer Boerneplatz memorial, 11,908 small blocks set into the wall, each inscribed with the name of a Frankfurt Jew who was deported and murdered during the Holocaust.

Immanuel Johnson

Stars and Stripes

Twitter: @Manny_Stripes

johnson.immanuel@stripes.com
Take your best shot

For fun that’s on target, try Shihan Mato seated archery at Obi Castle Town in Japan.

You can try out this ancient art at Obi Castle Town in Miyazaki’s Nichinan City for a small fee. Archers can either kneel on a mat or sit on a small platform and shoot at targets about 27 feet away.

The arrows you fire are quite long — about 3 feet — and tend to veer slightly to the right of where you’re aiming. The folks at the range have added a little dot left of the target for people to shoot at.

The lightweight bows and short distance to the target make the sport something that doesn’t require much strength to compete in. It’s an activity that older people and men and women can participate in together.

Early 20th-century film of Japanese people doing Shihan Mato archery shows huge crowds of people who look a little tipsy. It was common for people to drink local shochu before competing.

Feudal lords, fearing rebellion, would allow peasants to practice archery only when seated, which led to the establishment of Shihan Mato, or a Japanese style of seated archery.
WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Do one thing, and do it well

Fujitaya near Hiroshima only serves eel; it earned them a Michelin star

BY JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

The world-renowned floating torii on Miyajima near Hiroshima is closed for restoration, but the island boasts one of the world’s best spots for grilled eel, and it is still open. The Fujitaya restaurant serves only one set meal, anago-meshi, which is conger eel on a bed of rice with three small side dishes. Popular side dish options include pickled vegetables and liver.

This longstanding restaurant does this one dish so well, it received a one-star rating from the Michelin Guide in 2018. The prestigious rating doesn’t mean you’ll break the bank for a meal, however. The main course runs about $22, with $7 for each side dish.

Other restaurants serve their versions of conger eel, but Fujitaya stands apart. Its ingredients are sourced at the local fish market every morning, made to order and served up hot and fresh. Conger eel has a savory flavor that melts in your mouth. The eel is deboned and simmered, and its head and spine make the stock that is seasoned with soy sauce and used to cook the accompanying rice. The eel is filleted and grilled with a soy-based sauce. Expect a short wait while your order is prepared. During peak tourist season on the island, it’s not unusual to find a long line out the door at Fujitaya. It’s open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday through Tuesday, but the restaurant will close for the day once it runs out of food. An English menu is available, but the staff does not speak much of the language. Ample seating is available at the bar, at tables and chairs or on traditional Japanese seating.

Fujitaya

Location: 125-2 Miyajimacho, Hatsukaichi, Hiroshima 739-0588
Directions: A short walk from the Daishoin Temple.
Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday through Tuesday, but may close early if the eel sells out
Prices: About $22 for the main dish; $7 for appetizers
Dress: Casual
Information: Phone: 829440151

Jonathan Snyder

Aromatic spice paste enlivens Balinese pork

BY CHRISTOPHER KIMBALL
For The Associated Press

Whether it’s an entire spit-roasted pig or the more accessible skillet-braised shoulder, pork frequently is the focus of feasts during religious festivals in Bali, a pocket of Hindu tradition in majority-Muslim Indonesia.

One particularly delicious dish is babi guling, a fork-tender pig roast seasoned with a long list of spices and aromatics. We used one of our favorite spice cabinet shortcuts — the blend garam masala, which includes cumin, cardamom, cinnamon, mace, black pepper, coriander and sometimes more.

Leaving the fat on the surface of the pork roast — but scoring it with a knife — creates a surface to which the seasoning paste can adhere.

Roasted pork shoulder with turmeric and lemongrass

Ingredients
4 medium shallots, peeled and quartered
3 lemongrass stalks, dry outer layers discarded, trimmed to bottom 6 inches and cut into 1-inch lengths
3 tablespoons packed brown sugar
2 tablespoons neutral oil
1 tablespoon garam masala
1 tablespoon ground turmeric
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
5-pound boneless pork shoulder roast, untrimmed

Directions
Heat the oven to 300°F. In a food processor, process the shallots, lemongrass, sugar, oil, garam masala, turmeric, 1 tablespoon salt and 2 teaspoons pepper to form a paste. With a knife, score a crosshatch pattern into the surface fat on top of the roast. Rub the paste onto all sides of the roast and into the cuts. Place the pork fat side up on a rimmed baking sheet and roast until the center reaches 195°F, about 4 hours. Let rest for 30 minutes, then cut into slices for serving.

Optional garnish: Thinly sliced scallions OR chopped fresh cilantro OR lime wedges OR sambal OR a combination.
Serves 8 to 10.
‘Vegan, at Times’

Seinfeld’s wife wants to encourage people to cook without meat or dairy, even occasionally

By Mark Kennedy

Jessica Seinfeld became a vegan almost by stealth. The cookbook author and philanthropist started quietly making separate meals for herself without dairy or meat.

“I just started doing it myself and experimenting with it and not talking about it and kind of seeing how I would feel,” she says. “I undeniably felt better.”

Over time, she has managed to win over her three-teen-aged kids and her husband, comedian Jerry Seinfeld, who all eat vegan these days. Now, she’s hoping to recruit even more with her new book “Vegan, at Times.”

With more than 120 recipes — from vegetable spring rolls with peanut butter dipping sauce to red curry with zucchini noodles — Seinfeld hopes the book can inspire more meatless Mondays (and maybe a few meatless Thursdays, too).

“I don’t know if I’ll ever get to be 100% vegan. That isn’t really my plan. My plan is to just do a really good job every single day with eating more vegetables, less meat and less dairy, and I’m succeeding,” she said.

“Vegan, at Times,” written with Sara Quessenberry, is a judgment-free book with practical recipes that avoid dairy and meat. They can be prepared from ingredients at any store and made in 30 minutes or so. Seinfeld hopes readers can ease into veganism. (There’s even a chapter titled “How Not to be an Annoying Vegan.”)

“Myself and my family and lots of people that I know felt really intimidated by the aura around veganism, which is that it’s strict and it’s militant and unless you do it at 100%, you are not welcome,” she says. “I have a real issue around shaming people for their food choices. I just think that food is a privilege and it’s a pleasure. And if you are able to put food on your table and make choices, you shouldn’t complain about how anybody eats.”

The book is broken up into breakfast, mealtime, snacks, desserts and sauces. It leans on such veggies as chickpeas, sweet potatoes and cauliflower to replace meat. Like sloppy Joes that uses cannellini beans and cauliflower florets. For those craving barbecue, she broils eggplant slices and puts them in hot pita pockets with homemade coleslaw.

Jen Bergstrom, senior vice president and publisher at Gallery Books, says Seinfeld has a talent for creating accessible, affordable and approachable recipes.

She says the book’s collection of plant-based options “will appeal to even the biggest carnivore. I’ve tried a number of the recipes myself, with very tasty results, including my personal favorite, sweet potato tacos with corn salsa. I look forward to readers discovering the pleasure of going vegan, whether occasionally or every day.”

The fast-casual chain Chipotle is popular in Seinfeld’s family, so the author challenged herself to re-create the taste of their dishes at home without meat. Hence her cauliflower rice and beans, which her 16-year-old son admitted he was surprised to like. She also makes mac and cheese with a plant-based cheddar and cashew or almond milk.

“Your can’t go from zero to 60 with people. You have to wade in slowly. And so I make their favorites, but I make them vegan.”

“Vegan, at Times” is Seinfeld’s fifth cookbook and she’s also the president and founder of the Good+ Foundation, a non-profit that provides services, educational resources, tangible goods and support for low-income families. She turned to veganism after her doctor recommended eating less dairy and meat. She also embraces its benefits for the planet and animals.

Seinfeld says she was stunned early in the pandemic when giant meat-processing plants would not close despite their workers being sick. She thought the priorities were skewed.

“I just thought, we’re so addicted to meat in this country that we can’t even keep workers safe and we can’t even shut down,” she says. “That really made an impression on me, it really bothered me, and that was when I went full-on into this concept.”

She has found inspiration in recipes from outside America, where meat and dairy aren’t the star of every dish. “How do we inch towards a healthier lifestyle overall as a country? If we look at other countries, it makes it feel more doable to me.”

Whatever she’s doing seems to have worked. Two of her three children are in college, but her teenage son and husband are stepping up. “We just committed as a family a couple of nights ago to four week nights a week going vegan,” she says.

Macaroni and Cheese

Serves: 6

Total time: 55 minutes

Active time: 35 minutes

For the macaroni and cheese:

½ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for pasta water
1 pound short pasta, such as cavatappi, elbows or small shells
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
5 tablespoons all-purpose flour
4⅓ cups unsweetened cashew or almond milk
16 ounces (4 cups) shredded plant-based cheddar cheese (We like Violife)
2 tablespoons nutritional yeast
1 teaspoon dry mustard
2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat leaf parsley, for serving

For the breadcrumb topping:

1 cup panko or coarse dried breadcrumbs
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon kosher salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper

Directions:

Position the oven rack about 8 inches from the top and heat the oven to 400 degrees F.

