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WEEKEND
EDITION

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a late bloomer
for Black Knights
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VIRUS OUTBREAK



AMANDA GERLACH/U.S. Army

Spc. Selena M. Castillo prepares to administer a flu vaccination at Fort Sill, Okla., in 2019.

Bases chosen for troops to receive 1st vaccinations

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Military health care workers in South Korea, Germany and Okinawa will be among the first in the Defense Department who can choose to receive the new coronavirus vaccines once they are approved, defense officials said Wednesday.

"The department is strongly encouraging everyone to take it," Army Lt. Gen. Ronald Place, director of the Defense Health Agency, said during a briefing at the Pentagon.

The Defense Department on Wednesday announced its plan for distributing the allocation of coronavirus vaccines. The department is one of five agencies to be allocated its own supply of the vaccines, along with the Department

SEE BASES ON PAGE 6

RELATED

Report: 1st active-duty soldier dies from coronavirus

Page 6



ROSE L. THAYER/Stars and Stripes

A soldier assigned to Fort Hood, Texas, spoke Tuesday to base leadership about the difficulty that she faced in reporting a sexual assault, including that she was forced to live in the same barracks as her perpetrator.

'It impacts my daily life'

Fort Hood soldiers react to failings of base leaders uncovered in Army report

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

FORT HOOD, Texas — Standing in parade rest, an Army specialist on Tuesday told Lt. Gen. Pat White, commander of the central Texas base, about being raped there by a fellow soldier in her unit, and then having to live in the same barracks building with him.

Behind her, nearly 2,000 other soldiers sat silent in the blue bleachers of Hood Stadium as she described her failed attempts to receive therapy and her constant fear of seeing her perpetrator.

"He was partying with people right there

■ Leadership issues outlined in report could go beyond Texas installation
Page 4

next to my room. I was scared, but I couldn't do anything about that," said the soldier, who is not being identified because she was the victim of an assault.

Eventually, she was able to speak to a major who helped her living situation, but she told White that it shouldn't require such efforts

from a victim of sexual assault.

Her chain of command did not know what to do "because they are not getting the proper training," she said. "We need people who care and not just take it with a grain of salt. It's not a joke. It really messes people's lives up."

The soldier was one of two women who chose to share emotional stories of sexual assault Tuesday at the stadium gathering with White, who hosted the discussion following the release of an Army report that found Fort Hood has created an environment permissive of sex-

SEE HOOD ON PAGE 4

BUSINESS/WEATHER

EUROPE GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Germany	\$2.431	\$2.842	\$3.095	\$2.801	Azores	..	..	\$2.894	..
Change in price	+3.6 cents	+2.7 cents	+2.8 cents	+2.4 cents	Change in price	..	..	+4.2 cents	..
Netherlands	..	\$3.348	\$3.578	\$3.454	Belgium	..	\$2.377	\$2.621	\$2.423
Change in price	..	+8.6 cents	+9.8 cents	+12.4 cents	Change in price	..	No change	No change	No change
U.K.	..	\$2.741	\$2.994	\$2.700	Turkey	..	..	\$2.995	\$3.359*
Change in price	..	+2.7 cents	+2.8 cents	+2.4 cents	Change in price	..	..	+2.8 cents	+0.5 cents

PACIFIC GAS PRICES									
Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel					
Japan	..	\$2.889	..	\$2.589	South Korea	\$2.239	..	\$2.899	\$2.609
Change in price	..	+3.0 cents	..	+2.0 cents	Change in price	+4.0 cents	..	+3.0 cents	+3.0 cents
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EXCHANGE RATES		
Military rates		
Euro costs (Dec. 11)	\$1.18	
Dollar buys (Dec. 11)	0.8046	
British pound (Dec. 11)	\$1.31	
Japanese yen (Dec. 11)	102.00	
South Korean won (Dec. 11)	1059.00	
So. Korea (Won)		1088.14
Switzerland (Franc)		.8855
Thailand (Baht)		30.03
Turkey (NewLira)		7.8686
(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 nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with 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.)		
Commercial rates		
Bahrain(Dinar)	.3770	
Britain (Pound)	.7513	
Canada (Dollar)	1.2717	
China(Yuan)	6.5432	
Denmark (Krone)	6.1244	
Egypt (Pound)	15.7113	
Euro	.8229	
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7515	
Hungary (Forint)	292.65	
Israel (Shekel)	3.2507	
Japan (Yen)	104.26	
Kuwait(Dinar)	.3051	
Norway (Krone)	8.7745	
Philippines (Peso)	48.05	
Poland (Zloty)	3.64	
Saudi Arab (Riyal)	3.7513	
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3348	
INTEREST RATES		
Prime rate		3.25
Interest Rates Discount rate		0.75
Federal funds market rate		0.09
3-month bill		0.08
30-year bond		1.69

WEATHER OUTLOOK



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MILITARY

Biden: Austin is 'right person' for Pentagon

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President-elect Joe Biden implored Congress on Wednesday to grant his defense secretary nominee, retired Army Gen. Lloyd Austin, a rare waiver to allow him to lead the Pentagon.

"There are good reasons for this law that I fully understand and respect," Biden said Wednesday in a brief speech to introduce Austin to the public as his nominee. "I would not be asking for an exception here if I did not believe this moment in our history didn't call for it — it does call for it — and if I didn't have the faith I do have in Lloyd Austin."

Austin would require an exception to a long-standing law that requires career military officers to spend seven years out of uniform before serving in the Pentagon's senior-most civilian position, in an effort to ensure the military remains under civilian control. The waiver must be approved by votes in the House and Senate.

Some lawmakers expressed mixed responses this week to Austin's nomination. The general is well respected in Congress, several of them have said, but some others are uncomfortable with the idea of granting the waiver — especially because it would mark the second such exception for a recently retired general in just four



JOE GROMELSKI/Stars and Stripes

Then-Gen. Lloyd Austin, attends a Senate Armed Services Committee budget hearing in Washington in March 2015.

years. A waiver of the 1947 law had only been passed one other time, in 1950.

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., an Iraq war veteran and member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said Wednesday that she would vote against the waiver, though she believed Congress would pass it. However, she added she would "support" Austin, if the waiver does pass.

"I believe very strongly there needs to be civilian oversight of the military," Duckworth said on MSNBC. "And ... I just can't support that on principal. I will tell you, though, that Gen. Austin is an excellent officer, well-tested, very capable of leading the Department of Defense. I think he would be an excellent secretary of de-

fense."

Duckworth was among 17 Democratic senators to vote against a waiver in 2017 for Jim Mattis, the former Marine general who became President Donald Trump's first defense secretary. Duckworth, and 15 of the 16 others who voted against the waiver, later voted to confirm Mattis.

Biden on Wednesday talked of his long relationship with Austin, especially their close work together when, as vice president, Biden was former President Barack Obama's point person for Iraq. At the time, Austin was the top American general there. Biden said Austin had not sought the position, but the president-elect reached out to him because he was "the right person" for the job.

"His many strengths and his intimate knowledge of the Department of Defense and of our government are uniquely suited to the challenges and crises we face," Biden said. "He is the person we need in this moment. And, given the urgent threats and challenges our nation faces, he should be confirmed swiftly."

Austin, 67, retired from the Army in 2016 after leading U.S. Central Command for about three years. The 41-year veteran and graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., has extensive combat experience, leading troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

He has a history of breaking barriers. Austin was the first Black Army general to command a division and a corps in combat. He was the first Black commander of a combat theater, the first Black Army vice chief of staff and the first to command U.S. Central Command.

If confirmed, Austin would become the 28th secretary of defense, and the first Black Pentagon leader.

Biden said a nonwhite Defense Department leader was long overdue. "At a time when more than 40% of our active-duty forces are people of color, it's past time the Department [of Defense] had leadership that reflects that diversity," he said.

Austin, who is known to avoid speaking publicly, vowed to follow the U.S. mantra of a civilian-led military, if confirmed.

"When I concluded my military service four years ago, I hung up my uniform for the last time and went from being Gen. Lloyd Austin to Lloyd Austin," he said. "It's an important distinction, and one that I make with utmost seriousness and sincerity."

He said his vast uniformed experience would serve him well in the position, but he would seek regular insight from advisers who have spent more time in the civilian world.

"I come to this role now as a civilian leader — with military experience to be sure — but also with a deep appreciation and reverence for the prevailing wisdom of civilian control of our military," Austin said. "I recognize that being a member of the president's Cabinet requires a different perspective and unique responsibilities from a career in uniform. I intend to keep this at the forefront of my mind, and I look forward to surrounding myself with experienced, capable civilian appointees and career civil servants who will enable healthy civil-military relations grounded in meaningful civilian oversight."

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Airmen, Marines to have quarantine leave days restored

BY ERICA EARL

Stars and Stripes

Airmen who were charged for leave while on mandatory coronavirus quarantine may have those days restored, Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force JoAnne Bass said Monday.

The Marine Corps will also reimburse that time, Maj. Kenneth Kunze, a spokesperson for the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, wrote in an email to Stars and Stripes on Wednesday.

Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, service members who traveled for either mission-essential or personal reasons were sometimes required to isolate 14 days as a safety precaution.

Headquarters Air Force posted an order Monday that the two weeks spent on mandatory quarantine would not count against leave days, according to Bass' post, even if that travel was not mission essential. This waiver decision was backdated to Nov. 20.

"Sharing this win in case you hadn't gotten word yet," Bass said in her Facebook post Monday.

Airmen will be able to recoup all leave days charged for any time in quarantine on or after Aug. 6.

Marines do not have a cut-off



U.S. Air Force

Airmen arrive in quarantine at Osan Air Base, South Korea, in March.

date for recovering leave, Kunze said.

Service members in either branch wishing to have quaran-

tine leave days restored will need to work with their squadron or unit commander to get a memo drafted.

For airmen to reclaim leave days charged amid the pandemic, Bass said, the memo needs to include the member's rank, original

leave number, original leave dates and the dates of quarantine. This information should be turned in to the service member's local financial management flight.

Spokespeople for the Army and the Marines on Wednesday told Stars and Stripes via email and phone calls that quarantine after travel for any reason, including holiday travel, will not be charged as leave.

The Army did not respond to inquiries about how their reimbursement policies would work, but Kevin Krejcarek, a spokesperson for U.S. Army Japan, said no soldiers under the command have requested reimbursement for leave charged during quarantine.

The conversation around charging leave for quarantine after personal travel began buzzing in October, when Chief Master Sgt. Rick Winegardner of U.S. Forces Japan raised the issue during a question-and-answer session with American Forces Network Radio. Winegardner at the time said USFJ and Indo-Pacific Command were working to simplify the leave policy in time for the holidays.

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MILITARY

Leadership failures could go past Fort Hood

By ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — A committee of civilians that examined the command climate and culture of Fort Hood told House lawmakers Wednesday that it found years of systemic leadership failures contributed to the death of soldiers and could exist at other Army bases.

“A toxic culture was allowed to harden and set,” said Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif. “Your comments suggest that this has gone on since 2014 or maybe before. So how do we address those leaders who went on to other installations and bases and commands, but were part of the problem?”

Chris Swecker, the lead member of the committee who compiled the report, said many of the recommendations to improve conditions at Fort Hood should be implemented across the Army. However, he said the group’s mandate was to look specifically at Fort Hood, which is an outlier in the Army in some areas including suicide, missing soldiers, sexual assault and drug use.

“We didn’t have the mandate to go outside of Fort Hood and do a deep dive,” he said.

The report — written by the five members of the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee — was released Tuesday and discussed Wednesday in a hearing of the House Armed Services Committee’s subpanel on military per-

sonnel.

The report details the ways that leaders at the central Texas Army base maintained a heavy operational tempo while ignoring the signs that created a permissive environment for sexual assault and neglected to offer the appropriate resources to victims. The report also documents how the problems date back to at least 2014.

“Despite red flags popping up for years, leaders ignored them,” said Speier, chairwoman of the subpanel who presided over the more than two-hour hearing that moved between large overviews of programs to specific details of sexual assault cases and deaths involving individual soldiers.

The nearly 140-page report offered a troubling look inside Fort Hood, which lead the House lawmakers to question whether the problem stretched beyond that one base.

“This issue affects not only Fort Hood, but overall our national security. The service members who participated in a culture of sexual harassment at Fort Hood will not just stay at Fort Hood. They’ll continue to be stationed at bases across the country and around the world and take that culture with them,” said Rep. Deb Haaland, D-N.M.

The report also found the base lacked procedures to properly identify when a missing soldier could be in danger and had an un-



ROSE L. THAYER/Stars and Stripes

A soldier takes notes Tuesday as Lt. Gen. Pat White and Command Sgt. Maj. Cliff Burgoyne Jr., commander and senior noncommissioned officer of III Corps and Fort Hood, addressed about 2,000 soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas.

der-experienced and under-resourced criminal investigation office that often failed to appropriately investigate sex crimes and deaths, including suicides.

Nearly 30 soldiers assigned to Fort Hood have died this year, with five of those deaths being ruled as homicides. During a visit to Fort Hood in August, Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy said the base had the highest numbers of the Army formation when it can to violent crimes.

McCarthy appointed the civilian review committee to help un-

derstand the root causes of the violence, particularly because of the national media attention surrounding the disappearance and death of Spc. Vanessa Guillen. The 20-year-old Fort Hood soldier went missing on April 22 while working in an arms room on base. Her remains were found June 30 alongside a river about 30 miles from the base.

Spc. Aaron Robinson, another soldier in Guillen’s unit, killed her with a hammer, then moved her body. He shot himself dead July 1 when approached by civilian law enforcement in Killeen, the town just outside Fort Hood.

Swecker, who testified before the House subpanel alongside fellow committee members Jonathan Harmon, Carrie Ricci, Queta Rodriguez and Jack White, said Wednesday that the group sought to determine whether Fort Hood was operating within the Army’s values. He told lawmakers that the base’s high operational tempo caused by nearly 20 years of war led commanders to focus solely on readiness for deployment.

“In their peripheral vision, they didn’t see this, and it was an act of omission versus an act of commission,” Swecker said.

Commanders repeatedly ignored command climate surveys, which are meant to provide a soldiers’ view of the unit to leaders. Those surveys revealed the deep problems, he said.

“We felt like that was a very val-

uable source of information,” Swecker said. “They did show some pretty dismal results, particularly with the larger units on the base. What we determined was that these climate surveys were not being used the way they should have been used.”

The findings of the report caused McCarthy to fire or suspend 14 leaders serving at Fort Hood, including a pair of two-star generals. He also agreed to all of the report’s nine findings and 70 recommendations.

“Are these firings sufficient to fix the issues at the base that have long proceeded this summer? Are we to believe that these 14 individuals alone created and maintained such a dangerous atmosphere at the base and now that it is safe to say that people are safe after this action?” Haaland asked.

“The answer is no,” Harmon said. “It’s going to take a lot more work, a lot more oversight. I think as everybody recognizes, changing culture is hard. And it doesn’t come from just firing 14 people. And our report, I think, was very clear that the problems at Fort Hood were not the result of one commander, they were not the result of one administration.”

Prior to the congressional hearing, Swecker said he briefed all 300 of the three- and four-star generals in the Army.

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Hood: Soldiers react to findings from monthslong investigation at base

FROM PAGE 1

ual assault.

“I think once you have an opportunity to read the report, which is required reading for every soldier in [III Corps], you’ll see some extremely similar comments about our program,” said White, who is the commander of Fort Hood and III Corps. “The courage you showed to get up in front of everybody to talk about a situation that you still live in today is a thread that’s in this report that’s coming out. We have a problem here that can be solved by all of you and I’m going to help as much as I can.”

The report was the result of a three-month investigation into the command climate and culture at Fort Hood and it stated soldiers, particularly young women serving in the lower ranks, do not have confidence in the Army’s Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention program, known as SHARP, which has led to underreporting. For soldiers who do report, the investigation found they face a drawn-out process and investigators who are under-experienced, over-assigned and un-

der-resourced.

Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy appointed five civilians to conduct the investigation as part of the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee following public outcry about the number of violent crimes, deaths and sexual assaults and harassment at the base.

Spc. Vanessa Guillen’s death was one of five at the base to be ruled a homicide and brought national attention to the issue. Guillen, a 20-year-old small arms repairer, was killed April 22 by a fellow soldier in an arms room on base during the work day.

McCarthy said the findings in the report were a direct result of the failures of leadership and 14 leaders at Fort Hood were relieved or suspended, including the command team at the helm of Guillen’s unit, the 3rd Cavalry Regiment.