Make the macaroni: Bring a large pot of water to a boil, then salt it. Add the pasta and cook until it’s a few minutes short of al dente (it will continue to cook in the oven). Drain into a colander and pass under cold running water to stop the cooking. Shake out any excess water.

Meanwhile, to make the cheese sauce, in a large pot or Dutch oven, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the flour and cook, stirring with a wooden spoon, for about 3 minutes to cook out the raw flavor of the flour. Add 1 cup of the milk and whisk until it forms a smooth paste. Continue to whisk in the remaining milk a little at a time, at first, to avoid lumps. Let the mixture reach a simmer minutes short of al dente (it will continue to cook in the oven). Drain into a colander and pass under cold running water to stop the cooking. Shake out any excess water.

For the breadcrumb topping:

In a small bowl, stir together the breadcrumbs, oil, salt and pepper. Grate the garlic and stir to combine.

Sprinkle the breadcrumb topping over the macaroni and cheese. Bake for about 15 minutes, or until the sauce is bubbling. Then turn on the broiler and cook for another 3 minutes, until the breadcrumbs are golden brown. Let cool for 5 minutes before serving and sprinkle the top with the parsley.

Macaroni and cheese made using the recipe, right, from the book, “Vegan, at Times; 120+ Recipes for Every Day or Every So Often,” by Jessica Seinfeld with Sara Quessenberry, is shown above.

Mark Weinberg, Gallery Books/AP
Describing life’s saddest, loneliest experiences

‘Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows’ gives readers the words to express the emotions they’ve felt but could never name

By Jen Rose Smith

Friday, December 3, 2021

F

eelings are fleeting, but finding words for them brings solidity and even solidarity — to moments both ebullient and drayly. Witness “languishing,” a word that “speaks to the idea that the media feeds after a New York Times story called it the “dominant emotion of 2021.” Naming that diffuse malaise was oddly comforting.

Words for obscure emotions remind us we have company in our most private moments, writes John Koenig in his prologue to “The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows,” a compendium of words he invented (or re-invented, in some cases). Koenig is taken with the “aches, demons, vibes, joys and urges that are humming in the background of everyday life,” he writes. Take for example “zonzmers,” the thrrob of dread that sometimes hits when you’re on the cusp of realizing a long-held dream. Or perhaps you’ve savored a moment of “nyctous,” which Koenig defines as “feeling quietly overjoyed to be the only one awake in the middle of the night.”

Koenig began coining and compiling such words on his website in 2009, a foray followed by a YouTube channel and TED Talk. Some of Koenig’s creations have, Pinocchio-like, come to life and escaped into the wider world. His 2012 neologism “sonder,” which Koenig called “the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own,” is in the namesake, for among other things, several studio albums, a hospitability company and eateries in California, Wisconsin and Kosovo.

Some of Koenig’s words are copped from snippets of European languages, while others are simply pulled from the world’s bargain bin of used-but-still-useful vocabulary. For example, Koenig’s adjective “idlewild” — “feeling grateful to be stranded in a place where you can’t do much of anything” — is borrowed from the original name of John F. Kennedy International Airport. Flipping through the book you’ll see pages of connections. For example, posting “sonder” on his website nearly a decade ago, Koenig writes that he received an avalanche of emails from readers thanking him for putting words to a feeling they’d experienced but never named. Entries in the dictionary range from pithy definitions to mini essays on modern life’s anxieties.

It’s not all whimsy, and a philosophy of language weaves through the dictionary. Koenig, who works in advertising, encountered such ideas as an undergraduate at Macalester College and remains entranced by the subtleties of language. Words “function as a kind of psychological programming that helps shape our relationships, our memory, even our perception of reality,” Koenig writes. He quotes the philosophe Ludwig Wittgenstein’s aphorism that “the limits of our language are the limits of our world.” In the most extreme version of this reasoning — a theory called linguistic determinism that’s almost entirely shunned by linguists — our native tongues impinge our minds, leaving us capable only of understanding the feelings and concepts our languages allow.

That can’t be the case: Think of the thousands of readers who immediately recognized their previously unnamed experiences reflected in words like “sonder.”

A scaled-back version of this idea, however, has currency among some linguists, researchers and psychologists. In his 2010 book “Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages,” Israeli linguist Guy Deutscher argued that the words we use can subtly channel our experiences and habits of mind. Neuroscientist Kristen Lindquist, who leads the University of North Carolina’s Carolina Affective Science Lab, has found that words help us crystallize quicksilver emotional experiences into something more recognizable. Psychologist Tim Lomas created an interactive lexicon of emotion words in English from Alexander the Great to Zulu, positing that expanded emotional vocabularies enrich our inner lives. (The Lomas lexicon includes several entries drawn from Koenig’s writings.)

“Any word is only real if you want it to be,” Koenig writes. “It’s a defense of language’s endless creative possibility, and a fitting coda to an enchanting book of made-up words turned real.

‘Go Tell the Bees that I Am Gone’ worth the wait for ‘Outlander’ fans

By Elizabeth Hand

Special to The Washington Post

There’s no doubt that legions of readers will be raising a toast or two to celebrate the publication of “Go Tell the Bees That I Am Gone,” the latest installment of Diana Gabaldon’s sweeping Outlander saga. The series began with the publication of “Outlander,” first in a series of books penned by Claire’s former husband from the mid-20th century who, after many years living in the 17th century, has mostly adapted to life among folks unfamiliar with penicillin, automobiles or Dr. Seuss. A World War II British Army nurse, Claire now uses her skills as a healer to tend to the many residents of Fraser’s Ridge. These include Jamie, her Scottish husband, Roger, and their children, additional outliers from the future. The extended Fraser clan also includes children born out of wedlock, stepchildren, adopted children (and adults), along with lovers and spouses acquired in the dozens since Jamie and Claire first met. The book contains three Outlander family trees, which are somewhat helpful.

Still, it’s been seven years since Gabaldon’s previous Outlander installment. Eyewitness reports from fans may feel as though they’ve been thrust into the midst of a huge family reunion, only half-recalling who’s who and why they should remember them. The first few hundred pages of “Go Tell the Bees,” while well-told, move slowly, as Gabaldon reacquaints us with not just Claire and Jamie but their far-flung network of family, friends and frenemies, some of them now on opposing sides of the U.S. War of Independence. A new name or character is introduced on almost every page, and few escape without a backstory. A Jacobite rebel before he emigrated to America, Jamie sides with the Patriots but is tolerant of his Loyalist tenants on the Ridge. Yet things heat up as the conflict grows more dire and closer to home.

There are stirring accounts of the sieges of Charles Town (now Charleston, S.C.) and Savannah, excursions to Philadelphia and Upstate New York, with a memorable sojourn among the Mohawks; and appearances by such historical figures as Francis Marion, the Swamp Fox, whom Roger (raised in the 20th Century) finds “Not quite what the romantic moniker ‘Swamp Fox’ conjured up.” Coats are turned, friends are betrayed, lives are lost. One of the many things that Gabaldon achieves is to show how great events aren’t history to those who live through them but simply everyday life, with children to be fed, clothes to be bought, bills to be paid, and lives to be buried. And yes, whisky to be quaffed, in celebration or in mourning.

At first, time travel doesn’t play a huge role in the novel. When it does, it’s mostly represented by books — “Green Eggs and Ham,” treasured by Claire and Jamie’s grandchildren; a precise copy of the Merck Manual that Claire references while setting bones and performing surgeries; but literature takes on a more ominous role when Jamie comes across a book about American Revolution penned by Claire’s former husband from the 20th century. In it, Jamie finds his own name among the list of those killed at the Battle of Kings Mountain, N.C., in Octobet, 1780.

Is it possible to outrun your own death? Could you countenance doing so, at the cost of honor and the knowledge of your own small part in a crucial battle for American independence? Yet what if one learns, as another character does, that a small act could change the course of world history, almost certainly for the better?

Gabaldon’s vast and sweeping account of the Revolutionary War is so intricately plotted and peopled that one is amazed she conceived and wrote it in only seven years. This is a series where many of the finest moments are small ones, especially those that depict Claire and Jamie’s enduring love and passion as they enter their roles as parents.

Readers and themselves checking up as the book nears its cliffhanger end. It may be another seven years before the next and final Outlander volume, but I’m betting it will be worth the wait.
If there’s one thing Bruce Springsteen’s fans can find fault with in their hero, it’s his early aversion to film cameras. Because of that, there is very little onscreen documentation of Springsteen onstage in the mid-to-late 1970s, when the power and majesty of the E Street Band combined with youthful exuberance for some truly epic concert experiences. Without a ticket and a good memory, they passed you by.

That makes last week’s release of a 90-minute film that shows them performing at the “No Nukes” benefit concerts in September 1979 significant for fans and music historians. It’s found money.