Pfc. Saricia Wright arrived at Fort Hood three months ago and works in the same regiment doing the same job as Guillen. She said it’s difficult to hear others describe the regiment by its failings and was nervous about the assignment.

“Before we got here, I can remember my drill sergeants were concerned for us as females coming here and they also said be safe. They were scared for us coming here,” Wright said Tuesday following the stadium discussion. “They told us to watch out for each other. Always have each other’s back.”

Spc. Manuel Viveros, also of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment, said it’s difficult to hear a discussion of the issues long known to soldiers in his unit, particularly because it took several deaths and media attention for leaders to take notice. Soldiers ranked private through specialist make up about half of the 37,500 soldiers assigned to Fort Hood, but they often feel like an afterthought, he said.

“It took [death] to realize that and take the initiative to move forward and try to resolve something and have something come out of it,” Viveros said.

White specifically asked for a gathering of those lower enlisted soldiers to join him at the stadium and took the opportunity to address the report directly. He asked the soldiers to pull out their

phones and share his remarks on social media so his message could travel farther.

He said he’s already directed the base’s SHARP program receives further support. It is now overseen by a sergeant first class and a civilian. He directed a master sergeant and lieutenant colonel come into the program to get it back on track.

White then took questions and comments from the crowd, which ranged from asking about living conditions in the barracks to promotion criteria to requesting more morale-focused activities to build camaraderie between soldiers.

Many of the soldiers who attended White’s outdoor briefing came straight from their jobs and had not heard the news that leaders had been fired, nor had they seen the report.

Spc. Alyssa Halcomb said she had been following the committee closely and was eager to read all 140 pages of the Fort Hood report.

“I’m stationed here. It’s my home. It’s my job. It impacts my daily life,” she said. “Also, it’s because I am interested in the news. I try and pay attention to current

events. I’m also an intelligence analyst and one of the things we learned in the schoolhouse is you’ve got to watch the news.”

Halcomb said she been assigned for the past year to the 1st Cavalry Division, a unit with leaders also impacted by the report. Maj. Gen. Jeff Broadwater and Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Kenny, the division’s commander and top noncommissioned officer, were suspended Tuesday, pending a new Army-directed investigation into the division’s command climate and culture. “I like to know that they are working on making changes. This has been encouraging for me. They want to improve the way things are for soldiers here,” she said.

She would like to see more of these honest conversations with top commanders, Halcomb said.

“Yes, the chain of command is there, and people do use it. But when there’s question about the chain of command, something like this gives them the opportunity where they can feel brave enough to come forward because they’ve got all their peers right there,” she said.

MILITARY

Accident deaths in Army fall in 2020, likely due to virus

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The Army recorded its fewest accidental deaths on record in 2020, as coronavirus restrictions kept more soldiers off the road and hunkered down at home.

There were 96 soldiers and Army civilians recorded as “mishap fatalities” for the fiscal year, less than the previous low of 109 accidental deaths in 2016, the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center’s annual safety report found. Of the 96 deaths, 25 happened on duty.

The reduction was likely because of restrictions and possibly curtailed training activities brought on by the pandemic, the report said.

“(W)e can look at trends from past years, especially with private motor vehicles, and be reasonably confident stop-movement orders and restricted travel had a posi-

tive net effect on mishaps in 2020,” Brig. Gen. Andrew C. Hilmes, USACRC commanding general and director of Army Safety, said in a statement.

There were 18 accidental deaths for soldiers involved in ground duty, down from 24 in the previous year. Vehicle rollovers were responsible for eight of the deaths, the Army said.

While Army aviators recorded fewer Class A accidents for the year — six compared to 12 in 2019 — there were more deaths in 2020. Class A accidents typically involve crashes of more than \$2 million in losses, which also result in at least one death.

Seven soldiers died in the crashes compared to two in the previous year, the Army reported. Four of the six Class A mishaps involved Black Hawk helicopters. The other two accidents involved an



U.S. Army

The U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center this week reported 96 soldier and Army civilian accidental deaths for fiscal year 2020, making it the safest year on record, besting the previous low of 109 accidental deaths in 2016.

MC-12 and an AH-64.

Despite coronavirus restrictions, the Army’s manned aviation force completed 90% of planned flying hours, the Army said.

“That fewer mishaps were actually deadlier is a tragic reminder of the inherent danger in flight operations,” Hilmes said. “We can lose entire crews in a single crash.”

Accidents cost the Army more than \$1 billion in losses, the ser-

vice said.

Meanwhile, off-duty accidental deaths dropped from 91 last year to 71 in 2020. The Army said the decline was likely caused by fewer soldiers traveling for leisure in connection with pandemic restrictions. Fifty-three of the 71 deaths were the result of motor vehicle accidents.

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Virginia sailor pleads guilty to giving info to Russians

Associated Press

PORTSMOUTH, Va. — A Navy sailor stationed in Virginia pleaded guilty Tuesday to giving a Russian national classified information. Chief Petty Officer Charles T. Briggs also pleaded guilty to making false official statements three times, The Virginian-Pilot reported.

Briggs’ rank was reduced to E-4 and he was sentenced to 18 months, as well as an additional 13 months for the second conviction. The sentences will be served consecutively.

Briggs was accused of acquiring classified information while he was stationed at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska from 2018 to early 2019. Navy officials said he later passed that information on to a Russian national knowing it would be harmful to the United States.

Briggs was also accused of lying about his connections to the Russian national and an Italian citizen. Officials said he also lied about a trip he made to Serbia.



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VIRUS OUTBREAK

US soldier dies of COVID, Germans say

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
AND MARCUS KLOECKNER
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — A 43-year-old U.S. soldier with the coronavirus died on the way to a U.S. military hospital despite a roadside rescue attempt by emergency personnel, German police said Thursday.

The man, who has not been identified, would be the first known active-duty soldier to die from the virus, and 14th uniformed service member among all Defense Department services, the Reserve and the National Guard.

The Army in Europe confirmed Thursday that the soldier's death was not service- or training-related, but did not comment further on the cause of his death.

The soldier had trouble breathing and collapsed in the passenger seat at about noon while his wife, also an American, was driving him to the hospital, Bernhard Christian Erfort, a spokesman for the Westpfalz police, said in a statement Wednesday.

German first responders were initially on the scene in Oberstaufenbach, a village between Baumholder and Kaiserslautern, Erfort

said. They revived the soldier with aid from his wife until further medical help arrived, Erfort said.

A helicopter landed in the street to airlift the man to the hospital, and firefighters and U.S. military police came to assist as well, but the man died at the scene, Erfort said.

When asked for details, U.S. Army Europe and Africa would only confirm that a soldier assigned to the 44th Expeditionary Signal Battalion of the 2nd Theater Signal Brigade in Baumholder died Wednesday.

"Our heartfelt and deepest sym-

pathies go out to the Soldier's family at this difficult time," the command said in a statement.

Erfort said the man and his wife both had coronavirus and had been under quarantine for a week.

USAREUR-AF did not comment on whether the soldier had been in quarantine.

German news organization SWR reported that the rescue operation involved emergency personnel in protective suits. Erfort said the two first responders on scene did not wear protective gear.

The Pentagon's coronavirus

website reported Wednesday that 13 service members had died from the coronavirus, among 87,488 total infections.

Including dependents and contractors, the Defense Department has recorded 131,894 coronavirus cases and 143 deaths.

Germany is struggling to contain a second wave of coronavirus infections and the government is considering imposing further restrictions during the holidays.

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A sign reminds patrons to wear masks and practice social distancing at a shop in central Tokyo, on Nov. 17. AKIFUMI ISHIKAWA/Stars and Stripes

Tokyo's daily count tops 600

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Japan's capital city recorded more than 600 new cases of the coronavirus Thursday, the most confirmed there in one day during the pandemic thus far.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government said 602 people tested positive, exceeding the previous high mark, 584, set Saturday, according to public broadcaster NHK and metro government data.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military in Japan and South Korea announced 14 new cases as of 6 p.m. Thursday, 10 of them new arrivals to the Korean Peninsula between Nov. 26 and Tuesday.

South Korea is also experiencing a surge and Wednesday reported 682 new infections nationwide, according to the Central Disease Control Headquarters. The nation's largest cities, including Seoul, are mostly off-limits to U.S. troops and their families.

In Tokyo, the fall coronavirus surge is the most extreme of the three that have washed across the metro area this year. The city of

13.5 million has reported 45,529 people with the virus and 528 deaths during the pandemic.

Tokyo is also off-limits to most U.S. personnel.

The U.S. Navy had two new coronavirus cases Wednesday in Japan at Sasebo Naval Base on Kyushu island, according to a Facebook post. One person tested positive after falling ill with COVID-19 symptoms; the second was discovered during contact tracing, the base said on Thursday.

U.S. Army Japan had one new coronavirus case on Okinawa, according to a news release Thursday. That person had contact with someone with the virus, tested positive on Saturday and then was quarantined.

Kadena Air Base, also on Okinawa, reported one newly infected person on Wednesday evening. That person, the fourth member of a family to test positive, was already quarantined, according to Kadena. No other close contacts were identified, according to a Facebook post.

Okinawa, where the bulk of U.S.

forces in Japan are stationed, reported 129 new cases this week, including 46 on Thursday, a public health official told Stars and Stripes by phone.

To the north, U.S. Forces Korea reported all 10 of its recent cases tested positive after arriving in South Korea, according to a news release.

Four of those patients are service members who arrived at Osan Air Base on Sunday and Monday aboard the government-chartered Patriot Express passenger service. The others arrived on commercial flights at Incheon International Airport on Nov. 26 and 29 and Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.

Eight tested positive on their first test before entering the mandatory 14-day quarantine; two tested positive on a test required before exiting quarantine, according to USFK.

Stars and Stripes reporter Aya Ichihashi contributed to this report.
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Bases: After FDA OKs vaccine, DOD will assess if mandatory for troops

FROM PAGE 1

of Veterans Affairs, the State Department, the Indian Health Service and the Bureau of Prisons.

The department expects to receive its first batch of slightly fewer than 44,000 doses of the vaccines as soon as next week. The doses will be distributed to more than a dozen locations in the United States and overseas as part of a pilot program to make certain the distribution process is working, defense officials said.

Locations outside the continental United States are Allgood Army Community Hospital, Camp Humphreys, South Korea; Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany; Kadena Medical Facility, Kadena Air Base, Okinawa; and Tripler Army Medical Center, Honolulu, Hawaii.

In the United States, the locations are Darnall Army Medical Center, Fort Hood, Texas; Willford Hall, Joint Base San Antonio, Texas; Madigan Army Medical Center, Joint Base Lewis McChord, Wash.; Womack Army Medical Center, Fort Bragg, N.C.; Navy Branch Health Clinic, Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, Fla.; Base Alameda Health Services, U.S. Coast Guard Base, Alameda, Calif.; Naval Medical Center, San Diego, Calif.; Naval Hospital, Camp Pendleton, Calif.; Naval Hospital Pensacola, Pensacola, Fla.; Armed Forces Retirement Home, Gulfport, Miss.; Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, Md.; Armed Forces Retirement Home, Washington, D.C.; Portsmouth Naval Medical Center, Portsmouth, Va.; U.S. Coast Guard Base Clinic, Portsmouth, Va.; Indiana National Guard, Franklin, Ind., and New York National Guard Medical Command, Watervliet, N.Y.

The locations were picked based on criteria including having ultra-cold storage for the vaccines, large medical and security staff who can receive the initial phase of the vaccine and also monitor the vaccination process, and prioritization of the location for the services, according to Place.

Once the program proves the distribution process works, the Defense Department will begin sending the vaccine to hundreds of other sites in the United States and around the world, Place said.

A committee of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration was to meet Thursday to discuss whether the agency will approve an emergency use authorization for the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine, one of two vaccines that are likely to receive this approval soon. On Tuesday, the United Kingdom began vaccinating citizens there with the Pfizer vaccine.

Once the vaccine's emergency authorization is approved, the Defense Department anticipates people will begin to be vaccinated within 48 hours. However, the department will not mandate that personnel be vaccinated because the vaccine is under an emergency authorization.

If the vaccine is eventually fully licensed by the FDA, then the Pentagon will look at whether to make it mandatory for service members, he said.

The department will continue to follow its health protection guidance for the coronavirus pandemic, to include hand washing and social distancing, while it works to vaccinate as many people as possible in the next several months, McCaffrey said.

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VIRUS OUTBREAK ROUNDUP

California sees surge in deaths, hospitalizations

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — California's coronavirus surge has caused so many hospitalizations and deaths that the numbers brought usually stoic public health officers in major metropolitan areas to pleas — and even near to tears — as they urged people to heed safety rules.

Los Angeles County, the nation's largest with 10 million residents, had a "devastating increase in deaths" from about a dozen a day in mid-November to an average of 43 a day this week, the county's health director, Barbara Ferrer, said Wednesday.

"Over 8,000 people who were beloved members of their families are not coming back," Ferrer said in a choked voice. She called the deaths "an incalculable loss to their friends and their family and the community."

The county reported 3,299 people hospitalized with the virus as of Wednesday, and 23% of them were in intensive care. New COVID-19 admissions were approaching 500 a day and health officials estimated that could jump to 700 a day by next week.

The county is part of the enormous Southern California region which, along with the San Joaquin Valley, contain more than 60% of the state's 40 million residents. Last week, the two regions were ordered to follow the strictest anti-COVID-19 rules under a new state stay-at-home order that aims to keep hospitals from being overwhelmed by restricting infectious contacts.

Counties in the San Joaquin Valley region saw their intensive care units reach full capacity this week, forcing hospitals to consider alternatives to treat patients needing the most care.

In Santa Clara County in the San Francisco Bay Area, about 50 ICU beds were available for a population of about 2 million.

Texas

DALLAS — A Texas state official who has been critical of measures Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has implemented to help slow down the coronavirus pandemic said Wednesday that he has tested positive for COVID-19.

Texas Agriculture Commis-

sioner Sid Miller was among leaders from the right wing of the Texas Republican Party who staged a protest outside of Abbott's home in October. Miller, 65, was among an estimated 200 people gathered outside the governor's mansion to blast Abbott's executive orders, including a continued statewide mask mandate and lockdowns.

In a statement Wednesday, Miller said he'd be quarantining at his ranch.

"Not feeling my best, but I've survived rodeo injuries, broken bones, hip, double knee and shoulder surgery, West Nile virus and cancer, and I'm going to beat this too," he said in the statement.

Nevada

RENO — The Washoe County School Board has decided to extend distance learning for middle and high schools in the Reno area until at least Jan. 19 partly because of a shortage of teachers.

Elementary schools will continue to offer in-class instruction for kindergartners through fifth-graders.

The board had decided last month that secondary students would return to a hybrid model on Jan. 4 that combined remote teaching and classroom learning every other day. But on a 5-2 vote Tuesday night, the board agreed to extend the distance learning for another two weeks after the winter break.

Superintendent Kristen McNeill said additional time is needed to put pieces in place, including recruiting more substitutes and to give the health district time to train more contact tracers, according to the Reno Gazette-Journal.

"This is really about resources," McNeill said.

Even with only the district's 66 elementary schools doing in-person teaching, it's still short about 90 substitutes a day.

New Mexico

SANTA FE — New Mexico has begun monitoring sewage from prisons and youth rehabilitation facilities to more efficiently detect COVID-19 outbreaks in the southwest of the state, the state Environment Department announced



ROB O'NEAL, FLORIDA KEYS NEWS BUREAU / AP

Mike Price, an infection prevention specialist with iP Program, walks and programs an ultraviolet light-emitting robot at Key West International Airport Wednesday, in Key West, Fla.

Wednesday.

The agency says the goal is to sample human feces in group-living situations to quickly identify coronavirus outbreaks. The results may be used to more effectively deploy individual testing to pinpoint infections and halt the spread.

Sampling will take place at federal, state and local jails, along with facilities overseen by the state Children, Youth and Families Department. A list of individual facilities was not immediately available.

Environment Department spokeswoman Maddy Hayden said the initial effort comes at a cost of about \$300,000, utilizing federal relief funds. Lexington, Massachusetts-based ERG was contracted to perform the sewage testing.

The southwest region was selected for the initial phase of testing because of high positivity rates along with limited access to testing.

Mississippi

JACKSON — Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves on Wednesday defended his decision to hold Christmas parties at the Governor's Mansion, despite repeatedly warning residents to avoid social gatherings as coronavirus cases surge.

The Republican governor said he invited family, friends and state officials to the multiple parties, but he expects many will choose not to attend.

The front part of the Governor's Mansion is a museum that is open by appointment only, and the Reeves family lives in a private portion in the back. Reeves compared the parties to tours that have been happening during the pandemic. No more than 10 people are allowed on each tour of the historic home, and masks are required.

"What I think we are doing by offering the public the opportunity to, for instance, tour the Governor's Mansion, is to offer a sense of normalcy," Reeves said during a news conference.

Reeves, who became governor in January, said he canceled many social events for the year, including a 16th birthday party for his oldest daughter and an open house traditionally held the first Friday of December.

Pennsylvania

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf said Wednesday he has contracted COVID-19 and is isolating at home, revealing the diagnosis after several members of his security detail recently tested positive for the coronavirus.

The second-term Democrat said a routine test on Tuesday detected the virus.

"I have no symptoms and am feeling well," Wolf said in a statement. "I am following CDC and Department of Health guidelines."

Wolf's spouse, Frances Wolf, has been tested but has not re-

ceived the result, Wolf said. She is quarantining with him at their home in Mount Wolf, near York.

Wolf is one of several governors who have tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19, including the governors of Oklahoma, Missouri, Virginia, Nevada and Colorado.

Oklahoma

TULSA — Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum said Wednesday he's disgusted that some cities, particularly in the Tulsa area, have not mandated mask wearing to help slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Cities with mask ordinances listened to medical professionals, Bynum said, suggesting city leaders in some other municipalities who opposed mask mandates took advice from "Facebook epidemiologists who can cite some sham website and claim that makes them an expert on the value of mask wearing."

Many Tulsa suburbs have adopted mask ordinances, but officials in nearby Broken Arrow on Nov. 23 rejected a proposal to strongly encourage mask wearing.

A spokesperson for Broken Arrow did not return a phone call seeking comment Wednesday.

The White House Coronavirus Task Force report released by state health officials on Wednesday noted the fall and winter surge of the coronavirus is now spreading wider and more rapidly than since the pandemic began.

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VIRUS OUTBREAK

Jobless claims jump amid virus surge

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of people applying for unemployment aid jumped last week to 853,000, the most since September, evidence that companies are cutting more jobs as new virus cases spiral higher.

The Labor Department said Thursday that the number of applications increased from 716,000 the previous week. Before the coronavirus paralyzed the economy in March, weekly jobless claims typically numbered only about 225,000.

The latest figures coincide with a surging outbreak that appears to be weakening the job market and the economy and threatening to derail any recovery. Consumers thus far haven't spent as much this holiday shopping season as they have in previous years, according to credit and debit card data. And in November, employers added jobs at the slowest pace since April. Restaurants, bars and retailers all cut jobs last month.

The total number of people who are receiving state-provided unemployment aid rose for the first time in three months to 5.8 mil-

lion, the government said, from 5.5 million. That suggests that some companies have sharply pulled back on hiring.

All told, more than 19 million people are still dependent on some type of unemployment benefit. And unless Congress acts soon, nearly half of them will lose that aid in just over two weeks. That's when two jobless aid programs that the federal government created in the spring are set to expire.

The first program provides unemployment benefits to the self-employed and contract workers,

who weren't eligible in the past. The second program extends jobless aid for 13 weeks.

Members of Congress and the Trump administration are fighting over a roughly \$900 billion relief package that could extend the programs into the spring, sparing about 9 million unemployed Americans from deeper financial distress.

A bipartisan group of senators has proposed to extend the supplemental aid for four months and add \$300-a-week in federal jobless aid. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin on Tuesday pro-

posed a one-time round of \$600 relief checks — half the \$1,200 that was provided in the spring. But Mnuchin's proposal includes no funding for supplemental unemployment aid payments, drawing sharp objections from Democrats in Congress.

With a coronavirus vaccine nearing approval, many economists are optimistic that the economy will rebound strongly next year. But most favor another federal financial relief package to support state and local governments, unemployed workers and small businesses until then.

Tensions rising over mask orders in smaller cities

Associated Press

MISSION, Kan. — Arguments over mask requirements and other restrictions have turned ugly in recent days as the deadly coronavirus surge across the United States engulfs small and medium-size cities that once seemed safely removed from the outbreak.

In Boise, Idaho, public health officials about to vote on a four-county mask mandate abruptly ended a meeting Tuesday evening because of fears for their safety amid anti-mask protests outside the building and at some of their homes.

One health board member tearfully announced she had to rush home to be with her child because of the protesters, who were seen on video blaring air horns and sirens, banging on buckets and blasting a sound clip of gunfire from the violence-drenched movie "Scarface" outside her door.

"I am sad. I am tired. I fear that, in my choosing to hold public office, my family has too often paid the price," said the board member, Ada County Commissioner Diana Lachiondo. "I increasingly don't recognize this place. There is an ugliness and cruelty in our national rhetoric that is reaching a fevered pitch here at home, and that should worry us all."

Boise police said three arrest warrants were issued in connection with the demonstrations at board members' homes.

In South Dakota, the mayor of Rapid City said City Council members were harassed and threatened over a proposed city-wide mask mandate that failed this week even as intensive care units across the state filled with COVID-19 patients.

The tensions are flaring amid

an epic surge in U.S. deaths, hospitalizations and infections over the past several weeks.

The U.S. topped 3,000 deaths Wednesday in what is a single-day record, according to the COVID Tracking Project. That's surpassed the level seen during last spring's peak in and around New York City. New cases per day have rocketed to more than 200,000 on average, and the number of patients in the hospital with COVID-19 stood at almost 105,000 on Tuesday, another all-time high.

The grim figures led the usually stoic health director of the nation's most populated county to become emotional. Barbara Ferrer described "a devastating increase in deaths" in Los Angeles County, with the total hitting 8,075 on Wednesday.

"Over 8,000 people who were beloved members of their families are not coming back," Ferrer said, fighting back tears.

Meanwhile, protesters in Montana's Gallatin County have gathered for two consecutive weeks outside the Bozeman home of county health officer Matt Kelley to decry regulations, including a statewide mask mandate. They have carried signs reading, "We refuse to be your experiment" and "Oxygen is essential."

Last week, around 80 people lined Bozeman's Main Street to support Kelley and other health officials.

In Montana's Flathead County, where officials recorded 17 coronavirus-related deaths over 18 days and resistance to masks runs strong, the interim public health officer is resigning when her contract is up at year's end, citing a lack of support from local authorities for measures to control the



DARIN OSWALD, IDAHO STATESMAN/AP

Boise police were forced to create a barrier to keep anti-mask protesters from entering a meeting at the Central District Health offices on Tuesday in Boise, Idaho.

scourge.

In Helena, Republicans who control both chambers of the Montana Legislature denied a request by Democratic lawmakers to require masks be worn inside the Capitol during the legislative session next month.

In Missouri, Greene County officials recorded 51 COVID-19 deaths in the first eight days of December as hospitals overflow and hundreds of health care workers are quarantined. The area's two major hospitals asked the city of Springfield, the county seat, to renew the city's mask mandate before it expires in January. The county itself does not have a mask mandate, nor does the state.

As the deaths pile up, Spring-

field Mortuary Services owner Brian Simmons is overseeing the embalming and cremation of COVID-19 victims as his own 48-year-old daughter battles the virus. She spent the past week hospitalized on a ventilator in one of the city's overwhelmed hospitals.

"You are just helpless," he said. "There is nothing you can do about it. We haven't seen her since she's gone in."

South Dakota has suffered through the country's worst rate of deaths per capita over the last week, but Gov. Kristi Noem has been ardent in her opposition to mask mandates or other aggressive efforts to slow infections.

That hands-off approach drew vocal support at Rapid City Council meetings, even as doctors

warned that the only large hospital in the western half of the state is facing a crisis and patients are being flown out of the state. The meetings drew hours of testimony from people who said the dangers of the virus are overblown and that mask requirements violate their liberties.

Dr. Stephen Neabore, who works in the biggest hospital system in the region, said he has been frustrated as he tries to persuade people to wear masks. After working in New York City and studying medicine in England, he said, he sees a distinct skepticism toward government around him.

"I still see people out here that will tell me that they don't believe it's any worse than a common cold," he said.

VIRUS OUTBREAK

Government funds extended to allow more time to talk

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Still spinning their wheels on COVID-19 relief, lawmakers have grabbed a one-week government funding extension that buys time for more talks — though there is considerable disagreement over who is supposed to be taking the lead from there.

Amid the uncertainty, the House easily passed a one-week government-wide funding bill Wednesday that sets a new Dec. 18 deadline for Congress to wrap up both the COVID-19 relief measure and a \$1.4 trillion catchall spending bill that is also overdue. The 343-67 vote sent the one-week bill to the Senate, where it's expected to easily pass before a deadline of midnight Friday to avert a partial government shutdown.

The measure would give lawmakers more time to sort through the hot mess they have created for themselves after months of futile negotiations and posturing and recent rounds of flip-flopping.

Top GOP leaders said the right people to handle endgame negotiations are the top four leaders of Congress and the Trump administration, focused on a proposal by Senate Majority Leader Mitch

“The bipartisan group provided a good foundation kind of a place to start from. And hopefully, the negotiations are real negotiations on what can... get signed.”

John Thune
R-S.D.

McConnell to eliminate a Democratic demand for a \$160 billion or so aid package for state and local governments.

Top Democrats, meanwhile, are placing their bets on a bipartisan group of senators who are trying to iron out a \$908 billion package. The bipartisan group is getting no encouragement from McConnell, but members are claiming progress on perhaps the most contentious item, a demand by the Kentucky Republican to award businesses and other organizations protections against COVID-19-related lawsuits.

“We’re trying to get a bipartisan compromise along the lines of the Gang of Eight framework,” said Senate Minority Leader Chuck

Schumer, D-N.Y. “We need Leader McConnell to stop sabotaging the talks and work with this gang of eight, which is the most hopeful and the only bipartisan group together.”

Senate Minority Whip John Thune, R-S.D., however, said the only way to resolve the negotiations is for McConnell, Pelosi and the White House to take charge.

“The bipartisan group provided a good foundation kind of a place to start from. And hopefully, the negotiations are real negotiations on what can ultimately pass the House, the Senate, and get signed,” Thune said. “We need to get under way.”

The Trump administration is back in the middle of the negotia-

tions, offering a \$916 billion package on Tuesday that would send a \$600 direct payment to most Americans but eliminate a \$300-per-week employment benefit favored by the bipartisan group of Senate negotiators.

The offer arrived Tuesday came with the endorsement of the top House Republican and apparent backing from McConnell, who had previously favored a \$519 billion GOP plan that has already failed twice. But Democrats immediately blasted the plan over the administration's refusal to back the partial restoration, to \$300 per week, of bonus pandemic jobless benefits that lapsed in August.

“I think everybody is encouraged that there is a real framework here that everybody agrees on and there's a few issues that are still the sticking points,” Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told reporters Wednesday. “The two biggest issues are the money for state and local governments and liability protections. If we can't resolve those, we can move forward on everything else. I don't want to tell a bunch of small businesses that they can't get (paycheck protection) loans.”

President-elect Joe Biden is pressing for as much pandemic relief as possible, though he's not directly involved in the talks. McConnell says Congress will not adjourn without providing the long-overdue COVID-19 relief. The pressure to deliver is intense — all sides say failure isn't an option.

The bipartisan negotiating group — led by Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and GOP Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, among others — is seeking to rally lawmakers behind a \$908 billion framework that includes a \$300-per-week pandemic jobless benefit and \$160 billion for states and local governments. It is more generous than a plan assembled by McConnell but far smaller than a wish list assembled by House Democrats.

Details leaked Wednesday on less controversial elements of their plan, including a four-month extension of jobless benefits set to expire at the end of the month, \$300 billion for “paycheck protection” subsidies for struggling businesses, funding for vaccines and testing, and a host of smaller items.

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NATION

2 US bombers fly over Mideast as note to Iran

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a new show of military might, two American bomber aircraft took off from the United States and flew over a swath of the Middle East on Thursday, sending what U.S. officials said was a direct message of deterrence to Iran.

The flight of the two massive B-52H Stratofortress bombers over the region, the second such mission in less than a month, was designed to underscore America's continuing commitment to the Middle East even as President Donald Trump's administration withdraws thousands of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The long-range heavy bombers, which are capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear weapons, are a formidable sight and are flown less frequently in the Middle East than smaller combat aircraft, such as American fighter jets. Adversaries often complain about bomber flights in their region, deeming them a provocative show of force.

"The ability to fly strategic bombers halfway across the world in a non-stop mission and to rapidly integrate them with multiple regional partners demonstrates our close working relationships

and our shared commitment to regional security and stability," Gen. Frank McKenzie, the top U.S. commander for the Middle East, said in a statement.

The troop cuts coupled with the impending departure of the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier strike group in the Gulf have fueled allies' concerns that the U.S. is abandoning the region. Those worries are compounded by fears that Iran may strike out at the U.S. or allies in retaliation for the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh.

Iran has blamed the death on Israel, which has been suspected in previous killings of Iranian nuclear scientists.

U.S. officials are also worried about a possible Iranian retaliatory strike on the first anniversary of the U.S. airstrike that killed Iran's top general, Qassem Soleimani, and senior Iraqi militia leaders near Baghdad's airport in early January.

Iranian-backed militias routinely launch rockets near installations in Iraq where U.S. and Iraqi troops are based, and officials worry about a larger, more deadly assault.

"We do not seek conflict," McKenzie said, "but we must re-

main area — on defense policy. But on Wednesday the effort to turn back the arms sales failed to reach the 51-vote majority needed for passage. Trump was expected to veto the two resolutions anyway.

The showdown over the sale, alongside sweeping bipartisan support for the annual defense bill despite Trump's threats to veto it, is potentially a final power play between the executive and legislative branch in the final weeks of Trump's presidency. The Senate will take up the broader defense bill soon.

Action is halted for now, though the House, where Democrats have control, would likely be able to pass them easily.

Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., said in a statement after the vote he was eager to work with President-elect Joe Biden's administration "to take a closer look at each of these sales before any transfers are completed."

Murphy said the UAE's track record in war-torn Yemen and Li-



SENIOR AIRMAN KEIFER BOWES, U.S. AIR FORCE / AP

A U.S. B-52H Stratofortress prepares to fly over Southwest Asia, in May 2019.

main postured and committed to respond to any contingency or in opposition to any aggression."

A senior military official, who spoke to a small group of reporters on the condition of anonymity to provide details of the mission, said the administration believes that the risk of an Iranian attack on U.S. or allied interests in the region is a bit higher than normal now, and the Pentagon wants to ensure that Tehran thinks twice before doing anything. Adding to the concerns is the presidential transition in the U.S. following Joe Biden's November victory over Trump. The official said Iran or other adversaries often believe the U.S. may be weaker or slower to respond during a political transition, which American officials flatly deny.

Bomber deployments and short-term flights to the Middle East and Europe have been used in the past to message Iran, a few times in the last two years.

According to officials, the bombers flew out of Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana on Wednesday and conducted the flight into Thursday. Officially

nicknamed the Stratofortress and informally known as the Big Ugly Fat Fellow, the B-52 gained lasting fame in Vietnam as an aerial terror.

The two bombers were expected to fly a roughly 36-hour mission, across the Atlantic Ocean and Europe, then cross the Arabian Peninsula and fly down the Persian Gulf, making a wide loop near Qatar and staying a safe distance from Iran's coastline before returning home, said the military official. The flight was coordinated with U.S. allies in the region, and aircraft from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar flew with the bombers as they traveled through the airspace, according to the official.

The USS Nimitz, and as many as three other warships in its strike group, had been scheduled to head home by the end of the year, but they have been held in the region and no new timeline on the departure has been given.

Officials, however, have made it clear that the ships' return hasn't been decided and the additional time in the Gulf area is open-ended.

Senate falls short in halting \$23B arms deal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate fell short Wednesday in trying to halt the Trump administration's proposed \$23 billion arms sales to the United Arab Emirates, despite bipartisan objections to the package of F-35 fighter jets and drones stemming from a broader Middle East peace agreement.

Senators argued the sale of the defense equipment, which Secretary of State Mike Pompeo formally authorized last month after the Abraham Accords normalizing relations with Israel, was unfolding too quickly and with too many questions. The administration has billed it as a way to deter Iran, but UAE would become the first Arab nation — and only the second country in the Middle East, after Israel — to possess the stealth warplanes.

"Can a lasting peace be purchased with more weapons?" said Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., in a speech ahead of the vote.