Before a friendly crowd at New York’s Madison Square Garden, Springsteen and his gang of Jersey toughs crackle with pent-up energy. They’d been off the road in 1979, recording “The River,” and are thrilled to be before an audience again. Their typical four-hour show was condensed into 90 minutes. Sharing a bill with artists like Jackson Browne, Graham Nash and Bonnie Raitt, they burned to show peers what they could do.

See BYPASSING on Page 29
Isbell talks vaccines, Scorsese and wild year

By Chris Riemenschneider
Star Tribune

A s he heads into the final stretch of a year that put him at the forefront of the vaccine debate and several other controversies, Jason Isbell only has one regret about the way he heavy-handedly handled 2021's COVID problem.

"I spent too much time arguing about something I didn't have the argument as the first point," the Alabama reared country-rocker said.

Five months after he and his tour band the 400 Unit played their first shows of summer — all requiring proof of vaccine or negative COVID tests to attend — Isbell is still on the road. In the interim, he made a lot of headlines for his rigid policies, and several other hot topics, too.

Still, it's hard to argue with the results. Isbell proudly pointed them out in an interview the week before Thanksgiving from his home outside Nashville.

"We were still able to go out and play a lot of shows," he said, "and we saw only a very small drop in attendance, which might've happened anyway. And honestly, the people who did show up made up for it so much better than anything."

No one could accuse Isbell of doing nothing when it comes to the causes and controversies of the day. When fast-rising country music star Morgan Wallen — who covered Isbell's "Cover Me Up" on his latest album — was caught on tape drunkenly spewing racial slurs, Isbell condemned Wallen's actions and pledged to donate all his royalty money from Wallen's album to the NAACP. When the 2020 election proved nail biting close in Georgia, Isbell promised that a winning turnout of blue voters would prompt him to make an album of cover songs for the Georgia State (where his former band, the Drive-by Truckers, formed).

Isbell

Isbell and the 400 Unit's latest release, "Georgia Blue." The follow-up to their Grammy-nominated 2020 record "Reunions," the new album features several previously unreleased from the MUSE benefit concerts. Isbell

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"We were still able to go out and play a lot of shows," he said, "and we saw only a very small drop in attendance, which might've happened anyway. And honestly, the people who did show up made up for it so much better than anything." The sheer quality film, shot by a crew that he said, "The sheer quality film, shot by a crew that was on hand to make a documentary on the benefit for Steen's shows are filmed. Back in the audience."

Surprising is, when it comes to the causes and controversies of the day, When fast-rising country music star Morgan Wallen — who covered Isbell's "Cover Me Up" on his latest album — was caught on tape drunkenly spewing racial slurs, Isbell condemned Wallen's actions and pledged to donate all his royalty money from Wallen's album to the NAACP. When the 2020 election proved nail biting close in Georgia, Isbell promised that a winning turnout of blue voters would prompt him to make an album of cover songs for the Georgia State (where his former band, the Drive-by Truckers, formed).

It was still a relatively new song in 1979, and the band at a double-time ferocity. The film also illustrates how vital Clarence Clemons was to the show: Catch how he and Springsteen make eye contact during "Rosalita," launching an extended choreography that partnerships lean on him, literally and figuratively. With Clemmons and organist Danny Federici now dead, the band's not the same. The "No Nukes" film is on sale as a DVD or Blu-ray disc, in separate packages with audio CDs of the music. The film won't be available on streaming services until next year; audio began streaming Nov. 19.

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"I think they mainly wanted us for our cover of "Born in the USA" tour five years earlier.

"After waiting 40 years for this, it does not disappoint," he said. "It's an amazing thing, with temps that are off the charts. That's evident when you say "Born to Run." Decades into the song's existence, its appearance in concert is now a karaoke-like ritual — everybody gets up, everyone sings along. It was still a relatively new song in 1979, and the band attacks it on "No Nukes" with a"
Disney+ documentary series created from nearly 60 hours of mostly unseen film, 150 hours of audio recordings

By David Bauder
Associated Press

For 50 years, the fixed narrative had the Beatles’ “Let it Be” recording session as a miserable experience with a band where members were sick of each other, sick of their work and in the process of breaking up.

The nearly 8-hour, Peter Jackson-produced documentary culled from film and recording outtakes of those sessions instead reveal a self-aware band with a rare connection and work ethic that still knew how to have fun — yet was also in the process of breaking up.

The “Get Back” series unspooled over three days starting on Thanksgiving on Disney+.

Produced by a Beatlemaniac for fellow Beatlemaniacs, it can be an exhausting experience for those not in the club. But the club is pretty big. Beyond the treats it offers fans, “Get Back” is a fly-on-the-wall experience for those not in the club. But musically, every time we would count in — one, two, three, four — people do. But musically, every time we would count in — one, two, three, four — we were into being the best we could be.”

Jackson follows the sessions day by day from their start in a cavernous film set that was eventually abandoned in favor of their familiar London recording studio, to the brief rooftop performance that was the last time the Beatles played in public.

The filmmaker is sensitive to the idea that he was brought in to “sanitize” the sessions, pointing out that “Get Back” depicts George Harrison briefly leaving the band, an event Lindsay-Hogg was not permitted to show.

That moment unfolded after a morning where Harrison watched, silently stewing, as Lennon and McCartney displayed their tight creative connection working on “Two of Us” as if the others weren’t there. When a lunch break came, Harrison had something more permanent in mind.

“I’m leaving the band now,” he says, almost matter-of-factly, before walking out.

After a few days, and a couple of band meetings, Harrison was coaxed to return. The morning he does, the film shows he and Lennon reading a false newspaper report that they had come to blows, and faced off in boxing stances to mock it.

Jackson’s project dispels and reinforces pieces of conventional wisdom that have solidified through the years.

Myth No. 1: McCartney was a control freak

Verdict: Partly true. The film shows Harrison visibly chafing at McCartney giving him and other band members instructions on how to play and cajoling them into a decision on a live concert. The band had been somewhat aimless since the 1967 death of manager Brian Epstein. McCartney had taken on the “daddy” role, and isn’t entirely comfortable with it.

“I’m scared of me being the boss, and I have been for a couple of years,” he says. “I don’t get any support.”

Myth No. 2: Yoko Ono broke up the Beatles

Verdict: Not true. She’s there at virtually every recording session, but mostly as a benign force sitting next to Lennon. The other Beatles groused all show up in the studio, although not as often. At one point, McCartney even makes a prescient joke

“I just waited for it to go bad. I waited for the arguments to begin. I waited for the conflict to begin. I waited for the sense that they hated each other. I waited for all the things I had read in the books, and it never showed up.”

Peter Jackson
producer of “The Beatles: Get Back”

Ringo Starr, Paul McCartney, John Lennon and George Harrison play for the last time in public, as shown in “The Beatles: Get Back.”
Truth: Band breakup not as contentious as originally thought

FROM PAGE 30

about her.

“It’s going to be such an incredible comical thing in 50 years time—they broke up because Yoko sat on an amp,” he says.

The afternoon after Harrison left, the remaining Beatles clearly take out their frustration with some aggressive, atonal music, and Ono takes over his microphone—a spellbinding moment.

Myth No. 3: They essentially turned into 4 solo artists

Verdict: Not true. They’re constantly collaborating, seeking and taking advice. At one point, Harrison confesses to Lennon that he’s been having trouble completing the line that became “attracts me like no other lover” in “Something.” Lennon suggests using a nonsense phrase—“attracts me like a cauliflower”—until something better emerges.

Through the film, viewers can see how the song “Get Back” emerged from McCartney working out a riff on the side, to he and Lennon trading lyrical suggestions and throwing out an idea to make it a song criticizing anti-immigrant sentiment, to the full band working out the arrangement. Pleased with the final result, it’s Harrison who suggests immediately releasing it as a single.

“A glimpse of them working together is an enormously important artifact, not just for Beatles fans but for anybody who is creative,” said Bob Spitz, author of “The Beatles: The Biography,” published in 2005.

Myth No. 4: Filming showed the Beatles breaking up

Verdict: Essentially true. It becomes clear that Lennon and Harrison’s enthusiasm for being Beatles is waning. Lennon is clearly in love with Ono; McCartney tells Harrison who suggests immediately rehearsing the line that became “attracts me like a cauliflower” — until some-thing better emerges.

At one point, Harrison confesses to Lennon he’s been having trouble completing the line that became “attracts me like no other lover” in “Something.” Lennon suggests using a nonsense phrase—“attracts me like a cauliflower”—until something better emerges.

The afternoon after Harrison left, the remaining Beatles clearly take out their frustration with some aggressive, atonal music, and Ono takes over his microphone—a spellbinding moment.

The movie, though, was just a footnote in their lives until the late 1970s. “I started hearing more about it then,” said Hawkins in a recent Zoom interview with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution to promote the 75th anniversary Blu-Ray DVD release, which came out Nov. 16. “People were holding trivia parties. I thought, ‘Wow! This suddenly got big!’”