Congress has shown a willingness to confront Trump in one

bya and its "complicated" relationships with China and Russia raise more questions than answers.

"I'm not here to say that we shouldn't be in the security business with UAE," Murphy, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said during the debate.

But, he said, "without resolving those issues, is this the moment to be selling for the first time ever F-35s, armed drones into the heart of the Middle East?"

The arms sale emerged after the U.S. brokered the Abraham Accords to normalize relations between the UAE, Bahrain and Israel.

In notifying Congress last month, Pompeo said the authorization of the sale was in recognition of the "deepening relationship" with the UAE and its need to deter threats from Iran.

Pompeo said the "historic agreement" reached with the Abraham Accords offered a

"once-in-a-generation opportunity" to transform the region's "strategic landscape."

The sale, worth up to \$23.37 billion, includes dozens of F-35s, advanced armed drone systems and a package of air-to-air and air-to-ground munitions. It may not become final until next year.

Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey, the top Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, said a list of questions senators sent to Pompeo and then-Defense Secretary Mark Esper about the arrangement remains unanswered.

A classified briefing for senators did not appear to adequately answer their questions.

"We must assert our congressional prerogative," Menendez said. Voting "sends a message to the executive branch."

Israeli officials have previously expressed some concern about an F-35 sale. But in October, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appeared to confirm Israel's consent.

Biden picks McDonough to be VA secretary

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President-elect Joe Biden has chosen Denis McDonough, a longtime aide of former President Barack Obama, to be the secretary of Veterans Affairs.

The Biden transition team made the announcement in an email Thursday. A member of the transition team, speaking anonymously, said Biden chose McDonough because he's a "crisis-tested public servant" with "the empathy, the character, the integrity and ethics, and the relentless work ethic the position demands."

"McDonough helped lead the Obama-Biden administration's work on behalf of military families and veterans and earned the trust of the president-elect as a first-class manager with the knowledge and vision to deliver results," the official announcement said.

McDonough is expected to address the public Friday during an event where Biden will officially introduce him as his nominee.

McDonough, 51, served as principal deputy national security adviser under Obama and later took the job as Obama's chief of staff. McDonough began working with Obama in 2007 as his senior foreign policy adviser. Before working for Obama, McDonough held staff positions in the House and Senate.

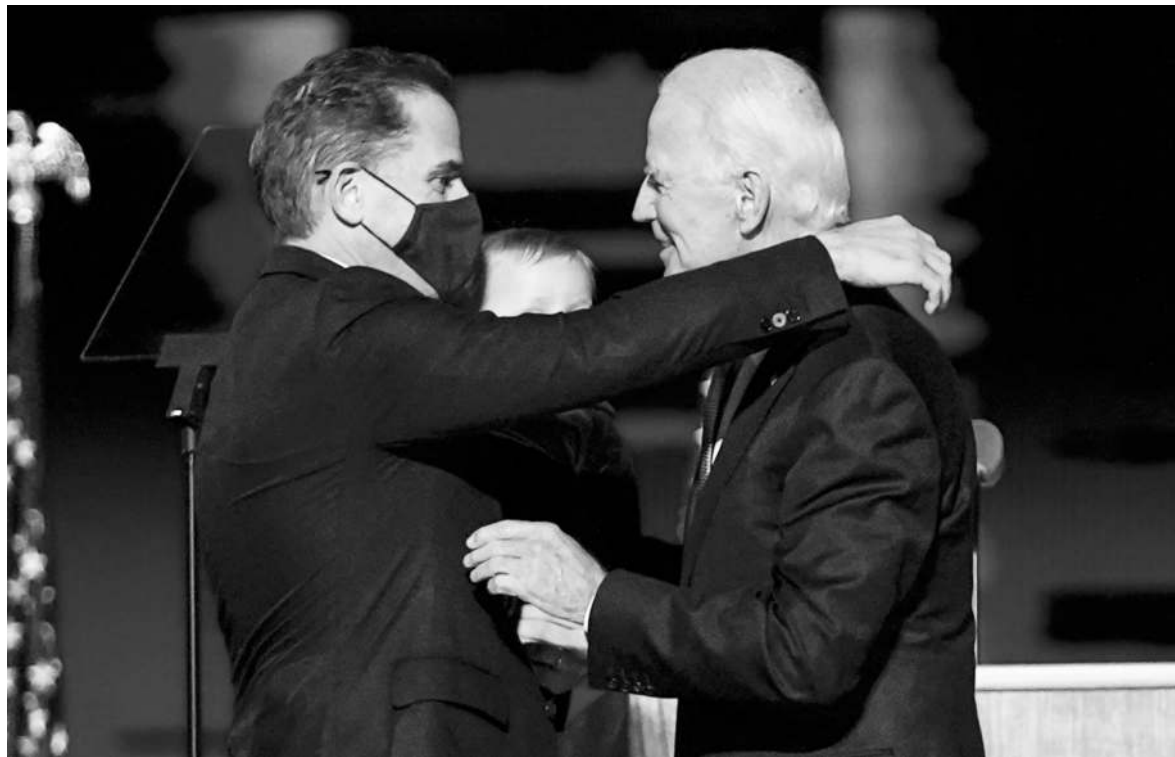
If confirmed, McDonough would become only the second secretary of Veterans Affairs who is not a veteran. David Shulkin, whom President Donald Trump nominated as VA secretary at the start of his presidency, was the first.

As head of the VA, McDonough would be in charge of the country's second-largest federal agency, with 400,000 employees and an annual budget that recently surpassed \$200 billion.

Some leaders in national veterans' organizations were pushing Biden's team to nominate a woman, a post-9/11 veteran or a combination of both. Since 1989, when the department was created as a Cabinet-level agency, all of its secretaries have been men. No post-9/11 veteran has taken the helm of the agency.

"We were expecting a veteran, maybe a post-9/11 veteran. Maybe a woman veteran. Or maybe a veteran who knows the VA exceptionally well," said Joe Chenelly, national director of AMVETS. "We are looking forward to hearing from President-Elect Biden on his thinking behind this nomination."

NATION



ANDREW HARNIK/AP

President-elect Joe Biden embraces his son Hunter Biden in Wilmington, Del.

Hunter Biden tax probe examining his business dealings with China

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department is investigating the finances of President-elect Joe Biden's son, including scrutinizing some of his Chinese business dealings and other transactions, a person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press.

The revelations put a renewed spotlight on questions about Hunter Biden's financial history, which dogged his father's successful White House campaign and were a frequent target of President Donald Trump and his allies. They also come at a politically delicate time for the president-elect, who is weighing his choice to lead an agency that is actively investigating his son.

There is no indication that the investigation has anything to do with Joe Biden.

The tax investigation was launched in 2018, the year before the elder Biden announced his candidacy for president. Hunter Biden confirmed the existence of the investigation on Wednesday, saying he learned about it for the first time the previous day.

"I take this matter very seriously, but I am confident that a professional and objective review of these matters will demonstrate that I handled my affairs legally and appropriately, including with the benefit of professional tax advisors," he said in a statement.

It is unclear which entities or business dealings might be in the probe, though the person with knowledge of it said at least some of focus was on his work in China. Federal investigators served a round of subpoenas Tuesday, including one for Hunter Biden, according to another person familiar with the investigation.

Investigators did not reach out until recently because of Justice Department practice against taking overt investigative actions in the run-up to an election, one of the people said. The people familiar with the investigation insisted on anonymity to discuss an ongoing probe.

Hunter Biden has a history of international affairs and business dealings in a number of countries. Trump and his allies have accused him of profiting off his political connections and have raised unsubstantiated charges of corruption related to his work in Ukraine at the time his father was vice president and leading the Obama administration's dealings with the Eastern European nation.

Late Wednesday, Trump tweeted a quote from New York Post columnist Miranda Devine claiming, "10% of voters would have changed their vote if they knew about Hunter Biden."

Biden is actively assembling his Cabinet, but has yet to name a nominee to lead the Justice Department. That person could ultimately have oversight of the investigation into the new president's son if it is still ongoing when Biden is sworn in on Jan. 20.

The transition team said in a statement, "President-elect Biden is deeply proud of his son, who has fought through difficult challenges, including the vicious personal attacks of recent months, only to emerge stronger."

The revelations could also add weight to Trump's broad accusations that Biden was weak on China. Trump took a tough line on China during the campaign as he tried to deflect blame for the coronavirus. Biden has rejected the characterization that he was weak

and said that, unlike Trump, he would rebuild global coalitions to check China's power.

A New Yorker profile on Hunter Biden last year detailed some of his business work in China, including how he accompanied his father on a 2013 trip to Beijing, where he met with a business associate. He also acknowledged having received a diamond from a Chinese energy tycoon interested in liquified natural gas projects.

He downplayed the idea that the gift could have been intended to affect his father's policy. He told the magazine he gave the diamond to an associate.

"What would they be bribing me for? My dad wasn't in office," he said.

Hunter Biden joined the board of Ukrainian energy company Burisma in 2014, sparking concerns about the perceptions of a conflict of interest given the elder Biden was deeply involved in U.S. policy toward Ukraine. An investigation by the Republican-led Senate did not identify any policies that were directly affected by Hunter Biden's work.

In the weeks before the election, Trump supporters used the existence of a laptop they said was connected to Hunter Biden — and the emergence of someone who maintains he had business discussions with him — to raise questions about Joe Biden's knowledge of his son's activities in Ukraine and China. The president-elect said he did not discuss his son's international business dealings with him and has denied having ever taken money from a foreign country.

A third person familiar with the matter said the tax investigation does not have anything to do with the laptop.

US and states sue Facebook, claiming 'predatory' conduct

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. government and 48 states and districts sued Facebook Wednesday, accusing it of abusing its market power in social networking to crush smaller competitors and seeking remedies that could include a forced spinoff of the social network's Instagram and WhatsApp messaging services.

The landmark antitrust lawsuits, announced by the Federal Trade Commission and New York Attorney General Letitia James, mark the second major government offensive this year against seemingly untouchable tech behemoths. The Justice Department sued Google in October for abusing its dominance in online search and advertising — the government's most significant attempt to buttress competition since its historic case against Microsoft two decades ago. Amazon and Apple also have been under investigation in Congress and by federal authorities for alleged anticompetitive conduct.

James noted at a press conference that "it's really critically important that we block this predatory acquisition of companies and that we restore confidence to the market."

The FTC said Facebook has engaged in a "systematic strategy" to eliminate its competition, including by purchasing smaller up-and-coming rivals like Instagram in 2012 and WhatsApp in 2014. James echoed that in her press conference, saying Facebook "used its monopoly power to crush smaller rivals and snuff out competition, all at the expense of everyday users."

The FTC fined Facebook \$5 billion in 2019 for privacy violations and instituted new oversight and restrictions on its business. The fine was the largest the agency has ever levied on a tech company, although it had no visible impact on Facebook's business.

Facebook called the government actions "revisionist history" that punishes successful businesses and noted that the FTC cleared the Instagram and WhatsApp acquisitions years ago.

"The government now wants a do-over, sending a chilling warning to American business that no sale is ever final," Facebook general counsel Jennifer Newstead said in a statement that echoed the company's response to a recent congressional antitrust probe.

Facebook is the world's biggest social network with 2.7 billion us-

"Our hope is to restructure the social networking marketplace in the United States, and right now there's one player"

Josh Stein

North Carolina attorney general

ers and a company with a market value of nearly \$800 billion. CEO Mark Zuckerberg is the world's fifth-richest individual and the most public face of Big Tech swagger.

James alleged Facebook had a practice of opening its site to third-party app developers, then abruptly cutting off developers that it saw as a threat. The lawsuit — which includes 46 states, Guam and the District of Columbia — accuses Facebook of anti-competitive conduct and using its market dominance to harvest consumer data and reap a fortune in advertising revenues.

North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein, who was on the executive committee of attorneys general conducting the investigation, said the litigation has the potential to alter the communications landscape the way the breakup of AT&T's local phone service monopoly in the early 1980s did.

"Our hope is to restructure the social networking marketplace in the United States, and right now there's one player," Stein told reporters.

Antitrust expert Rebecca Allessworth, a law professor at Vanderbilt University, said it is "hard to win any antitrust lawsuit and this one is not any different." But as far as antitrust cases go, she added, the government has a strong one.

The Justice Department's suit against Google, announced just two weeks before Election Day, brought accusations of political motivation from some quarters. It was filed by a cabinet agency headed by an attorney general seen as a close ally of President Donald Trump, who has often publicly criticized Google. The FTC, by contrast, is an independent regulatory agency whose five commissioners currently include three Republicans and two Democrats.

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NATION

Astronauts named for moon-landing program

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — NASA has named the 18 astronauts — half of them women — who will train for its Artemis moon-landing program.

The first woman and next man on the moon will come from this elite group.

Vice President Mike Pence introduced the astronauts Wednesday at the close of his final meeting as chairman of the National Space Council. The announcement was made at Florida's Kennedy Space Center, beneath one of only three remaining Saturn V moon rockets from the 1960s and 1970s Apollo program.

Pence noted that the last of the 12 men to walk on the moon, the late Apollo 17 commander Gene Cernan, wanted nothing more than to remove "last" from his title. Cernan's final lunar footsteps were on Dec. 14, 1972.

"He spent the rest of his natural life advocating for America to go back to the moon, and we are going to honor Gene Cernan's memory," Pence told the small crowd, seated several feet apart from one another.

Five of the astronauts — the only ones in attendance — walked onto the stage, waving and wear-



JOHN RAOUX / AP

Vice President Mike Pence, far left, introduces five of the astronauts that will be part of the Artemis missions, from left, Jessica Meir, Joe Acaba, Anne McClain, Matthew Dominick, and Jessica Watkins during the eighth meeting of the National Space Council at the Kennedy Space Center on Wednesday.

ing masks.

NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine stressed there would be more astronauts joining the group.

NASA has 47 active astronauts.

The space agency is aiming for a moon landing by 2024, although the chances of that happening are

growing increasingly dim. The upcoming change in administration also adds uncertainty.

Half of the NASA astronauts

have spaceflight experience. Two are at the International Space Station right now: Kate Rubins and Victor Glover.

The two astronauts who performed the world's first all-female spacewalk last year made the cut: Christina Koch and Jessica Meir.

It's a fairly young group, with most in their 30s or 40s. The oldest is 55, the youngest 32. Only two — Joe Acaba and Stephanie Wilson — flew on NASA's old space shuttles.

"The history is awesome, but we're here to look toward the future," Acaba told reporters after the announcement.

The other experienced members on the list include Kjell Lindgren, Anne McClain and Scott Tingle, all former space station residents.

"We are dreamers, but even more so, we're doers," McClain said.

She wants children from all backgrounds to take note of the diverse lunar team: "The doors are open, come on after us."

Among those yet to rocket into space: Kayla Barron, Raja Chari, Matthew Dominick, Woody Hoburg, Jonny Kim, Nicole Mann, Jasmin Moghbeli, Frank Rubio and Jessica Watkins.

SpaceX Starship crash-lands following its highest test flight

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — SpaceX launched its shiny, bullet-shaped, straight-out-of-science fiction Starship several miles into the air from a remote corner of Texas on Wednesday, but the 6½-minute test flight ended in an explosive fireball at touchdown.

It was the highest and most elaborate flight yet for the rocketship that Elon Musk says could carry people to Mars in as little as six years. Despite the catastrophic finale, he was thrilled.

"Mars, here we come!!" he tweeted.

This latest prototype — the first one equipped with a nose cone, body flaps and three engines — was shooting for an altitude of up to eight miles. That's almost 100 times higher than previous hops and skimming the stratosphere.

Starship seemed to hit the mark or at least come close. There was no immediate word from SpaceX on how high it went.

The full-scale, stainless steel model — 160 feet tall and 30 feet in diameter — soared out over the Gulf of Mexico. After about five minutes, it flipped sideways as

planned and descended in a free-fall back to the southeastern tip of Texas near the Mexican border. The Raptor engines reignited for braking and the rocket tilted back upright. When it touched down, however, the rocketship became engulfed in flames and ruptured, parts scattering.

The entire flight — as dramatic and flashy as it gets, even by SpaceX standards — lasted six minutes and 42 seconds. SpaceX broadcast the sunset demo live on its website; repeated delays over the past week and a last-second engine abort Tuesday heightened the excitement among space fans.

Musk called it a "successful ascent" and said the body flaps precisely guided the rocket to the landing point. The fuel tank pressure was low, however, when the engines reignited for touchdown, which caused Starship to come down too fast.

"But we got all the data we needed!" he tweeted.