He remained an actor in the 1950s and 1960s and worked with Reed on “The Donna Reed Show” from 1958 to 1966. Grimes got out of show business in her teens after her mother died from early-onset Alzheimer’s disease and her father was killed in a car accident. Her life was suffused with tragedy. Her first husband died in a hunting accident. One of her children committed suicide. And her second husband died of cancer. She didn’t even see “It’s a Wonderful Life” until she was 40 years old.

“I was enthralled with the messages from that movie when I first saw it,” Grimes said. “I knew then why it was very special and I could understand why I started getting fan mail and people wanted to have interviews with me.”

Back in 1980, she had no idea how journeying to the set, you click back into it,” Hawkins added.

Hawkins said people have come up to both of them and said watching the film kept them from killing themselves. And even at age 79, he said he feels like he’s four all over again when he thinks about the movie.

“When people ask us questions about being on the set, you click back into it,” Hawkins said. “It’s so vivid. It seems like a million years ago or just yesterday.”

The movie itself is pretty dark on multiple levels and Grimes thinks people, coming out of World War II, weren’t quite ready for it yet.

Stewart himself wasn’t sure he wanted to even act again after flying naval planes over Germany but, as Hawkins said, actor Lionel Barrymore, who plays the misérless Mr. Potter in the film, convinced Stewart to do it.

“The film is like the cream in the coffee,” Hawkins said. “It just rises to the top.”

James Stewart, as George Bailey, hugs Karolyn Grimes, who plays his daughter Zuzu, in 1946’s “It’s a Wonderful Life.”
sand. You can get a simple bidet attaching for toilet paper — it wasn’t We never stressed about search says. “At our house, no problem. says. “When you spray, you get into every nook and cran- ny, which leaves you way clean- er.”

Indeed, health experts generally agree that bidets elevate the bathroom hygiene experience, at least when used properly. What’s more, they can be helpful for those with hemorrhoids or mobility issues, research isn’t conclusive, and there are concerns that bacteria could fester on the device; plus, users could be scalded if the water gets too hot. Even if they’re not a medical necessity, bidets exploded in popularity in the United States during the pandemic — and they’ve been long common in Europe and Asia. These devices, which come in different styles, squirt water at your genital and anal areas after you use the toilet. Converts say they’re far more hygienic than toilet paper, as well as more eco-friendly because you use less toilet paper.

“Remember when the pandemic first hit and there was a shortage of paper products?” Webster says. “At our house, no problem. We never stressed about searching for toilet paper — it wasn’t even a concern.”

Over time, bidet aficionados also find them to be cost-effective. You can get a simple bidet attachment for about $50, while a stand-alone bidet could cost a few hundred.

The surge in use among Americans is a validating moment for James Lin, who launched the e-commerce site Bidet King in late 2009, after visiting his grandmother in Taiwan and getting acquainted with her bidet. “It was one of those experiences where the glass shatters and you can’t put it back together,” he says.

After a decade of diligently selling the devices, orders suddenly skyrocketed during the pandemic, when toilet paper became scarcer. “To say there was a spike is an understatement,” he says. “Sales increased by 20, 30 times over the course of two to three weeks, to the point where you couldn’t buy a bidet if you really wanted to. Everyone was out of stock.”

Inventory is now back to norm- al, he reports, though interest remains high.

As Lin puts it, those who discover the bidet can’t be stopped — they tell their neighbors and friends and all that.

Here’s a look at what health experts say about the pros and cons of bidets:

The pros

Washing instead of wiping is, in many ways, a no-brainer, says Evan Goldstein, an anal surgeon in New York City and founder of Bespoke Surgical. He regularly recommends bidets to his pa- tients.

From a hygiene perspective, it just clearly makes sense, he says. “You’re able to get rid of any extra residual that’s there. The bidet has always been part and parcel to anal hygiene.”

Less wiping: Goldstein says Americans have a tendency to over-wipe: Desperate to be clean, we rub toilet paper against our- selves again and again, irritating the skin and sometimes even causing tiny cuts or bleeding. While toilet paper can be abrasive, a bidet delivers a more soothing stream of water to sensi- tive areas.

Wiping might not be entirely eliminated, though: Goldstein notes that it’s still important to “From a hygiene perspective, it just clearly makes sense. You’re able to get rid of any extra residual that’s there. The bidet has always been part and parcel to anal hygiene.”

Evan Goldstein
NYC anal surgeon, founder of Bespoke Surgical

fully dry yourself after using the toilet — otherwise, excess mois- ture could lead to an infection. He suggests using a little bit of toilet paper or a cloth towel to pat yourself dry; not wet wipes, which can vex the skin, especially if used consistently. Some bidets have a built-in air dryer, but those models tend to be pricier."

“The reality is that most people, when they switch to a bidet, they’re mad at themselves that they didn’t use it earlier, and they consider it a game changer,” Goldstein says. “It’s hygiene at its finest.”

Good if you have problems with mobility: Bidets are often partic- ularly popular during the COVID-19 toilet paper shortage because they can decrease the quality of hy-gienic practices,” she says.

The bidet is a convenient way to guarantee a thorough cleaning. Plus, Lee says, some seniors with poor hand-eye coordination who aren’t able to trim their nails accidentally cut themselves while wiping, leading to pain and in- fection. Indeed, a study published in Gerontologist found that bidets improved “comfort in toileting and cleanliness” among nursing home residents ages 75 and up. Helpful if you have issues in that area: There’s limited re- search on bidets, but a few studies suggest potential health benefits. Using one might make sense for those with hemorrhoids and anal fissures, since it reduces pressure

The cons

Concern about bacteria: A bidet isn’t a slam-dunk better toileting experience: Some re- search raises concerns. One large study, for example, indicated that regularly using a bidet altered the good bacteria in a woman’s vagi- na.

The study would “have to be repeated” for researchers to draw any conclusions, Swartzberg says.

Another study, involving a Japanese hospital, found that 254 out of 294 bidet nozzles were contaminated with infection- causing organisms such as Staphylococcus aureus and Enterococcus spp.

Maintenance and cleaning: That’s a good reminder of one of the golden rules of bidet own- ership: You need to regularly clean it. In many cases, running a damp cloth over the nozzle will suffice; it’s typically best to avoid harsh chemicals, though that will vary depending on your specific model.

“If you properly maintain it, as far as cleaning and upkeep, then it could be a hygiene— if not more — than toilet paper,” Lee says.

Potential scalding: It’s also important to pay attention to your bidet’s water pressure and tem- perature: If it’s too high, you could experience scalding or otherwise agitate your bottom. Having a professional plumber install your bidet, and reading the user manual, can help you avoid such misfires, Lee says.

The bottom line

Do we all need a bidet? Swartzberg owns one, so he cer- tainly believes in the appeal. “We put one in when we remodel- ed about 10 years ago, and now there’s a competition in the household for who gets to use that toilet,” he says.

But aside from cleanliness, there’s no compelling medical reason to use one. “There’s no medical preference,” he says. “People who like them tend to really like them. But from a medical standpoint, I don’t think it’s better or worse.”

Are bidets better?

Health expects weigh in on pros, cons of the cleaning devices, particularly popular during the COVID-19 toilet paper shortage in the rectum and is a relatively gentle experience. And people with pruritus ani, the technical term for itchy anus, are often cautioned to avoid toilet paper, leading them to bidets.

“There have been clear anec- dotal reports of people with hem- orrhoids where the bidet helps,” says John Swartzberg, a clinical professor emeritus in the School of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley. But be- yond those testimonials and a pool of preliminary studies, there’s “no good evidence to support” the impassioned claims of bidet lovers, he says. For example, some advocates believe bidets prevent urinary tract infections, but Swartzberg says there’s no evidence of that.
Experts offer advice for teaching kids when it’s okay to tattle

By Kelly Hoover Greenway

Recently, my 6- and 10-year-old sons were playing basketball in our driveway. While this should have been time for me to enjoy a peaceful, quiet house, my younger child soon came barreling through the front door with an urgent question. “Mom, is it true? Do snacks really get stitches?”

It ends up, his brother learned this refrain not from another kid, but from a counselor at his summer camp. My older son explained, when I pressed him, that the counselor encouraged campers to work things out among themselves instead of reporting all their skirmishes to an adult.

This left me feeling rather torn.

I agree that children must learn how to handle peer conflict in mature ways. However, this idea that reporting information to an adult automatically equates to “snitching” or being a “tattletale” dismisses the important role trusted grown-ups can play in helping kids and teens navigate complicated situations.

As our children grow, so do their bonds with friends, which can make the stakes higher for revealing information to the grown-ups in their lives. Pinkie promises, being sworn to secrecy and the threat of “stitch-ups” all lead to an internal conflict: to tell or not to tell?

Judging by the statistics, when it comes to peer conflict such as bullying, most of our children are choosing not to talk. Genevieve Rivera, executive director for American SPCC (Society for the Positive Care of Children), reports that only a tiny percentage of children who are being bullied tell their caregivers.