Musk had kept expectations low, cautioning earlier this week there was "probably" 1-in-3 chance of complete success.

Amazon's Jeff Bezos, who



AP

The SpaceX Starship becomes engulfed in flames and ruptures upon touching down after a test flight Wednesday in a remote area of Texas.

founded the Blue Origin rocket company, offered swift congratulations.

"Anybody who knows how hard this stuff is is impressed by today's Starship test."

Two lower, shorter SpaceX test flights earlier this year from Boca Chica, Texas — a quiet coastal village before SpaceX moved in — used more rudimentary versions of Starship. Essentially cylindrical cans and single Raptor engines, these early vehicles reached altitudes of 490 feet. An even earlier model, the short and squat Starhopper, made a tiny tethered hop in 2019, followed by two in-

creasingly higher climbs.

Wednesday's test followed SpaceX's latest space station supply run for NASA by three days, and the private company's second astronaut flight by less than a month from Florida's Kennedy Space Center.

Starship is actually the upper stage of Musk's envisioned moon and Mars-ships. It will launch atop a mega booster still in development known as the Super Heavy. The entire vehicle will tower 394 feet — 31 feet taller than NASA's Saturn V rocket that hurled men to the moon a half-century ago.

SpaceX intends to use Starship to put massive satellites into orbit around Earth, besides delivering people and cargo to the moon and Mars.

Earlier this year, SpaceX was one of three prime contractors chosen by NASA to develop lunar landers capable of getting astronauts on the moon by 2024.

While accepting an award in Berlin last week, Musk said he's "highly confident" of a human flight to Mars in six years — "if we get lucky, maybe four years." But Musk is the first to admit his timelines can be overly optimistic.

EUROPE

‘Not next year, but it will happen soon’

US military plane that crashed in 1946 will emerge from Alpine glacier earlier than was anticipated

BY KARIN ZEITVOGEL
Stars and Stripes

The fuselage of a U.S. military plane that crash-landed on a Swiss glacier in 1946 will emerge from the ice sooner than expected, near the spot where other parts of the plane have been retrieved, a scientist who studies glaciers has predicted.

Guillaume Jouvét, a glaciologist at the ETH Zurich, one of the world’s leading technical universities, made his prediction after using radioactive traces to accurately date sections of the Gauli Glacier in the Alps, where a U.S. C-53 Skytrooper Dakota crash-landed in 1946, and with a complex model to calculate the trajectory the plane would have taken down the glacier over the years.

The crew and passengers, which included six soldiers, four women and a little girl, were rescued and survived, according to a Nov. 24, 1946 story in Stars and Stripes.

But the president of the Swiss Glacier Commission, ETH’s Paul Louis Mercanton, asked the Americans to leave the plane where it was and allow it to be enveloped by the ice. When it re-emerged, he said, it would provide valuable data about the movement of glaciers.

A study published last year predicted that the fuselage would be spat out by the ice no earlier than 2027, more than half a mile up the glacier from the point where several pieces of wreckage — including the propeller, and parts of the engine and wings — have been recovered in recent years.

But the new data, which used radioactive deposits from atmospheric nuclear tests conducted by the U.S. and Soviet Union in the 1950s and early ‘60s to date different sections of the glacier, show that the fuselage is likely to be ejected from the ice sooner and will emerge close to where the other parts were found, Jouvét said.

Earlier sampling in 2018, when

some of the plane parts were retrieved, found no traces of plutonium. Scientists feared that radioactivity was being erased from the ice as the glacier melted, making it impossible to use it to date different sections.

But it was still visible in up to 20% of the ice collected last year for Jouvét’s study, published last month in the scientific journal *The Cryosphere*.

“There were one or two years when the Americans and Soviets really did a lot of tests,” and those years — 1957 and 1962 — were “clearly visible” in the ice in the form of higher radioactive readings, he said.

The radioactive traces stop shortly afterward, corresponding with the signing of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty by the U.S. and USSR in 1963.

A Swiss army unit that wanted to get some alpine training in collected ice from a roughly 1-mile stretch of the glacier and sent it to a lab to be analyzed for radioactive traces left by the nuclear tests.

The plane crashed a decade before the nuclear tests, meaning it would be downstream from the ice from the 1950s.

The data showed that scientists had erred in their earlier calculations of how fast the glacier was moving, and the path the plane has taken down the ice.

“So we recalibrated the model to get the data correct and produced a different trajectory for the plane,” Jouvét said. “With the new model, we have a much more consistent trajectory with the respect to the released pieces,” which were found far down the ice.

Jouvét said he would be “very surprised if the fuselage is far away.” As for timing, he expects it to emerge “in the coming years,” he said. “Not next year, but it will happen soon — in the time scale of a glacier.”

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PETER KLAUNZER/Foto VBS/

A Swiss soldier works on an engine of a U.S. C-53 Skytrooper that emerged from the ice of the Gauli Glacier in Switzerland in 2018, more than 70 years after the plane crash-landed at the top of the glacier in November 1946.

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U.S. Air Force

A vintage C-53D Skytrooper with D-Day-style markings flies over the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force in May 2019.

PACIFIC



U.S. Navy

The guided-missile frigate USS Taylor leads Navy and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force ships participating in a passing exercise.

Japan aims to build Aegis ships after ditching ashore plan

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Japanese government officials want to build two ships equipped with Aegis missile-defense systems to replace discarded plans for two land-based Aegis systems, Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato said Wednesday.

The plan, endorsed the same day by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, may go to the Cabinet as early as next week, public broadcaster NHK reported Wednesday. The government expects to fund the vessels for the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force next fiscal year, which starts in April.

The Defense Ministry is also seeking to add the equivalent of about \$288 million to its FY21 budget, according to a report Tuesday by Japan's Kyodo news agency.

"I understand that these vessels equipped with the Aegis system, along with other Aegis vessels that are being developed, will make it possible to create a structure which protects the entire nation constantly at all times and can respond to any situation," Kato said during a press conference.

He did not say when construction on the ships would start.

The U.S.-manufactured Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System is the seaborne version of a system designed to shoot down short- and intermediate-range missiles in flight. Some U.S. Navy Ticonderoga-class cruisers and Arleigh Burke-class destroyers — including several based in Yokosuka — are equipped with them.

Japan considered deploying Aegis systems on a floating platform at sea with the U.S. government after the original plan to build Aegis Ashore systems was canceled in June.

The defense minister at the time, Taro Kono, cited technical problems and cost overruns in his decision to freeze procurement of the ground-based systems. They were to be placed at Self-Defense Force bases in Yamaguchi and Akita prefectures.

Japan had already spent or allocated about \$1.9 billion on the ashore systems when the plan was abruptly scrapped, Kyodo News reported in June. Local residents had expressed concerns about the potential health effects from the ashore system's radar, along with the possibility of being targeted during an armed conflict.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who took office in September, instructed the new defense minister, Nobuo Kishi, to come up with an alternative plan by the end of the year.

The vessels will belong to the JMSDF, which could further burden a service already having difficulty filling its ranks. Kato said the government will work on measures to recruit and retain more personnel.

Kishi, during a meeting with Liberal Democratic lawmakers, also proposed extending the range of surface-to-ship missiles under development.

Critics said this may contradict with Japan's Constitution, which allows the SDF to respond only for defensive purposes, but Kato said the extended-range standoff missiles would allow forces to respond from beyond enemy missile range.

"I understand that the purpose is to strengthen defense capabilities and will not be used to strike enemy territory nor being developed under a new policy regarding missile interception," he said.

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AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police go to break-in, find music video shoot

FL PEMBROKE PINES — Police in South Florida descended on what they thought was an armed break-in at a men's clothing store after people were spotted storming in with rifles — but officers arrived to find a music video filming, all with the store owners' knowledge.

The guns were not real and the men holding them were actors in a video, said Amanda Conwell, a spokeswoman for the Pembroke Pines Police Department.

The music video was being filmed inside the men's clothing and accessories store with a film crew while the larger shopping center was closed, The Miami Herald reported, citing a store manager.

A witness saw the events unfolding, and not knowing it was staged, called police, authorities said.

Gun shop burglarized for 2nd time in 2 months

SD SSTURGIS — After operating without incident for five years, a Sturgis gun store was burglarized for the second time in two months.

Sturgis Guns was broken into last weekend, according to a police news release. Authorities arrived to find a broken side window and learned that nine rifles, a BB gun and a scope were stolen, the release said.

The shop was also targeted on Nov. 2, when 14 firearms were stolen.

Tammy Bohn, who owns Sturgis Guns with her husband Justin, said she ordered metal bars after the first burglary, but they hadn't arrived yet.

Wings, pot thrown into prison in footballs

MS LEAKESVILLE — Corrections officials at a South Mississippi prison said they confiscated dozens of illegal cell phones and pounds of marijuana and barbecued chicken wings, some of which were concealed inside footballs and thrown over a prison fence.

The footballs and other packages cleared South Mississippi Correctional Institution's double 18-foot-high fences and were detected by the prison's sensing technology, officials said in a press release.

The contraband was split into 25 packages, which included 38 cellphones, cigars, 20 pounds of tobacco and rolling papers, 4 pounds of marijuana and 7 pounds of barbecued chicken wings.

Deputies: Man accused of fatally shooting 2 dogs

FL DELAND — A Florida man is facing animal cruelty and child abuse charges after killing two of his fiancée's dogs, Volusia County Sheriff's offi-



WILFREDO LEE/AP

Ice cream (police)man

City of Miami Police Chief Jorge Colina, center, prepares to hand out free ice cream to a group of children after the department unveiled their new community ice cream truck in front of Miami Police Headquarters. The truck will be driven through various neighborhoods by officers assigned to the Community Relations Section and also used during police-community events to give out free ice cream.

cialists said.

William Petty, 49, was arrested a day after the incident occurred in DeLand, the news release said.

A 16-year-old boy told investigators that Petty loaded up two of her dogs and drove them to a wooded area. He pulled out a revolver and shot the female dog in the head. He then handed the teen the gun and told him to shoot the other dog, the release said.

The teen said he shot into the ground and Petty took the gun back and shot the other dog. He then tossed both dogs into the woods, the release said.

Petty was arrested on two counts of felony cruelty to animals, two counts of unlawful disposal of a dead domestic animal, child abuse and carrying a concealed weapon in the commission of a felony.

Social media helps man, 92, find college jacket

NC WINSTON-SALEM — More than 60 years after Mal Osborn earned a varsity letter jacket from the University of Maine as a track runner, he still wore it. That is until the 92-year-old lost it in October.

Osborn, who has lived in Winston-Salem since 1964, told his daughter, Beverly Amick, that he couldn't find the treasured jacket, the Bangor Daily News reported.

THE CENSUS

50 The number of people who won the Massachusetts lottery game Mass Cash at the same time, setting a record, according to the state lottery agency. For a dollar, players choose five numbers between 1 and 35 and mark the choice on a slip. WCVB-TV reported that 50 people chose the winning combination of numbers. The people who matched all five numbers will take home more than \$48,000. The largest previous number of people to win at once was 34, Massachusetts State Lottery official Christian Teja said.

Amick and other relatives retraced Osborn's usual routes but didn't find it.

Amick then posted a photo of Osborn on Facebook wearing the jacket at a Master's swimming competition in 2016 and asked for help finding it.

Amick said she got an email from a woman who lived near her father and had found the coat in her yard, covered with leaves.

African music museum to open next month

TN NASHVILLE — A new museum in Tennessee that focuses on African American music will open next month, officials said.

The National Museum of African American Music will host a socially distanced ribbon cutting Jan. 18 when it officially opens in Nashville, news outlets reported. Members of the museum will be able to take tours Jan. 23-24 and the facility will open to the public Jan. 30.

Due to rising cases of the coronavirus, the museum said it would limit the number of people inside the museum and all visitors would be required to wear masks.

Suspects use police lights in 'traffic stop' thefts

LA NEW ORLEANS — A suspect was accused of pretending to be a New Orleans police officer to pull a car over using red and blue flashing lights before stealing the driver's handgun, according to authorities.

Two men pulled the car over in an SUV with what appeared to be emergency lights mounted on the dashboard, New Orleans police said.

One of the suspects was wearing a face mask and jacket with New Orleans police badges when he approached the stopped driver, asked for a license then asked whether the motorist had weapons in the vehicle, investigators said. The driver handed over a gun, and the suspects sped off

with it, according to police.

A similar encounter was reported less than 5 miles away, officials said.

Man accused of trying to bilk woman out of \$40K

MD WESTMINSTER — A Maryland sheriff's office arrested a Virginia man for trying to bilk a woman out of nearly \$40,000 by telling her that her nephew had been arrested.

The Carroll County Sheriff's Office said in a news release that a woman received a phone call telling her that her nephew had been arrested and that it would take \$29,000 to get him out of jail, the Carroll County Times reported. A man who investigators said was working with the caller arrived at the woman's home in Sykesville and collected the cash.

The next day the woman was told she would have to get another \$10,000, the sheriff's office said. A bank teller questioned the withdrawals and called police. When a man returned to the home on Saturday to collect the additional money, he was arrested.

The sheriff's office filed multiple charges against Michael Odell Anderson, 62, of Dunn, Va., including theft of between \$25,000 and \$100,000.

WEEKEND



Demon's Souls remake
pairs well with PS5

Video games, Page 23

Good, clean 'Fun'



BRENT N. CLARKE, INVISION/AP

Garth Brooks would rather be out on the road, but for now he's
content to serve up country comfort food on his new album

Music, Page 32

WEEKEND: GADGETS & TECHNOLOGY

Getting Hollywood working

New technology gets TV, movie production up and running again

By ANOUSHA SAKOUI
Los Angeles Times

Last month, cast and crew of the Amazon series “Goliath” gathered to check in for a day of filming at Santa Clarita Studios in Los Angeles.

Despite the pandemic, the fourth season of the show is back in action, thanks in part to technology that helps track COVID-19 testing for hundreds of cast and crew members, including stars such as Billy Bob Thornton.

As people arrived on set, a COVID safety officer scanned color-coded IDs with embedded chips that could be read by portals stationed around the set. The chips would collect and track data on the movements of cast and crew in case any of them came into contact with someone who tested positive for the disease.

This system, called Safe Set, was recently launched by Culver City, Calif.-based Greg Guzzetta, a former production manager who spent the past decade providing public safety technology for live music events.

Safe Set is one of the new and existing technology companies capitalizing on the demand for safe productions. These businesses, which supply everything from remote-operated robotic cameras to tracking technology that enforces social distancing,

have emerged in response to new safety protocols on sets.

The protocols presented challenges for productions looking to resume after the pandemic prompted shutdowns in spring. Although activity has not returned to pre-pandemic levels since LA County resumed issuing permits in June, productions are finding ways to get some crews back to work.

LA-based cinematographer Aaron Grasso and producer and talent manager Josh Shadid also found inspiration for a new company after the pandemic hit.

They created a robotic camera that has been used by Netflix, Warner Bros. and other studios to help film stars remotely for marketing campaigns for such projects as the upcoming “Dune” movie, as well as for corporate communications by chief executives.

The Solo Cinebot has also been used to shoot short series, and there are plans to use it on an upcoming indie feature, the company said.

“During the pandemic shutdown, (we) were looking to figure out ways to get back to work safely,” said Grasso, co-founder of Solo Cinebot Inc. “And so we started exploring possibilities for remote options — cameras, light and sound that we could operate remotely.”

They worked on improving some of the existing technology to create a camera system that could be used by celebrities and chief executives and operated remotely by trained crew members.

They launched the Solo Cinebot business in July, farming out 10 units at \$6,800 a day, not including other labor or production costs.

The pandemic has also provided opportunities for companies specializing in virtual productions. While production was shut down, Pasadena-based Stargate Studios created virtual sets for actors to step into once the industry was up and running again, reducing the number of people on set and the need for being on location.

One thing crews have had to learn is how to work more slowly and how to socially distance while on crowded sets. That has created a demand for wearable tracing technology that can set off alerts if crew members get too close to one another.

However, some filmmakers have found these devices, similar to sports wearable devices like Fitbit, to be too noisy on film sets, Guzzetta said.

On the set of “Goliath,” cast and crew members fill in health questionnaires on an app that then generates a code to be scanned at



AL SEIB/TNS

Greg Guzzetta, CEO and founder of Safe Sets, poses with one of several contract tracing portals. The devices record the tracing tech badge all crew allowed on set are required to wear while filming.

check-in points. If they have complied with testing needs, they are allowed in. The software is linked up with laboratories to keep on top of the thousands of tests needed during a shoot.