Somewhat surprisingly though, young people cite fear of parental repercussions, not necessarily those of their friends, as one of the main reasons they don’t want to share their struggles.

Rivera notes that children (yes, even the ones who are being bullied) worry they’ll have their phone taken away or be told they can’t play with a particular person anymore. Because of this, she says caregivers must “be the calm in the chaos” if their children tell them about bullying or other upsetting behaviors taking place.

One strategy Castillo recommends for maintaining open lines of communication while also respecting your child’s need for privacy is to create an “idea jar” where everyone in the family writes down tricky situations they’d like to discuss. No one gives specific names or whether a situation is real or hypothetical, but it gives the family a chance to sit down together, discuss and play out a number of different scenarios in which support might be needed.

It’s entirely possible to imagine a relationship with our kids where this topic isn’t binary: either they talk to us or they solve issues on their own. If we can remember that our role is to support, not solve, and we show up as reliable, trustworthy sources, then perhaps a new scenario can emerge — one where snacks no longer need to get stitches.

Finding goodness and light in a hectic season

It’s December, and we haven’t managed to snap a decent picture for our annual family photo cards. I haven’t even started buying gifts for my various relatives, friends, family, neighbors and pets. I haven’t baked Francisco’s favorite Cranberry Pinwheels or Hayden’s favorite Onion Swiss Bread or Grammmy’s favorite Cheese Ball. I haven’t moved the Elf on the Shelf from his box in our basement.

And I’m embarrassed to say, we haven’t even bought a tree yet.

The stress is beginning to build, but I won’t panic because I already did the one thing that keeps me grounded through the holidays.

No, I didn’t put a shot of Jameson in my morning coffee. I didn’t book a flight to Cancun to hide from my family. And I didn’t convert to Buddhism to avoid the holiday altogether.

All I did was plug in my old ceramic Christmas tree.

If you were born before 1990, you know what I’m talking about. Our mothers, aunts and grandmothers made them at local ceramics shops back in the day. When I was a kid, it seemed there was a ceramic Christmas tree glowing in the window of every house in town.

Problem was, we didn’t have one in our brick ranch. Why? My mother thought they were tacky. Sigh...

Sometimes, we visited our friend’s house, which had a huge ceramic tree in the front window. I couldn’t stop staring at it. The vivid colors of the plastic pegs, glowing from the light bulb within, seemed impossibly pure. Cobalt blue, emerald green, golden yellow, ruby red and hot magenta. It was an irresistible feast for my ceramic-tree-deprived eyes.

To me, that lighted tree somehow symbolized everything good about the holiday season.

Twenty years later, I was pushing our stroller through a seedy indoor flea market in an abandoned strip mall in Virginia Beach when I saw it.

I have no idea what possessed me to wander into the flea market, but three aisles in, past the creepy dolls, the handbag knockoffs and the suspicious electronics, there it was — a beautiful W71 ceramic Christmas tree gleaming like a beacon in that broken-down strip mall.

“Eleven dallas?” the Filipino vendor suggested. I counted out the paltry sum and took my prize home. There on my kitchen counter, radiating precious jewels beside my toaster, was my sanity.

The mesmerizing sight of the vintage tree transported me away from the mayhem. Away from the obligation to spend hundreds on meaningless gift cards for people we hardly know. Away from the photo cards mailed out to so many recipients, there’s no time to even sign our names. Away from the distraction of cellphones. Away from the 24-hour lineup of holiday television programming on our digital video recorders.

Instantly, the lighted tree cancelled me back to childhood. To a time before the internet, digital photos, virtual reality, Black Friday, Cyber Monday and Throwback Thursday.

When we scratched the frost off of our windows with our fingernails, and couldn’t wait to get outside. When we ate all our peaches at dinner because “A Charlie Brown Christmas” was airing soon. When Christmas cards were special because we only got 10. When we lounged under the tree in footed pajamas, gazing into the colors of the dangerously hot incandescent bulbs, our bellies full of chocolate chip cookies.

When the holidays, and life in general, were simple and sweet.

Nowadays, the first thing I do to prepare for the holiday is plug in my ceramic Christmas tree to remind me of the simple joys of the season. But there’s no need to run out to a seedy indoor flea market in search of a handmade relic like mine. Just find the simple things that bring goodness and light to your holiday.
Return to love

‘A Castle for Christmas’ is the first rom-com Cary Elwes has done since ‘The Princess Bride’

By Peter Sblendorio
New York Daily News

Decades after he was crowned rom-com royalty for “The Princess Bride,” Cary Elwes fell in love with the genre all over again.

The English actor stars in Netflix’s “A Castle for Christmas,” and though it might seem inconceivable, the film is Elwes’ first romantic comedy since he portrayed the heroic Westley in “The Princess Bride” back in 1987.

“I avoided picking that genre simply because that film had pretty much covered that for me, and I didn’t feel like I wanted to try and compete with it,” Elwes said. “But here I am, some 30 years later, and I couldn’t pass up the opportunity of doing this one. Firstly, because the role was so interesting to me, to play someone so totally different to Myles,” Elwes, 59, said.

Elwes said he “didn’t realize how much” he missed starring in romantic comedies until he worked on “A Castle for Christmas.”

“It’s a film about family. It’s a film about love,” Elwes said. "It’s a film about friends. I think, between those three things, they hit the most important notes of the holiday season.”

It's Always Sunny” becomes the longest-running sitcom ever

From wire reports

With the premiere of its 15th season Wednesday on FXX, “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia” became the longest-running live action comedy series ever.

The sitcom has run out classic series “The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet,” which ran for 14 seasons from 1952 to 1966. The sitcom — ostensibly about a group of friends who own and run a Philadelphia bar, but actually about a group of truly awful people — has thrust Philadelphia into the cultural spotlight, leaving many wondering if they can visit Paddy’s Pub and others wondering if the city is really full of miscreants like the “gang.”

The show, which premiered in 2005, was created by Philadelphia native Rob McElhenney, and also stars fellow actors Charlie Day and Glenn Howerton. The show centers on the group of friends trying — and failing — to run Paddy’s Pub, the fictional Irish bar in a nondescript part of the city.

When the show began, the characters were flawed, silly and selfish, constantly trying to get one over on the other and launching schemes that included buying tanks of gasoline to resell at a higher price and charging people to witness a water stain that appeared to be in the shape of the Virgin Mary.

But as the show has gone on, the group has evolved into people who often relish backstabbing and conning their way through life. Somehow, the sitcom remains hilarious and the gang endearing to watch.

The show, for all of its sometimes dark humor, has elevated Philadelphia in the eyes of the public, said Pete Caniglia, social media manager at Neff, a Philadelphia marketing agency.

“It think it’s brought a lot of Philly culture to the forefront. The show is super popular all around. Especially on social media, I’m constantly seeing ‘It’s Always Sunny’ memes,” he said.

“It shows our culture and shows what Philly is all about, said Caniglia. “The toughness of it and how fun they can be.”

Bad Bunny is Spotify’s 2021 most-streamed artist while Olivia Rodrigo has top song

Bad Bunny hopped to the top of Spotify’s most-streamed list yet again.

The Puerto Rican rapper led all artists worldwide with more than 9.1 billion streams on the music service in 2021, Spotify announced Wednesday.

The company didn’t release every individual performer’s streaming totals, but said Bad Bunny’s lofty number of listeners was enough to surpass Taylor Swift, who finished second on the global ranking.

It’s the second year in a row that Bad Bunny, whose hits include “Mia” and “La Cancion,” has led all artists in Spotify streams.

Making the feat more impressive is that Bad Bunny didn’t come out with a new album in 2021, though he did release hit songs with “Volver” and “Yonaguni.”

The third through fifth most-streamed artists in the world this year were BTS, Drake and Justin Bieber, respectively.

Another top performer in 2021 was Olivia Rodrigo, whose hit “Drivers License” was the most-streamed song both globally and in the U.S. The song, which was the pop star’s debut single, garnered more than 1.1 billion streams this year.

Rodrigo’s “Good 4 U,” meanwhile, finished second on the U.S. list, and fourth globally. Both songs appeared on the 18-year-old Rodrigo’s debut album, “Sour,” which came out in May.
“Chief Chat” is a military-exclusive Facebook live program created to keep Soldiers, Airmen and military communities connected during this challenging time. The “Chief” in “Chief Chat” is the Exchange’s senior enlisted advisor, Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Osby.
‘tis the season

...for tax-free shopping & military exclusive pricing!

Fa-la-la-la-la...

Find holiday gifts, decor & stocking stuffers galore at shopmyexchange.com/ads

All honorably discharged Veterans are eligible to shop their military exchanges online, tax-free for life.

The Department of Defense expanded in-store military exchange and commissary shopping privileges as well as MWR resale facility use to all Veterans with service connected disabilities.

Learn more about veteran shopping benefits at ShopMyExchange.com/vets.