While the pandemic won't last forever, Guzzetta believes the systems will have ongoing use.

“We know one of the other things we're going to track next year is vaccinations,” he said.



FEIYUTECH/TNS

FeiyuTech's new AK2000C handheld gimbal features motorized three-axis stabilization for shake-free video capture.

GADGETS

Handheld gimbal eliminates video shake

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

No one wants to watch a shaky, unstable video unless you are volunteering for a headache. An easy solution is FeiyuTech's new AK2000C handheld gimbal for videographers from beginners to the most seasoned pros.

If you're not familiar with a gimbal, this is a device that attaches to your camera or smartphone. It offers extra stabilization that eliminates jerky video. In a nutshell, a gimbal is an anti-shake tool that will help stabilize and smooth the video while you're in motion. You can tilt, pan, run, walk or move in 360-degree circles. Whatever you choose to film, a gimbal will help. Even with the built-in stabilization that many cameras have, they can't beat the results of a gimbal.

While they aren't new, gimbals have grown in popularity and in some cases are a necessity to smooth out camera movement.

With the FeiyuTech AK2000C, you get a motorized three-axis stabilized handheld gimbal, which is easy to use for instant results and at an affordable price. Do a quick Amazon search for “Gimbal stabilizer for DSLR camera” and you'll find hundreds of choices, including some over \$5,000, making the \$299 AK2000C even more appealing.

A big feature distinguishing the differences between gimbals is how much weight they can support. The AK2000C is good for up to 5 pounds. This in-

cludes the camera, lens, and any other accessory attached, making it ideal for most mirrorless camera setups.

The 2.5-pound AK2000C gimbal is well constructed with aerospace aluminum alloy, and a color-customized (carbon fiber texture, navy camouflage, or rosewood pattern) handle. Tripod legs attach and fold out of the bottom, which, when folded in, can be used as a monopod.

It's built with a three-axis motor lock and quick-release plate to securely attach to a camera's bottom tripod thread. A 3-inch OLED touchscreen is an app-free easy-to-use control center for switching modes instantly. Inside is a rechargeable battery, good for about 7 hours of use.

Using it is easy. Once the camera is attached and balanced, power them both on and hold it at any angle. The camera will remain level. Use it at eye level, hold it up high, at ground level, or turn it on yourself for Vlog selfie filming.

I did a test run up and down my street, doing my best to make it miss and produce unwanted movements and jerkiness, but it didn't. Going from a foot off the ground next to my dog walking and then running was quite entertaining. Even doing circles around my neighbor sitting in a lawn chair was smooth.

Whatever I attempted, it worked flawlessly. Online: feiyu-tech.com

WEEKEND: MOVIES



iStock

Roll up the red carpets

Upcoming Hollywood awards season, including Oscars, will be done virtually: And that's not entirely a bad thing

BY JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

This is the time of year when Hollywood's awards-season-industrial complex usually shifts into high gear. It's a frothy, festive run of the year's final premieres and screenings — all part of a carefully orchestrated dance to court tastemakers and, ultimately, academy voters.

The movies' eligibility may be locked in, but their Oscar fortunes are in flux right up until ballots are cast. And a glittering, glad-handing ecosystem of cocktails and Q&As works very hard to steer the conversation.

This year, with many under quarantine, theaters shuttered in major markets and, well, some more pressing concerns than who's campaigning for best supporting actor, awards season is operating in a strange COVID-19 vacuum with only a whiff of the stuff it thrives on: buzz.

For Awards Daily founder Sasha Stone, who has been covering the Oscars since 2000, it's like nothing she's ever seen — an awards season without glamour, without red carpets, without anything that feels real. She compares this year's race to the debris left by a sinking ship.

"There's no there there," says Stone. "What's missing is the

'wow' factor. That's really what the Oscars have kind of been built on."

Nevertheless, Oscar season is pushing ahead, despite the pandemic, despite a year where most of the biggest releases were postponed. The timetable has shifted two months: The Academy Awards are to be held April 25. And awards season, such as it is, has gone virtual.

Awards campaigns normally focused on doing everything they can to lure guild members and others to see their film on the big screen have had to accept that this year, films will be watched in living rooms — maybe on laptops — potentially with a lot of pausing and probably with many glances at their phone.

"The biggest challenge is: How are we going to get people to see the movies? Are they really going to watch them? What are they going to watch?" says Cynthia Swartz, one of the industry's top Oscar campaign strategists. "Ninety-five percent of an academy campaign is getting people to see the movie, ideally on the big screen. Now you can't get them to the big screen. Everyone's seeing it at home."

Keeping any movie not named "Borat" in the zeitgeist has been nearly impossible this year, either because people are over-

burdened by the pandemic, movies are underwhelming on a small screen or because viewers would rather just binge "The Queen's Gambit."

The whole rhythm of the season's calendar is also off kilter. With Oscar nominations ballots usually due in early January, most voters plow through screenings over the holidays.

"It's going to be a challenge to keep your movie sort of in the awareness all the way to April or to March, when voting happens," said Tom Bernard, co-president of Sony Pictures Classics, whose contenders this year include the dementia drama "The Father," with Anthony Hopkins. "It's going to be a very different journey between now and the end of April."

It has undoubtedly reshuffled the usual kinds of movies in the race. Many of the films that might have been among the favorites this year — Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" or Wes Anderson's "The French Dispatch" — have been postponed. That's left open leading positions for smaller films — among them Chloe Zhao's open-road ode "Nomadland," Lee Isaac Chung's Korean-American family drama "Minari" and Regina King's fictional gathering of '60s Black icons "One Night in Miami."



AP

Tom Hanks works the red carpet at the Academy Awards on Feb. 9 in Los Angeles. Hollywood's awards season has gone virtual. This time of year would normally be flush with splashy premieres, cocktail parties and star-studded screenings. This year, Oscar campaigns are having to make do with virtual Q&As and home-delivered gift baskets.

"We didn't have any blockbusters this year, so how do we know what was a hit? I'm curious if it will skew more indie-cinephile," says Steven Soderbergh, whose Meryl Streep-led "Let Them All Talk" is among the many films going straight to streaming. "The question is: Do you embrace that and say: 'That was this year,' and not be pants-on-fire about it. Just go: That was this year."

It's also left the field for Netflix to dominate. The streamer, which has fiercely sought a best-picture win after close calls with "Roma" and "The Irishman," this year has at least three best-picture candidates, including David Fincher's "Mank," Aaron Sorokin's "The Trial of the Chicago 7"

and George C. Wolfe's "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom." One of few sure things is a posthumous nomination for Chadwick Boseman for his performance in "Ma Rainey."

This year, the film academy relaxed its requirement of a theatrical run for nominees — a change some are already lobbying to make permanent.

Not everyone is sorry that awards season — an increasingly bloated, overlong, high-priced slog from September to February — has been turned upside down. Publicists used to racing from event to event can do it this year with a click, while wearing sweatpants. Costs will be lower. Stars less worn out. Maybe, some hope, it will slim down for good.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

‘76 Days’ of COVID

Director Hao Wu manages to get an inside look at the start of the outbreak in Wuhan

By JOSH ROTTENBERG
Los Angeles Times

As a documentary filmmaker, Hao Wu has focused throughout his career on smaller, character-driven stories that bridge the divide between his native China, where he grew up, and his adoptive home in America. In 2013’s “People’s Republic of Desire,” for example, Wu followed three young Chinese people as they pursued internet fame through live-streaming, while his 2019 Netflix film “All in My Family” chronicled his tradition-minded parents’ road to accepting his homosexuality.

When he was first approached in February about making a film about the growing COVID-19 pandemic, Wu wasn’t sure how to approach such an enormous, headline-dominating subject. “Normally I tend to shy away from newsy topics,” he says. “As a filmmaker, I don’t know what more I could add to a topic that’s being well covered by the news media already.”

Based in New York, where he lives with his partner and their two children, Wu began reaching out to reporters and filmmakers on the ground in Wuhan to find out what they’d been seeing.

Poring through footage from overrun hospitals where health care workers heroically struggled to save as many lives as they could, and reflecting on his own family back in China — including a dying grandfather he was unable to visit due to travel restrictions — Wu quickly realized that even this massive, globe-shaking story ultimately boiled down to the sort of intimate human drama that had always fascinated him.

The resulting film, “76 Days,” offers an alternately harrowing and inspiring look inside four hospitals in Wuhan during the country’s 2 1/2-month lockdown as it became the world’s first COVID-19 epicenter. Co-directed by Wu and two Chinese filmmakers — Weixi Chen and a state-run-media reporter who is remaining anonymous so as not to run afoul of the government — the film premiered in September at the Toronto International Film Festival and is now playing in virtual cinemas in the U.S.

Dispensing with interviews with experts and commentators, “76 Days” instead zeroes in on a handful of individuals as they navigate the crisis, including a health care worker comforting an old woman who is dying alone, a

young couple who have been separated from their newborn baby and a weary nurse returning the cellphones of deceased patients to their grieving families.

The LA Times spoke with Wu about how the film came together, what it reveals about China’s handling of the pandemic and the messages he hopes viewers take away from it.

Los Angeles Times: Throughout the making of this film you were in the U.S. while your co-directors were shooting footage in Wuhan. To this day, you’ve never met them in person. How did that collaboration work?

Wu: I’d been following the news, but by mid-February, very little video footage had come out of Wuhan. So when I started talking to reporters and filmmakers to see whether they would share what they’d been filming, my co-directors’ footage really jumped out at me. It was so striking to me that they were able to be so close to the action, to the human drama, the fear, the panic, as well as the patience of the medical workers and their efforts to comfort the sick. I talked to them and they were very gracious and started uploading their rushes.



AP

Hao Wu is a co-director of the documentary “76 Days.” The film was shot in four Wuhan hospitals. Wu said at first he was reluctant to take on a newsy topic such as COVID, but he realized that the event boiled down to the sorts of intimate human dramas that interested him.

Every day after their shoot, they would back up their footage onto the cloud and I was able to download it in New York. But because of the Great Firewall (regulating internet access in China), there was always a few days’ delay. Once I watched the rushes, I would try to talk to them at least every other day to

discuss where they were at with certain characters. I tried to give them some advice about character focus and about coverage, but in general they made most of the decisions on the ground themselves because the situation was changing really fast. Whatever character we think is interesting might be transferred the next day to a different hospital or might refuse to participate. It was very chaotic.

This movie is entirely free of politics. There are no talking heads commenting on the Chinese government’s handling of the crisis, just footage from the front lines. Was that a conscious decision early on?

As I started editing, my view about the politics shifted. At the beginning, I think the entire country of China was angry at the government. There were a lot of questions about how much did the government know, how much did it try to cover up, why was the situation so bad in Wuhan? But as soon as the virus traveled to other countries, especially the U.S., and as the U.S. fumbled its response to the pandemic, everyone in China was shocked.

Once China decided to take this super seriously, it quickly got it under control. Right now in China, their lives have gone back to normal. Movie theaters, restaurants, bars — everything has reopened. But here, we just struggle with no ending in sight.



MTV DOCUMENTARY FILMS/AP

A man holds his newborn baby in a hospital during the peak of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China, in a scene from “76 Days.” Given the constraints at the time on footage and information from Wuhan, it’s a rare window into the infancy of the pandemic.

SEE WU ON PAGE 21

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Wu: Happy just to be able to finish the film

FROM PAGE 20

That made me think more about my earlier intentions.

We did interview some whistleblower doctors who told the public about the early cases of the coronavirus. But by the time we approached them, their stories were not that fresh anymore and on camera, they were not compelling. When we put them next to the other footage, it was jarring. So in the end, I removed all these other characters. I found that less is more; the less I tell about what is happening and just let people observe, the more emotional power the film has.

As someone who grew up in China and has lived in the U.S. for many years now, do you see cultural differences between the two countries that help explain how differently the pandemic has played out in each place?

First of all, the reason I made the film this way is I saw more similarities than differences in many places. At least during the Wuhan lockdown, everyone treated the virus as a common enemy almost like in a war, and people rise to the occasion in a time of war. I think that's something we've seen everywhere: how health care workers have had so much courage to stay on the job, how volunteers are helping each other out, how we all cheer our medical workers like we did every day in New York back in March and April.

In terms of differences, I don't like to try to generalize, but I've been thinking about this issue a lot. I'm not a historian or a political commentator, but I feel like the relationship in China between the people and the state has always been different. In Chinese Confucian history, the state has always been acting sort of as a patriarch, so in times of crisis when the state asks you to do certain things people follow orders. That's not limited to China; if you look at all the East Asian countries which have been under Confucian influence — Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan — they're all like that. Here in America, there is a strong belief in individualism.

In World War I and World War II, the American government was able to mobilize the entire population to combat a common enemy. But this time, I feel like it's both the culture and a failure of leadership at the very top. I do feel like if we had a different administration and that administration was using consistent messaging and reminding the population we're at war with the virus, maybe we would have had a completely different outcome.

From early on, we've seen President Trump and many of his supporters blame China for this pandemic and call it the "China virus." Is part of your aim with the film to push back on that and get viewers to see the Chinese people in a different light?

Any message like that is secondary because as a storyteller, as I was putting the film together, the motivation was emotional. It's really about highlighting the common humanities. If anything, I feel like especially in the last couple of years with the increasingly toxic China-U.S. relationship, both sides tend to view the other side as just a monolith. We take away the individuality and agency of the individuals.

When we're talking about "China virus" and "they started this," we put that on the entire population of China as a whole. But on the ground there are so many individuals making decisions on a day-to-day basis whether they want to be part of the effort to combat the virus, whether they can be nice to each other — those are tiny, tiny decisions. So with this film I wanted to restore the human agency for these Chinese people who were trying to survive this. Otherwise they become like statistics and news headlines.

Secondly, I just want people to watch this and see that COVID is still really bad. I cannot believe there is still discussion going on even after the election about whether COVID is a hoax or not. ... People's willingness to disregard science baffles me.

There are a number of scenes in "76 Days," like sick people banging on the door to be admitted to a hospital that is being strained to its limits, that play like something from a horror movie. With the pandemic now entering its most dangerous phase, do you think this film may feel too raw for some viewers?

The reactions so far overall have been the same: Most people would say, "I have no interest in watching a film about COVID." But after they watched it, they were either shocked or incredibly moved.

For me, to be able to finish this film given all the hiccups and obstacles in making it, whatever comes I'm happy. I feel like I want to save this for posterity. This is such a great front-line, firsthand document about what it's like leading to a pandemic. So maybe more people will watch it after the pandemic is over. ... I'll be very pleased if a year or two years or 10 years from now, people seek this film out to try to understand COVID-19.



MTV Documentary Films photos

In Wuhan, China, a doctor comforts a COVID-19 patient in a scene from the documentary "76 Days."

'76 Days' an inside look at the first outbreak of COVID

BY KEVIN CRUST

Los Angeles Times

The first minutes of the experiential COVID-19 documentary "76 Days" are claustrophobic and disorienting — a feeling not unlike your first trip to the grocery store while wearing a mask. But it gets better.

In the controlled chaos of a hospital's corridors, everyone is sheathed head to toe in PPE. We see a woman screaming to say goodbye to her father and having to be restrained. A crowd bangs on a door pleading to be let in as the hospital staff reassures them that they will all be admitted if they only remain patient.

The date is Jan. 23, 2020, and it's the first day of Wuhan, China's lockdown, which will stretch the length of the film's title. Wuhan has a population of 11 million — think New York City plus Chicago — and as the epicenter of the virus that rapidly spread around the world, officials acted quickly and decisively to try to contain it.

The documentary, however, is largely concerned with the patients and frontline medical workers in the four hospitals where it was shot. If Alex Gibney's "Totally Under Control" (now on Hulu) is a macro-report of what went wrong with the U.S. response to the outbreak, "76 Days" is an apolitical, microbial view of what happens to the people at its point of impact.

About 30 minutes in, the initial daze begins to lift and individual stories emerge — though it's not always clear who is who due to the PPE or even that we are actually in different hospitals. But the connection between caregivers and their patients is powerful, even when regional dialects makes communication challenging. There is a universal tone of tough love that initially seems brusque but becomes more endearing the more we hear it.

Older patients are respectfully addressed as "Grandma," "Grandpa," "Auntie" and "Uncle," told to stay strong and encouraged to keep in touch with their families via their omnipresent mobile phones. One hospital worker tells a grandma that she can't be with her family but "we are your family now."