The Exchange is a Department of Defense Organization.
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Answer to Previous Puzzle

Cryptopiqup

12-4

D V N R H U L Q V H F U E N S X E ’ R
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Yesterday’s Cryptopiqup: WHEN ACTORS CRUISE AND HANKS WERE KIDS, WHAT COULD YOU HAVE OBVIOUSLY CALLED THEM? TOM BOYS.
Today’s Cryptopiqup Clue: S equals W
US must respond to Iranian attack on Al Tanf base

By Thomas Spoehr

The Heritage Foundation

An October 18 rocket attack by an unknown military group calling themselves the “Allies of Syria” launched five suicide drones at the only publicly acknowledged U.S. base in Syria, Al Tanf. This was a studied provocation. Thanks largely to a timely warning from Iranian militia forces and facilities near its border with Israel. It released a small target and then shot it with a projectile. It was a measured close, it maneuvered dangerously, it maneuvered threateningly so that there was a concern of collision, “he said. “So clearly, the Iranians were sending us a message.”

Building day-to-day deterrence is not easy nor for the faint of heart; it takes years of resolve. Israel has also learned that it doesn’t matter whether your adversary’s punch doesn’t land. Even if you manage — via luck or intervention — to avoid injury, the fact that your opponent tried to kill you should be treated the same as an attack that succeeds in causing casualties. Today, there is much talk in Washington about deterrence. Most of those discussions revolve around China and Taiwan. Up for debate are questions such as whether it is better to be explicit in our intent to help defend Taiwan — or whether China could be deterred by tools such as diplomatic levers or economic sanctions (hint: It won’t). Often overlooked is the fact that deterrence operates on multiple levels. There is the long-range, strategic deterrence that is connected to other state and its armed forces are not to be trifled with. When you make potential adversaries understand that if they attack an American position or troop, they will regret it, you effectively give deployed troops another layer of armor.

The U.S. has done this in the past. Just two days after an Iranian militia group killed two U.S. soldiers behind its border in Syria, a rocket attack in 2020, the Pentagon responded by killing five militia members and destroying enemy weapons facilities in Iraq. Message sent.

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Lemieux sticking with Penguins

Franchise icon says he’ll still be a force despite sale of team

By Mark Belko
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

F or nearly 40 years, Mario Lemieux has been the heart and soul of the Pittsburgh Penguins. And he’s vowing that won’t change even as Fenway Sports Group takes over the team.

In his first comments since news broke that FSG would be taking a controlling interest in the Penguins, Lemieux made it clear that he still will stay involved.

“As the Penguins enter a new chapter, I will continue to be as active and engaged with the team as I always have been and look forward to continuing to build on our success with our incoming partners at FSG,” Lemieux said in a statement Monday.

He added that FSG has “an organizational philosophy that mirrors the approach that worked so well” during the 22 years he and California billionaire Ron Burkle have owned the team.

FSG and the Penguins formally announced the transaction Monday after the Boston sports conglomerate signed a purchasing agreement to take control of the franchise.

Lemieux and Burkle, who won three Stanley Cup championships together as co-owners, “will remain part of the ownership group and will be closely aligned with FSG,” according to the statement. Both are expected to have minority stakes in the team.

Under the arrangement, FSG will be the general partner and have control over the team and Lemieux and Burkle will be limited partners. The exact stakes each will hold has not been divulged.

“The transaction still must be approved by the National Hockey League board of governors. That potentially could happen at its meeting next week. Closing is expected before the end of the year.”

According to the release, Lemieux, a Pittsburgh sports icon who guided the Penguins to two Stanley Cup championships as a player, “will continue his role guiding hockey operations for the organization.”

As expected, the team’s core management also will remain in place.

That includes CEO David Morehouse, chief operating officer Kevin Acklin, coach Mike Sullivan, general manager Ron Hextall and president of hockey operations Brian Burke.

The deal is valued at $900 million, according to a source close to the Penguins, setting the benchmark for NHL franchises.

It is far above the sale prices for the NHL’s other 29 franchises, which have been $450 million or less.”

As part of the deal, FSG also will gain control of PPG Paints Arena, which is owned by the Pittsburgh- Allegheny County Sports & Exhibition Authority (SEA), and the development rights to the 28-acre former Civic Arena site across the street in the lower Hill District.

In addition to the NHL, the SEA also must approve the transaction. That could happen this month as well.

“I think it’s good for the city. I think it’s good for the fans. The sooner we get it done and get it settled, it will be better for everyone,” said state Senator and SEA board chairman Wayne Fontana.

“Personally I will be thrilled to see the new ownership come in and take an additional perspective on how to be a winner, how to maintain a winning team, and how to make that development of the 28 acres even better. A new perspective would be great,” he added.

FSG, Morehouse said in a statement, “brings everything we could ask for in an ownership partner to help continue the historic success of the Pittsburgh Penguins.”

Lemieux and Burkle have co-owned the franchise since 1999, when they bought it in bankruptcy. Neither has drawn a salary since taking over the team.

FSG, valued at more than $7 billion, is the owner of the Boston Red Sox, Liverpool Football Club of the English Premier League, Roush Fenway Racing of NASCAR and 80% of the New England Sports Network.

“I will continue to be as active and engaged with the team as I always have been and look forward to continuing to build on our success.”

Mario Lemieux

Gene J. Puskar/AP

A statue of Lemieux, left, stands in front of the PPG Paints Arena. Fenway Sports Group, which purchased the Penguins this week, also will gain control of the arena.

Pittsburgh Penguins co-owners Mario Lemieux, right, and Ron Burkle ride in the Stanley Cup victory parade on June 14, 2017 in Pittsburgh. The Penguins were sold this week to Fenway Sports Group.

Gene J. Puskar/AP

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

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Wednesday’s games

N.Y. Rangers vs. Philadelphia 1

Minnesota vs. New Jersey 2

Detroit 3, Seattle 2

Anaheim vs. Philadelphia 4

Minnesota vs. St. Louis 5

Thursday’s games

Pittsburgh at Vancouver

Sunday’s games

San Jose at Columbus 1

N.Y. Rangers vs. Detroit 2

N.Y. Islanders vs. New Jersey 3

Chicago vs. Pittsburgh 4

Calgary vs. Los Angeles 5

Scoring leaders

Through Wednesday

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Western Conference

Scoreboard
**NBA**

Friday, December 3, 2021

**Milwaukee 14 8 .636 —**

Curry, GS 20 18 3 82 556 27.8

**Charlotte 13 11 .542 2**

**Utah 14 7 .667 —**

Gobert, UTA 21 61 244 305 14.5

**Golden State 18 3 .857 —**

Jokic, DEN 16 42 178 220 13.8

**Miami 13 9 .591 1**

Harden, BKN 21 196 9.3

**L.A. Lakers 12 11 .522 7**

**Indiana 9 1 5 .375 6**

**Atlanta 12 10 .545 2**

**Washington 14 8 .636 —**

**Memphis 11 10 .524 ½**

**Phoenix 18 3 .857 —**

Paul, PHO 21 213 10.1

**L.A. Clippers 11 11 .500 7½**

**Golden State 18 3 .857 —**

**Harden, BKN 21 196 9.3**

**L.A. Clippers 11 11 .500 7½**

**Minnesota 11 11 .500 3½**

**Portland 11 11 .500 3½**

**Denver 10 11 .476 4**

**New Orleans 6 1 8 .250 7**

**Sacramento 9 1 4 .391 10**

**Philadelphia 11 11 .500 4½**

**Houston 5 1 6 .238 6½**

**San Antonio 4 1 7 .333 8½**

**New Orleans at Houston**

**Washington at Toronto**

**Charlotte at Atlanta**

**ARIAND THE LEAGUE**

The defending champions are beginning to look the part again. It wasn’t long ago that the Milwaukee Bucks were languishing under .500, but after an eight-game winning streak, they’ve moved back toward the top of the Eastern Conference standings. Milwaukee’s run has been overshadowed a bit by Phoenix’s 17-game winning streak and Golden State’s 15-3 start to the season. Now, the Bucks — and their conference finals opponents, the Atlanta Hawks — are showing signs that they’ve shaken off their early struggles.

“At the start of this season, going through some trying times, I think we were all just happy it was at the beginning of the season,” guard Jrue Holiday said. “We know how this league goes, how the games go. It’s always ebbs and flows. We know that we can make a run at any time.”

The Bucks haven’t lost a game when Holiday, Giannis Antetokounmpo and Khris Middleton have all played. Holiday missed about two weeks early in the season with a sprained ankle, and when he returned, Milwaukee blew a 21-point lead in a Nov. 5 loss to the Knicks.

When Milwaukee faced Atlanta in a conference finals rematch Nov. 14, the Hawks were on a six-game losing streak and the Bucks entered the game at 6-7 on the season. Atlanta won by 20, start of a seven-game winning streak that pushed the Hawks back above .500. That run ended Saturday, but Milwaukee hasn’t lost since that blowout against Atlanta.

The Bucks’ streak began when Middleton returned from an eight-game COVID-related absence Nov. 17. Antetokounmpo scored 47 points in a win over the Los Angeles Lakers.