Memorable personalities surface even though we don't always know their names — patients are usually referred to as No. 40 or No. 98. A cranky grandpa who spends the nights wandering the halls com-



An elderly woman with COVID-19, center, is escorted by two nurses after being admitted to a hospital in Wuhan, China, in "76 Days."

plaining and the days in bed crying is revealed to be suffering from dementia, a discovery that allows the staff to better care for him. An infant nicknamed "Little Penguin," whose mother tested positive for the virus, charms the nurses with her appetite and sleep habits as her parents wait to be reunited with her. A head nurse named Yang Li is determined to return phones and death certificates to the families of patients who did not survive.

For a film that opens in a rather grim environment, "76 Days" is ultimately (and surprisingly) uplifting as it moves through February and March to Wuhan's reopening in April, thanks to the emotionally-driven verité approach taken by directors Hao Wu, Weixi Chen and a third credited as "Anonymous" (the latter two are video reporters who shot the footage while Wu edited in the U.S.). Considering China's lack of artistic freedom, it's something of a miracle the film exists.

Like Gibney's "Totally Under Control," this is not the ultimate COVID-19 documentary, simply one of the first. We are likely to be watching films on this subject for years to come, but for its sheer in-the-moment rawness, "76 Days" is one that will stick in your consciousness for some time.

"76 Days" is unrated. Running time: 99 minutes. Available on streaming services.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Sugary sentimentality
‘The Prom’ is as sweet as you’ve heard

BY PETER MARKS
The Washington Post

People who hold musicals in low regard, please pause right here. This notice will be of little use to you. No, the appraisal of the Netflix adaptation of “The Prom” — a movie that is not merely a valentine to musical theater but also a sparkly gift wrapped in a Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa-appropriate bow of undying devotion to Tony nights and Playbill collections — is reserved for the die-hard keepers of the show tune flame among you.

Why? Because “The Prom” is a campy, sentimental slab of Broadway cake, with an order of jazz hands and high kicks on the side. It comes complete with a Dance at the Gym — and if you don’t know the historic significance of that allusion, well, I’m just sorry for your loss. It also features: Nicole Kidman as a leggy chorus girl with a heart of Fosse-engraved gold; James Corden, playing a Broadway veteran fluttering about in a silver tux with the panache of a middle-aged Liberace; Keegan-Michael Key, as principal of a Midwest high school and (straight) musicals superfan ... and Meryl Streep in the hog-the-spotlight role of a scenery-chewing stage star who never met a fawning admirer she didn’t desperately need.

Directed by Ryan Murphy with a “Glee”-tastic affinity for big numbers staged in school corridors, “The Prom” streams to your home at an ideal moment. I’m not talking about the holidays; I refer instead to the nine-month-long drought in being able to sit in a theater and watch a show in which stories unfold with actors improbably bursting into song.

Who cares if the voices of almost everyone in the film sound as if they’ve been sweetened by magical elves? “The Prom’s” love of the industry it embraces and sends up — the theatrical arcana include a joke about the Drama Desk Awards — carries an exhilarating whiff of the classic, buoyant Hollywood musical comedy “Singin’ in the Rain.”

That is a very good thing, and it makes “The Prom” a very dear thing. Lovers of musicals will groove on the shamelessness of its footlights worship. The numbers by Chad Beguelin and Matthew Sklar — all filmed in hazy pink and purple lighting — and the story by Beguelin and Bob Martin originate from the 2018 stage version that ran respectably on Broadway for 309 performances.

That production, directed by Casey Nicholaw with a cast including Beth Leavel, Brooks Ashmanskas and Christopher Sieber, had a comfortably goofy comic charm and an eye on identity politics: The show turned on the fight by a gay Indiana teenager, played by Caitlin Kinnunen, who has been banned from her high school prom.

The conceit remains the main plot-advancer of the splashier movie, with enormously appealing Jo Ellen Pellman as Emma, who wants her date to be cheerleader Alyssa (Ariana DeBose). The “Footloose” setup casts an Indiana town as Backwater, USA, where the homophobic locals stigmatize and isolate Emma. “We’re going down where the necks are red, and lack of dentistry thrives,” sing the Broadway swells who arrive on the wing of a scheme, to fight for Emma and earn good press for themselves.

“We are liberals from Broadway!” de-



“The Prom,” a campy, over-the-top musical, will feed your need for musical theater ad Hollywood stars. From left to right, Andrew Rannells as Trent Oliver, James Corden as Barry Glickman, Meryl Streep as Dee Dee Allen and Nicole Kidman as Angie Dickinson.

clares Andrew Rannells, in a funny turn as an actor between bookings who bursts in on a local PTA meeting with the rest of the hyperbolically dismissive New York contingent.

Nicholaw is retained as choreographer, and his jet-propelled dances here correspond to the warp speed at which his mind worked on Broadway in this and other projects, such as “Mean Girls.” Although I will acknowledge it stretches credulity in weird ways when insensitive students who bully Emma in one scene dance like Tommy Tune in the next.

It’s also fun watching Streep and Corden ham it up; You can imagine Murphy off-camera shouting: “OK, let’s do it again, but bigger!” Kidman and Rannells get the best numbers, hers a performance lesson in adding chemistry to technique, called “Zazz”; his a production number in a mall, “Love Thy Neighbor.” You learn here, too, that comic actor Key can sing. Could we cast him in a musical when things return to some semblance of normal?

Meantime, I’ll stream “The Prom” a couple more times, maybe invite my



NETFLIX PHOTOS

Ariana DeBose, left, and Jo Ellen Pellman are the high school couple at the center of controversy in “The Prom.”

daughter over to watch with her boyfriend, because I think they’ll like it, too. But I’ll try not to blubber then.

“The Prom” is rated PG-13 for mature thematic elements, some suggestive and sexual references and strong language. Running time: 132 minutes. Available to stream on Netflix.

‘I’m Your Woman’ puts a vivid new spin on the ’70s crime thriller

BY JUSTIN CHANG
Los Angeles Times

When we first meet Jean (Rachel Brosnahan), she seems the very picture of a mobster’s trophy wife: beautiful, sullen, entitled, expendable. She’s lounging in her backyard in a leafy Pennsylvania suburb, smoking, nursing a drink and trying to rip off the tag still clinging to the fur-fringed gown she’s wearing. It’s the ’70s, as you can deduce from her hexagonal sunglasses, the sound of Bobbie Gentry crooning on the soundtrack and even the reverse-zoom movement of the camera as it slowly pulls back, revealing — in the first of many crucial shifts in perspective — the smallness and stultifying loneliness of Jean’s world.

Jean’s husband, Eddie (Bill Heck), is a thief. She knows that much at least, and is content not knowing much more. His dirty dealings have paid for her fabulous outfits and their comfortable house, with its ostentatious wallpaper and period-perfect



AMAZON STUDIOS/TNS

Rachel Brosnahan stars as a mobster’s wife in “I’m Your Woman.”

yellow, browns and beiges.

They’ve also paid for the infant Eddie mysteriously brings home and plops into her arms that morning: “He’s our baby,” he says, and that’s that. Jean has learned not to ask too many questions — not now, as she accepts the child with shocked resignation, and not later, when Eddie closes the door on her with a smile, retreating into the next room with his gangster buddies.

That image is an obvious allusion to the ending of “The Godfather.” But it marks only the beginning of “I’m Your Woman,” Julia Hart’s beautiful, engrossing and potentially subversive new crime thriller. Rather than immersing us in the sordid details of Eddie’s racket, the story leaves us stranded on the outside with Jean, a character who might have been quickly sidelined in a different movie: ignored,

smacked around, maybe killed off.

One of the virtues of “I’m Your Woman” is its adherence to the present tense (emphasis on the “tense”) and its poker-faced refusal to even foreshadow what’s to come. Jean knows nothing of her husband’s business, which is both a mercy and a liability, and her ignorance persists even when his latest gambit goes terribly wrong. Soon she’s escaping into the night with her baby, Harry, and an armed protector, Cal, who is intent on keeping her one step ahead of some unnamed pursuers.

Warning Jean never to lower her guard, Cal ushers her into a menacing world of near-death escapes and not-so-safe houses. Hart can build suspense with the smallest of gestures, as when a friendly/nosy neighbor comes a-knocking. It’s all quite the wake-up call for Jean, who at one point finds herself alone in a way she’s never been before, with only little Harry to keep her

company. And if her domestic frustrations are telegraphed with perhaps one too many shots of her struggling to fry an egg, the gradual awakening of her own maternal instincts — and her embrace of a child she’s still getting to know — is among the picture’s subtlest satisfactions.

It would be hard to imagine a more dramatic departure for Brosnahan from her Emmy-winning turn in “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel,” in which she gave us the 1950s New York housewife as blithely overconfident motor-mouth. In “I’m Your Woman,” she doesn’t just vanish behind long blond tresses and those big, moody shades. She shows us a woman confronting moment-to-moment terror for the first time — and discovering, in that confrontation, a resourcefulness and sheer nerve that she never knew she possessed.

“I’m Your Woman” is rated R for violence and language. Running time: 120 minutes. Available on Amazon Prime Video.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

Demon's Souls: The ideal PS5 launch game

Cutting-edge technology transforms 2009 title into a stunningly immersive experience

BY GENE PARK
The Washington Post

The Valley of Defilement. The Tower of Latria. Every time I revisit a Souls game, trepidation bubbles in my gut before I realize I'm only worrying about Demon's Souls. Every pang of fear I get when playing a Souls game stems from my first steps through this game in 2009.

Yes, Dark Souls is the game that popularized the Souls-like genre. But it was Demon's Souls, with its level design and atmosphere, that embedded itself into my memory. The PlayStation 3 cult hit was nothing like I'd ever played before. Fellow games critic Brad Gallaway, who recommended it to me, then called it "the fruition of a dream three generations old."

I was, and still am, inclined to agree. This PlayStation 5 remake is a blessing for those of us who traveled through Boletaria 11 years ago. And what nasty surprises await everyone who skipped ahead and cut their teeth on Dark Souls and its ilk. This is where the real Souls genre begins.

To reduce this launch title as a mere remake of a PlayStation 3 game is to sell short this astounding achievement by Bluepoint Games. This is easily the best-looking game on any console today. More importantly, it clarifies that virgin voyage into this genre in ways I never thought we'd experience.

In 2009, the ambition of the level design here was hampered by technology. Old-school video game "fog" and darkness would obscure the darkest regions of the game, most notably the aforementioned Valley of Defilement, which set the bog standard for similar levels, like the infamous Blighttown of Dark Souls. Here, I can actually see what the entire valley looks like, far more vast and cavernous than even my imagination allowed.

On social media, there are flashes of disagreement with Bluepoint's design decisions, particularly with certain enemies like the Fat Minister and the Maneater boss; the increase in

graphical fidelity has led to them losing that chimerical quality which came from the haunting simplicity of the PS3 polygons. But there are really only a few examples that might seem disagreeable, all dwarfed by how each of the five worlds have been lovingly reimaged. And after all, Demon's Souls is FromSoftware's take on Western fantasy. It's not a huge leap to see these creatures reconceived by a Western developer.

Bluepoint Games has created what I believe is the ideal PlayStation 5 launch game. First of all, it was Sony's Japan studio that suggested to FromSoftware to conceive this game in the first place. The Souls-like genre is essentially a Sony first-party creation, before FromSoftware decided to branch out with Dark Souls two years later.

PlayStation CEO Jim Ryan says that the PS5 is all about sensory engagement. And Demon's Souls is a game that demands attention to its details, its movements, how every weapon feels, as well as its sights and sounds. It was one of the first games that asked players to behave as if they were actually creeping through the dark halls of the Tower of Latria, hearing bells jingle down the hallway as some Eldritch horror awaits. Running through strange, unlit hallways would be ill advice in real life, and it's a quick way to die in Demon's Souls. Every level must be approached with caution and keen situational awareness.

The "game feel" is enhanced with 3D audio and the DualSense haptic feedback. The controller now mimics what your character's hands might be feeling. If your sword hits a wooden shield, your controller will vibrate softer than against brassy, grinding steel shields and walls. When the sword in your right hand trembles with magical energy, so too will the right side of your controller. Every squish of flesh when you turn your blade will be heard from the controller's speakers, all timed perfectly to your on-screen action. With headphones on, it's true that you can almost feel arrows whiz by



Bluepoint Games photos

The new, revitalized version of Demon's Souls for PlayStation 5, a revelation 11 years ago on the PlayStation 3, is now easily the best-looking game on any console, anywhere.

your left ear, while a torch crackles to the right of your head. It's a Souls experience like we've never felt, heard or seen.

Demon's Souls now looks like what I imagined console games might look like late in the PS5's generational cycle, yet here it is for the PS5's launch. The new engine adds clarity to the context of each world. The castle walls of Boletaria look more like a place of recent unrest and chaos, while the Tower of Latria's upper and lower levels now make geographical sense. Latria is split between two planes, one above the fog in the highest floors of the tower, and another way below the fog, knee deep in mud and blood. My 2009 brain never was able to make sense of the architecture until now, when I'm finally able to see the pillars and foundations that hold the whole region together.

The facial animations are another controversial addition, but in my eyes, they only add to the game's otherworldly ghastliness. PlayStation-exclusive titles like Uncharted and The Last of Us have pioneered facial animation technology to express convincing emotion. Bluepoint Games seems to flip that convention on its head. The faces convey emotion, but not in any subtle way like we'd see in Ellie or Joel, but mimicking Kabuki-style exaggerations that belie a deeper, unspoken pain. And the new orchestral remixes now take cues from your action, adding rare moments of cinematic flair to boss battles in an otherwise deadly quiet journey.

The biggest game-changing feature of this console generation is also this game's biggest reason for celebration: fast loading times. Unlike later Souls-like titles, Demon's Souls is divided



The "game feel" of Demon's Souls is enhanced on the PlayStation 5 with 3D audio and the DualSense haptic feedback.



The settings in Demon's Souls have the complexity of real locations.

up among five different regions, instead of one universal map. This gave the game a classic structure, like World 1-1 in Super Mario Bros. But loading between the hub and between each region in five seconds or less ties the game together in ways older hardware simply couldn't. Leveling up, grinding, dying and trying again are all the more pleasurable and easier to do with this friction largely removed from the process.

The game itself is an all-time classic. The settings FromSoft-

were created in 2009 have the complexity of real places, which is why the game played so vividly to fans of role-playing games. And now Bluepoint has given Demon's Souls all the details and polish needed to fully realize this game's idealized concept of "role-playing immersion." It was a game of boundless creativity, and to have it reimaged so vividly by Bluepoint Games is nothing short of a minor miracle.

Platforms: PlayStation 5
Online: playstation.com/en-us/games/demons-souls

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Seaside traditions in Portugal’s Nazaré

As we’ve had to postpone our travels because of the pandemic, I believe a weekly dose of travel dreaming can be good medicine. Here’s a reminder of the fun that awaits us in Europe at the other end of this crisis.

Settling into a grungy fishermen’s bar in the beach town of Nazaré (two hours north of Lisbon), I order a plate of barnacles. Yes, barnacles — called percebes here. My waiter is happy to demonstrate how to eat them: dig your thumb between the shell and the leathery skin to rip the skin off. The meat stays attached to the shell. Bite that off and wash it down with local beer. Fresh barnacles are expensive, as they cling to rocks in the turbulent waves along the coast and are difficult and dangerous to harvest. Savoring my plate of barnacles at sundown, I gaze out at the surf attacking that stark bluff. Because I know that’s where they were gathered just hours ago, they seem like money well spent.

Perched on a far corner of Europe, Nazaré is one of my favorite beach towns. It greets me with the energetic applause of the surf, widows with rooms to rent and fishermen mending nets. This fishing-town-turned-tourist-retreat, set between cork groves, eucalyptus trees and the open sea, is a place to relax in the sun. Though many locals seem older than

most of its buildings, the town feels like a Portuguese Coney Island — humming with young people who flock here for the beach. Off-season, it’s almost tourist free — the perfect time to take in the wild surf and get a feel for a traditional way of life.



Rick Steves

The town’s layout is simple: a grid of skinny streets with sun-bleached apartment blocks stretching away from an expansive beach. The beach — in many places as wide as a soccer field — sweeps from the new harbor in the south to stark cliffs in the north.