While the Warriors and Suns have opened up some distance on the rest of the West, the Bucks (14-8) are one of four teams within 1½ games of East-leading Brooklyn (15-6). There have been some surprises at the top of the conference. Chicago (14-8) and Washington (14-8) have had early success after significant offseason changes, and Charlotte (13-11) isn’t far behind.

That’s not how the top half of the conference was necessarily expected to look, but it took a little while for Milwaukee to hit its stride, and even after its recent winning streak, Atlanta (12-10) isn’t above the play-in zone. Philadelphia (11-11) has lost seven of its last 10.

It’s not a shock to see the Bucks look less than dominant from time to time. They finished with the seventh-best record in the league last season before winning the title as a No. 3 seed.

Recently, they’ve taken advantage of a fairly favorable schedule. The first five games of their winning streak were at home, where they faced the Lakers with LeBron James out, then Oklahoma City, Orlando twice and Detroit. Then they went on the road and beat Denver with Nikola Jokic out before winning at Indiana and at home against Charlotte.

To their credit, the Bucks’ recent victories haven’t been all that close. Before a two-point win over the Hornets on Wednesday, the previous four were by 31, 21, 18 and 18 points.

“I guess we know this league goes, how the games go. It’s always ebbs and flows.”

Bucks guard Jrue Holiday

On the team’s resurgence after a slow start

Maybe we just kind of wear ‘em down with Kris and Giannis, then Jrue comes down on them hopefully breaks the wall, breaks the dam,” coach Mike Budenholzer said. “We’re able to get some separation.”

Three of Milwaukee’s last five opponents have scored 100 points or fewer.

“Just the connectivity, guys working and covering for each other and scrambling,” Budenholzer said. “Jrue at the front of the defense and I think Bobby (Portis) is improving and giving us lots of little things and plays and effort. Guys are just consistent, trying to get stops.”

The highlight of the Bucks’ upcoming schedule may be a pair of meetings with Miami (13-8) in a span of five days — on Saturday night at Miami and then Dec. 8 at Miami. When the teams met Oct. 21, the Heat won 137-95 over a Milwaukee team that was missing Holiday, Portis and Brook Lopez. Antetokounmpo and Middleton played less than half that game with the score out of hand.
Rookie Mitchell turning into big find for Niners

By Josh Dubow

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Elijah Mitchell has been one of the NFL’s biggest surprises this season.

Whether it’s going from overlooked sixth-round project out of Louisiana-Lafayette into one of the league’s productive backs as a rookie, or his knack on nearly every run for the San Francisco 49ers to churn out a couple of extra yards, Mitchell exceeds expectations.

“He competes for every single yard,” coach Kyle Shanahan said. “One of the biggest things may be as a play-caller is when I see with my own eyes, that it’s going to be second-and-10 and I start to look down and think about what I’m calling next. Then people in the box tell me it’s second-and-6. I don’t totally believe him because I saw that he was going down and I don’t realize that he fell forward and got 4 yards. When it’s like that, which he does all the time now, you keep going, it helps you keep doing it.”

Mitchell has been consistently doing that all season as he is fourth in the NFL with 66.6 yards rushing per game and second among all backs with 3.84 yards per carry after the contact, according to Pro Football Focus.

Mitchell has helped spark a running game that has led the Niners (6-5) to get back into playoff position in the NFC as San Francisco has overcome the loss of starter Raheem Mostert in the season opener by finding a back who may not be quite as fast, but makes up for it with his power.

“Elijah hits the holes downhill, like Raheem does. He’s not going to run 23 mph, but that 5 yards in between where he gets the ball through the line of scrimmage, he’s just so explosive and so fast,” tight end George Kittle said. “I think guys think, ‘I’m going to get him with an arm tackle because he’s not the biggest back in the world.’ But he just runs through arm tackles.”

Mitchell was a bit of an afterthought when he was drafted in the sixth round after San Francisco had already traded up to take Trey Sermon in the third round to join a group that also included Mostert, Jeff Wilson Jr., Wayne Gallman and JdMycael Hasty.

But the Niners quickly realized in training camp that they might have found a gem in Mitchell and he has proven them right.

“There’s some stuff to his game that the more he plays, the more you realize that he’s a special young player and there’s a reason why he’s having productivity.”

Mike McDaniel, 49ers offensive coordinator on rookie running back Elijah Mitchell.

By Ralph D. Russo

Associated Press

DALLAS — The latest meeting on expanding the College Football Playoff wrapped up without a resolution Wednesday as the people involved agreed to keep talking.

CFP Executive Director Bill Hancock said there remains a strong consensus among the management committee, comprised of the 10 major college football conference commissioners and Notre Dame’s athletic director, to expand the four-team playoff field.

But how and when? A proposed 12-team model remains at the heart of the discussions and there is still hope it can be implemented for the 2024 season. Which conferences would be assured access to the field is still up for debate.

“I thought there was a chance we’d get to the end today,” Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bowlsby said. “We didn’t and there were good and appropriate reasons why we didn’t. There are people in the room that are differently situated and they therefore have different perspectives. And they were healthy discussions. I think we made good progress, but we aren’t done.”

The next scheduled meeting is January around the College Football Playoff championship game in Indianapolis, but it is possible the commissioners could meet sooner.

Mountain West Commissioner Craig Thompson said there are still some who would rather expand only to eight teams. Others are adamant eight won’t work.

“I was part of a group that brought forward a recommendation of six conference champions and six best remaining teams — or you can stay at four,” said South- eastern Conference Commissioner Greg Sankey, one of four members of the subcommittee that worked for two years on the 12-team model put forth nearly six months ago.

Where do things stand with that original proposal?

“Well, it’s certainly not been approved,” Sankey said. “Otherwise, we wouldn’t be having this conversation today.”

The seven-hour meeting at a hotel at the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport was the sixth in-person gathering of the management committee since the subcommittee’s proposal was unveiled in June.

In the morning, a room was prepared for the possibility that a news conference could be held to announce the commissioners had reached consensus on an expansion model. A podium was set up in front of a backdrop of College Football Playoff logos, facing about a half dozen chairs for reporters in attendance.

By early afternoon, that setup was being broken down.

Instead of making big news, a short statement from Hancock was released at the conclusion of the meeting. Thompson, Bowlsby and Sankey then took turns informally speaking with reporters outside the meeting room on their way to the elevators.

Big Ten Commissioner Kevin Warren, Atlantic Coast Conference Commissioner Jim Phillips and Pac-12 Commissioner George Kliavkoff did not speak with reporters.

Those commissioners, all relatively new to playoff talks, were skeptical of the process from the start and became even more leery of how quickly it was moving toward 12 teams after it was revealed the SEC would be adding Oklahoma and Texas to the league in the next few years.

They pushed to revisit the possi- bility of expansion to only eight teams, though the obstacles to getting agreement on that were plentiful.

Playoff expansion talks inch forward
Defenses clash for Big 12 title

Associated Press

Oklahoma State linebacker Devin Harper tackles Oklahoma wide receiver Jaden Haselwood, left, in Stillwater, Okla., on Nov. 27. The Cowboys rank third nationally in total defense.

No. 9 Baylor (10-2, 7-2 Big 12) vs. No. 5 Oklahoma St. (11-1, 8-1)

AFN-Sports
6 p.m. Saturday CET
2 a.m. Sunday JKT

You don’t just see like a ton of weaknesses on tape,” then-Sooners coach Lincoln Riley said as his team prepared for Oklahoma State last week. “Like, they don’t have an area where you just point to and say, ‘That’s just killing them.’ They’ve got good, good playmakers at all levels.”

So does the Bears, who ranks 17th nationally in scoring defense, 19th in rushing defense and 12th in third-down conversion defense.

Baylor’s Jalen Pitre plays the STAR position, a hybrid of linebacker, safety and cornerback. He leads the Big 12 with 15.5 tackles for loss and three fumbles recovered. He also has forced three fumbles.

He was thrilled when coach Dave Aranda and defensive coordinator Ron Roberts presented the option of moving him from linebacker to a role that better highlights his versatility.

“I understood what the position entailed and what it demanded, and the different things that the position held,” Pitre said. “And so I’m thankful that they moved me to the position and it has been a great ride. He lets me, you know, be free. Lets me do a lot of things inside the defense.”

Linebacker Terrel Bernard averages 6.9 tackles per game, though he was out with a knee injury when Oklahoma State beat Baylor 24-14 in the regular season.

“I think Terrel is one of those guys that when he’s just in the huddle and he’s in, it’s just an added confidence that comes with him,” Aranda said. “Because of his maturity and his resilience and his preparation, you just feel like he’s a coach on the field.”

Big 12 title games have averaged just over 56 points the past four years, but the over/under this year is 46.5, according to FanDuel Sportsbook — a clear nod to those defenses.

Formidable: Alabama’s offense not at full strength for SEC championship

FROM PAGE 48

of the season and second of the game.

But Alabama still ranks seventh in passing and total offense, averaging 341.8 yards per game through the air and 491.2 overall.

Young has passed for 3,901 yards and 40 touchdowns against just four interceptions. He’s completing 66.9% of his passes.

“It’s like he’s composed at all times and has great presence in the pocket, great distributor of the ball,” Georgia coach Kirby Smart said. “Knows where all his outlets are. Can draw the defense to him and dish the ball, much like a point guard.”

Young said. “Knows where all his outlets are. Can draw the defense to him and dish the ball, much like a point guard.”

Knowles said after the team surrendered just 143 yards in a 55-3 win over Kansas earlier this sea son. “Not quite the words I used. But they hung in and they believed. And I just think now, you’re seeing the fruits of that.”

Oklahoma State super senior linebacker Malcolm Rodriguez ranks second in the Big 12 with 8.9 tackles per game and sixth with 13.5 tackles for loss. Defensive end Brock Martin has 10.5 tackles for loss and linebacker Devin Harper and defensive end Tyler Lacy each have 10.0. Safety Kolby Harvard has three interceptions.

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Source: Notre Dame set to promote coordinator Freeman to head coach

Associated Press

Notre Dame is working on a deal to promote defensive coordinator Marcus Freeman to head coach to replace Brian Kelly, a person with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press on Wednesday night.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because nothing had been finalized, though the first piece of the Fighting Irish’s plan to regroup after Kelly left for LSU earlier this week had already fall en into place.

Offensive coordinator Tommy Rees informed Notre Dame he would remain with the Fighting Irish instead of joining Kelly in Baton Rouge, La. The Irish released a video on Twitter of Rees telling the team he was staying put.

Notre Dame athletic director Jack Swarbrick, who was scheduled to attend a CFP expansion meeting in Dallas, instead spent

Wednesday in South Bend, Ind., meeting with Rees and Freeman.

The 29-year-old Rees, a former Fighting Irish quarterback, returned to the team as quarterback coach in 2017 and was promoted to offensive coordinator in 2020.

Freeman, 35, joined Kelly’s staff this year after being hired away from Cincinnati. Landing Freeman, who was also being pursued by LSU last offseason, was considered a major victory for Kelly and Notre Dame.

Freeman, a former Ohio State linebacker, is considered a rising star in college coaching and in his time with the Irish he has played a major role in assembling a recruiting class that’s ranked No. 5 in the country by 247 Sports two weeks before signing day.
Pitt, Wake well-armed in battle for ACC title

By Will Graves
Associated Press
PITTSBURGH — Kenny Pickett didn’t get specific. He didn’t need to. The goal the Pittsburgh quarterback set for himself when he made the surprising decision to return in 2021 rather than enter the NFL Draft covered all the bases.

“I want to be the best,” said Pickett, who was named the ACC’s Most Valuable Player on Wednesday. “That’s always been my goal since I was young. And it’s something that, you know, you continue to work for.”

A goal that’s come tantalizingly close for Pickett over the last three months. All he’s done since September is rewrite a majority of the school’s record book — surpassing the likes of Hall of Famer Dan Marino in the process — while leading the 17th-ranked Panthers (10-2) to their second appearance in the ACC title game and mounting a Heisman Trophy campaign that’s morphed from unlikely to dark horse to legit.

Yet he won’t be the only quarterback on the field Saturday night in Charlotte, N.C., whose name is on the Heisman ballot. Like Pickett, Wake Forest redshirt sophomore Sam Hartman has put together a season few saw coming. Like Pickett, he’s turned the Demon Deacons’ record book into his own personal dry-erase board. Like Pickett, he’s done it while leading No. 18 Wake Forest (10-2) to a division title and a chance at a conference championship.

“I think (Pickett) and Sam are very similar,” Demon Deacons coach Dave Clawson said. “That’s your first- and second-team all-ACC quarterbacks. You have two guys that are competitors, that play with courage, that make plays with their feet and have great arm strength and can make every throw.”

Pickett and Hartman connected during visits to the offseason passing camp run by Hall of Famer Peyton Manning. Maybe it’s not a coincidence that both players — and their teams — took a massive leap forward in 2021. Pickett ranks fifth in the country in yards passing (4,077) while Hartman is ninth (3,711).

Pickett’s 40 touchdown passes are second in the nation, just a few spots ahead of Hartman’s 34. Hartman has run for 10 touchdowns while Pickett has managed four on the ground, a dip from previous years, partly out of a conscious effort by Pickett to avoid unnecessary hits and partly because he’s got so many weapons around him that he no longer needs to make something out of nothing with his feet.

Above: Wake Forest quarterback Sam Hartman has passed for 34 touchdowns and run for 10. Left: Pittsburgh quarterback Kenny Pickett has broken many of Dan Marino’s records and has thrown 40 touchdown passes and run for four this season.
Teams spend big, then MLB locks out players

NEW YORK — Before getting locked out, players loaded up Wednesday as big league teams unlocked their coffers for an unprecedented spending spree.

Major League Baseball clubs committed to a one-day record $1.4 billion in salaries Wednesday, hours before the league locked out players following the 11:59 p.m. expiration of the sport’s collective bargaining agreement.

Six nine-figure contracts were handed out, including two by the Texas Rangers — shortstop Corey Seager got $325 million over 10 years and infielder Marcus Semien will make $175 million over seven years.

The Detroit Tigers got infielder Javier Báez for a $140 million, six-year deal, ace Max Scherzer was assured $130 million over five years. Twins center fielder Byron Buxton also finalized a $100 million, seven-year contract to remain with Minnesota.

“This is actually kind of fun,” Scherzer said. “I’m a fan of the game, and to watch everybody sign right now, to actually see teams competing in this kind of timely fashion, it’s been refreshing because we’ve seen freezes for the past several off-seasons.”

The 27 deals announced Wednesday totaled $1,423,250,000, part of roughly $2 billion in new contracts handed out since the end of the World Series ahead of the CBA expiration.

“Things were talking early and had some interest in what we were asking for,” Semien, a free agent for the second straight year, said. “It became easier to narrow a decision down. What it came down to was an opportunity to build something.”

The union and league are likely headed for a protracted labor dispute after the average major league salary fell on opening day in 2021 for the fourth consecutive season.

Players and teams alike may have feared the chaos of a limited free-agency window in the spring if the lockout goes that long. That spurred agents, general managers and owners to act before rosters froze.

“It was 50-50,” Báez said. “We didn’t know what was going to happen when the deadline comes. I was just making sure I wanted to be with one of the best teams.”

Teams won’t be able to communicate with their players during the shutdown.

“We were talking about that yesterday. It’s funny how you sign it and the next day you’re shut out,” Seager said. “They’ve been upfront with me. I know what to expect from them. They know what to expect from me. They know I’m going to come prepared. They know I want to be prepared.”

Plenty of big names remain on the board, though. Star shortstop Carlos Correa, first baseman Freddie Freeman, third baseman Kris Bryant, shortstop Trevor Story and outfielder Nick Castellanos are still free agents and might have to wait until spring or later to find a home.

Right-hander Nick Martinez was close to an agreement with the San Diego Padres but didn’t get it completed before the owners locked out players, according to a person with knowledge of the talks.
The going only gets tougher for Alabama’s normally explosive offense. While the Crimson Tide were held out of the end zone for the first 59 minutes and 36 seconds by Auburn, now they face the nation’s top defense. Heisman Trophy front-runner Bryce Young and the fourth-ranked Crimson Tide are gearing up to square off against No. 1 Georgia on Saturday in the Southeastern Conference championship game. Making matters more challenging, Alabama tailback Brian Robinson Jr. is nursing a left leg injury and his status is uncertain for the game. If he can’t play, that leaves Trey Sanders as the Tide’s only healthy scholarship running back against a defense allowing a nation’s best 6.9 points and 229.7 total yards per game. The Bulldogs’ formidable front seven, led by defensive lineman Jordan Davis and linebacker Nakobe Dean, is also a huge challenge for an Alabama offensive line that has struggled at times.

“What really motivates us is to make sure we come with our ‘A’ game,” Crimson Tide left tackle Evan Neal said. “We’re all competitors, man. It’s what it’s all about. You’re the best? Okay, let’s line up and go out there and play. That’s what it’s all about.” Alabama didn’t come with its best for that Auburn game, even if the Tide ultimately turned a 10-0 fourth-quarter deficit into a 24-22 quadruple-overtime victory. Alabama mustered just 68 yards on 30 first-half plays and allowed seven sacks in the game. Young led the Crimson Tide to 217 fourth-quarter yards, including a 97-yard drive over the final 95 seconds. The finishing flourish rescued the team’s playoff hopes and vaulted Young back to leading Heisman candidate status, according to FanDuel Sportsbook. Leading receiver Jameson Williams also missed most of the game after a first-half targeting penalty in punt return coverage. The winning touchdown pass with 24 seconds left went to freshman Ja’Corey Brooks, just his fourth catch.