Nazaré (population: 15,000) is famous for its traditionally clad women who — at least according to local lore — wear skirts with seven petticoats. Is that one for each day, or for the seven colors of the rainbow, or ...? Make up your own legend. While the story you’ll hear may be an invention for the tourists, it contains an element of truth. In the old days, women would wait on the beach for their fishermen to sail home. To keep warm in the face of a cold sea wind, they’d wear several petticoats so they could fold layers over their heads, backs, and legs as needed. Even today, older and more traditional women wear skirts made bulky by several — but maybe not seven — petticoats. The ensemble — with boldly clash-



DOMINIC ARIZONA BONUCCELLI/Ricksteves.com

Two hours north of Lisbon, Portugal, Nazaré hugs its wide beach on the Atlantic.

ing colors — is completed with house slippers, a hand-embroidered apron, woolen cape, head scarf and flamboyant jewelry, including chunky gold earrings.

People-watching here is like going to a living art gallery. The beach, tasty seafood and a funicular ride are the bright lights of my lazy memories. The funicular leads from the beach up to the Sítio neighborhood atop the cliffs. Sítio, with its own church, museum, and main square, feels like a separate village.

Along the beach, a local folk-music group plays and dances. This troupe — with petticoats twirling to the beat of a percussion section of bongo gourds and pine cones grating against each other — has been kicking up sand since 1934.

This article was adapted from Rick’s new book, *For the Love of Europe*.

Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. You can email Rick at rick@ricksteves.com.

It’s Christmas year round at these destinations

With the most eagerly anticipated events of the season canceled due to COVID-19 concerns, Christmas in Europe looks much different in 2020. While we’ll have to wait another year to stroll past Christmas market stalls, sip mulled wine or glide around the ice rinks, there are certain places where the spirit of the holidays is present year round. Once travel’s a go again, consider getting your pent-up Christmas fix at one of these destinations:

Seiffen, Germany: The Erzgebirge, or Ore Mountains of Saxony in eastern Germany, are synonymous with Christmas tradition. Long a center for silver and tin mining, as deposits were depleted, local residents turned to crafts such as lace making, weaving and carving. Gradually Seiffen emerged as the center of the startup industry of carving Christmas pyramids, nutcrackers and incense burners resembling men smoking pipes.

In 1699, town resident Johann Friedrich Hiemann took some wooden toys to the Nuremberg market, at the time a major center for the toy trade in Europe, where they found eager buyers. Today, some 120 families and five factories in Seiffen produce this folk art reminiscent of a long-past time.

Numerous craft stores and workshops can be visited year round. The Ore Mountain Toy Museum explores the history of toys and regional Christmas traditions, while the Open Air Museum Seiffen offers 14 historical buildings and workshops in which traditional wood-turning techniques are demonstrated.



Karen Bradbury

Online: en.seiffen.de

Lauscha, Germany: This city in Thuringia, in the former East Germany, is considered home of the original glass Christmas tree ornaments. The glassworks established in 1597 first turned out apothecary bottles and drinking goblets, but by the mid-18th century, the latest technology enabled the production of mirrored glass beads that could be strung together to make eye-catching chains. A popular story holds that when a poor local glassblower couldn’t afford the apples, nuts and sweets that typically adorned the Christmas trees of his day, he turned to making hollow glass shapes to decorate it. A picture of Queen Victoria’s Christmas tree covered in glass baubles launched the decorating trend in England, and after F.W. Wool-



iStock

Kaethe Wohlfahrt’s Christmas store in Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Germany, is one of the touristy medieval town’s hottest destinations.

worth saw the ornaments of a trip to Germany, he began importing them stateside. Several companies in Lauscha produce glass ornaments to date, among them Krebs Glas, which offers more than 5,000 different glass ornaments for sale in its factory outlet. Guided tours of its facilities are also offered.

Online: krebslauscha.de

Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Germany: An ideally preserved, medieval walled city makes a fitting location for a museum dedicated to Christmas decor and traditions. The “Deutsches Weihnachtsmuseum” displays histor-

ical Christmas tree baubles, nutcrackers, pyramids, smokers, Advent calendars, wreaths and more. The museum is an offspring of Kaethe Wohlfahrt’s “Christmas Village,” the famous company specializing in Christmas decorations, also in Rothenburg. Other Kaethe Wohlfahrt shops in Germany are located in Bamberg, Berlin, Heidelberg, Miltenberg, Nuremberg, Oberramberg and Ruedesheim.

Online: kaethe-wohlfahrt.com

Naples, Italy: The Presepio, or nativity scene, is a must-have for much of Italy’s population. For one-stop shopping, stroll down

Via San Gregorio Armeno and see why this narrow, cave-like passageway has earned the nickname Christmas Alley. Workshops lining the street turn out figures of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the wise men and shepherds throughout the year. In Naples, it’s common to see baby Jesus and the wise men accompanied by figures of beloved soccer players, politicians, and other icons of popular culture. Naples’ San Martin Charterhouse Museum (Certosa di San Martino) also offers a permanent exhibit of nativity scenes.

Online: tinyurl.com/y4m6cen7

Krakow, Poland: A Szopka is a historical and nativity scene with a special effect: loose replicas of Krakow’s own buildings serve as the inspiration for these fantastic and colorful models reaching dimensions up to 6 feet high and 10 feet long. The szopka building tradition dates back to the 19th century. Since 1937, local authorities have staged an annual competition for the most beautiful and original szopka. The contest takes place on the first Thursday of December each year in the main market square, and the best of them go on display in the Historical Museum of Krakow.

Online: krakow-info.com/szopki.htm

WEEKEND: FOOD AND DINING

Not elegant,
but still tasty

Chateau Kefraya turning out succulent Lebanese cuisine in Wiesbaden even though fine-dining atmosphere is on hold

BY DAVID EDGE
Stars and Stripes
I'd love to tell you about the Chateau Kefraya's elegant setting, and the experience of sipping the wine the restaurant gets its name from while nibbling on the small-plate appetizers elevated to an art form in Lebanese cuisine.

When coronavirus restrictions are over someday, I probably will. But for now, this is one of Wiesbaden's better options for takeout and delivery. Its Lebanese food will reward those looking for something new and impress others familiar with what it should be, while sating the less adventurous with familiar meats and a range of Italian food.

The takeout menu lacks some of the enticing course meals available in house, but it still boasts plenty of a la carte appetizers and platters, with main-stays like hummus, tabbouleh salad and flatbread. The entrees are more limited but do include kabobs and lamb cutlets, along with some salads typical of the region.

The Italian side includes pizzas with an assortment of toppings and several types of pasta dishes, including gnocchi, tagliatelle and lasagna.

Since this is primarily a Lebanese restaurant, I stayed focused on that. I'd have liked to try some



of their Lebanese wines by the glass — winemaking in the country goes back to the Phoenicians producing and trading wine thousands of years ago. Chateau Kefraya's website even notes that the biblical story of Jesus turning water into wine happened near what is now a Lebanese village.

But for delivery, the only option is to buy a bottle ranging from 15-25 euros, so I opted to stick with what I had at home.

I ordered two appetizers. The first was the fatayer bi sabanegh, which resembles an Indian samosa. The fatayer bi sabanegh is a light pastry filled with spinach, minced onions and lemon zest. When I first bit into it, the earthiness of the spinach and the brightness of the lemon was a very pleasant surprise. The minced onion rounded out the flavors.

I also choose baba ghanoush. The traditional roasted eggplant dish was mixed with tahini paste, garlic and lemon juice, with some olive oil and pomegranate seeds on top, and served alongside flatbread. The texture is very mushy, so avoid it if that turns



Grilled lamb with a roasted pepper, served with fried potatoes and a side salad, delivered from Chateau Kefraya, a Lebanese restaurant in Wiesbaden-Erbenheim, Germany.



The fatayer bi sabanegh from Chateau Kefraya include fillings of spinach, minced onions and lemon zest.

you off, but I enjoyed it. For my main course, I ordered the grilled chicken breast with fried potato rounds and a side salad. The chicken was fork tender and very juicy, seasoned simply with a little salt. The char

marks added flavor without bitterness, which impressed me because I normally don't like any form of charred meat. The restaurant is located in the Wiesbaden-Erbenheim area, making it a short drive from Clay

Chateau Kefraya
Location: Berliner Strasse 252, 65205 Wiesbaden
Hours: Monday-Friday 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. to 11 p.m., Saturday and Sunday 5 p.m. to 11 p.m.; hours subject to change due to coronavirus restrictions.
Prices: 5-18 euros. They accept credit cards.
Menu: German
Information: Phone, 0611-716-7300. Online, chateau-kefraya.de. The website is in German. Delivery also available through Lieferando.de, which has English translation.

David Edge

Kaserne and the Hainerberg area. While many restaurants have turned to delivery to support themselves during the pandemic, they don't all have their games together the way Chateau Kefraya does.

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Dinner is fast with these 30-minute gingery, garlicky chicken thighs

BY ANN MALONEY
The Washington Post
Whenever someone shares a recipe with me, I feel honored and pretty darn confident that it will be good.

There is a reason a dish travels from one set of hands to another. It might be because it is foolproof, but often it is loved because it comes with a memory or a connection. It's the pie someone's mom made every Christmas. It's a casserole that landed on every Sunday dinner table. Or it is a reflection of a person's heritage and culture.

It has been tested again and again and passed those tests.

That handing down of recipes is the premise of "In Bibi's Kitchen" (Ten Speed Press, 2020) by Hawa Hassan, the founder of the sauce company Basbaas and native of Somalia, with co-author Julia Turshen of New York.

When I took my first bite of the Akoho



TOM McCORKLE/For The Washington Post
Akoho Misy Sakamalao (Chicken Thighs With Garlic, Ginger and Coconut Oil).

Misy Sakamalao, which is from the chapter on Madagascar, I could see how it would move from one home cook's table to the next. I could imagine how the fragrance of the dish could create visceral memories of the flavors to come.

Chicken thighs are rubbed with salt,

garlic and ginger and then cooked in hot coconut oil in a cast-iron skillet until nicely browned. That's it.

Hassan describes these chicken thighs as "incredibly simple to make" and serves them over rice, spooning the chicken juices on top. On the side, she suggests roasted tomatoes or greens. The first time I made the thighs I followed Olga's advice and cooked the accompanying rice using coconut milk and water for the liquid and enjoyed them with a big green salad.

The recipes testifies to the near universal appeal of well-cooked chicken thighs. I'll make this dish again, and I'll recommend it to a friend or two — passing it on.

Akoho Misy Sakamalao
Ingredients
6 garlic cloves, minced or finely grated
2 tablespoons finely grated fresh ginger
1 teaspoon kosher salt

2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs
2 tablespoons coconut oil
Directions

In a large bowl, stir together the garlic, ginger and salt until combined. Add the chicken to the bowl and, using your hands, rub the aromatics all over the chicken. If you have time, cover the bowl and refrigerate for up to 24 hours.

When ready to cook the chicken, warm a large cast-iron skillet over medium heat until you can hold your hand about 5 inches above it for no longer than 2 seconds. Add the oil and heat until it shimmers. Add the chicken and cook, turning occasionally, until deeply browned and cooked through, about 15 to 20 minutes, adjusting the heat under the pan as necessary, if the garlic and ginger start to burn.

Divide the chicken among plates and serve warm.
Serves 4.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS



PHOTOS BY IMMANUEL JOHNSON/Stars and Stripes

The outside of the Weltenburg Abbey in Kelheim, Germany. The abbey was founded around 600 AD and has survived many misfortunes, including two world wars, making it Bavaria's oldest monastery.

Haven of peace, tranquility

Enjoy a quiet day at Weltenburg Abbey, Bavaria's oldest monastery

BY IMMANUEL JOHNSON
Stars and Stripes

There are many reasons to go to Weltenburg Abbey in Bavaria. One is the beer, brewed on the monastery grounds for centuries. Another is the church with its magnificent baroque interior. A third is the peace and quiet that goes hand in hand with monastery life. And the fourth is if you're considering becoming a Benedictine monk — there's a chapter on the abbey's website that will help you achieve that ambition, but the criteria are pretty strict and women are excluded.

Founded in 617 by wandering monks from Luxeuil monastery in what is now Burgundy in France, Weltenburg is the oldest monastery in Bavaria. It has survived everything from financial mismanagement to marauding Hungarians in the 10th century, illness brought into the enclosed religious community by Austrian soldiers who were billeted there in the 1700s during the Austrian war of succession, secularization in the 19th century, and a couple of world wars.

Today, it stands on the banks of the Danube River as a haven of peace, just an hour and a half's drive away from the cacophony and bustle of Grafenwoehr Training Area.

Although many of the attractions of Weltenburg are closed because of the coronavirus pandemic, including the brewery, restaurant, overnight accommodation and guided tours of the church, it's still possible to sample them.

Weltenburger Barock Dunkel — the

dark beer brewed at the monastery — can be ordered online at 7.50 euros for a six-pack, and is also available from beverage outlets.

The beer, which the monks say has won more awards than any other specialty brew — and monks don't lie — is the happy union of centuries of tradition and modern technology, the abbey says on its website. "It matures in its own rock cellar for up to six weeks, which gives it an inimitable taste," the website says.

The monastery brewery also produces a couple of lagers, wheat beer and other brews.

Next, the church. The sacred building looks fairly nondescript from the outside, but inside is a jewel of the late baroque period. Dramatic paintings adorn the ceiling and walls, and on the main altar, there stands an ornate statue of St. George, to whom the church is dedicated.

While guided tours of the church are not taking place during the coronavirus pandemic, it is possible to visit without a guide.

The only other parts of the monastic complex that are open during the coronavirus pandemic are the souvenir shop and, of course, the great outdoors, including hiking trails that stretch for miles through the Bavarian landscape.

Between the monastery and the town of Kelheim, the Danube Gorge — the point where, some 200,000 years ago, the Danube cut through limestone to create the river we now know — twists and turns through the countryside.

The gorge, including the Weltenburg Gap, where the river meanders past walls



The courtyard of the Weltenburg Abbey. The souvenir shop (left) and the church (middle) remain open during the coronavirus pandemic, but the museum (right), restaurant, accommodation and brewery are closed.

of rock, some soaring more than 200 feet above the river, is best viewed from a riverboat in the summer — provided the pandemic is behind us.

Lastly, the monastery offers guidance on its website to those considering life in a religious order. (kloster-weltenburg.de/wie-wird-man-moench)

Novice monks have to be Roman Catholic, single, male, at least 18 years old and

On the QT

Location: Asamstrasse 32, 93309 Kelheim. The monastery complex is about 1 ½ hours south of Grafenwoehr.

Food: The monastery tavern restaurant and brewery is closed due to the coronavirus, but when it reopens, it will once again serve traditional German dishes and sweets, and the monastery's beer.

Time: Every day from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Hours may vary on holidays.

Cost: Free to walk around the abbey grounds and visit the church.

Information: Online: kloster-weltenburg.de, phone: +49 09441 2040.

Immanuel Johnson



The ceiling fresco inside the church at Weltenburg Abbey. The church, built in the 18th century, is considered one of Europe's foremost examples of late baroque art and architecture.

Stars and Stripes reporter Karin Zeitvogel contributed to this report. johnson.immanuel@stripes.com
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WEEKEND: TRAVEL



Postcards from the edge

A love letter from Timbuktu? A project in Mali delivers delight — and a lifeline for tour guides in the ancient city

BY BAILEY BERG
Special to The Washington Post

It's not often that Phil Paoletta receives disgruntled emails about his and Ali Nialy's project, but when he does, it's because someone thinks their West Africa-based company is a scam.

The duo started Postcards From Timbuktu in 2016 with a mission to help unemployed tour guides gain an income by sending cards from a city that's become shorthand for a far-flung, if not imaginary, place.

"They think Timbuktu isn't a real place and we're printing fake postcards and stamps to make it seem like something's coming from a place in a joke," Paoletta said.

It then falls to Paoletta to explain that Timbuktu is, in fact, a real city, that the person who wrote the message is not a grifter a la a fictitious "Nigerian prince," and that one of their friends or family members ordered a postcard for them thinking they would enjoy receiving correspondence from Mali.

More often than not, though, the recipients of the postcards are delighted, especially this year, when international tourism has largely come to a halt. In fact, the armchair-travel nature of the postcards has led to the project's most successful year yet.

"We had a lot of postcards for people that were stuck in quarantine and wished they could be traveling," Paoletta said. "This way, at least, they have a postcard that traveled all the way from Timbuktu."

The idea for the project came the same day Paoletta, an American hotel and restaurant owner in Bamako, the capital city, received mail from a friend in the United States — his first parcel in six years. He was thinking about how delightful it was to receive the letter when Nialy came to visit him.

The latter had been a guide in the UNESCO World Heritage city since elementary school and had previously made a comfortable living walking tourists through his hometown, bringing the fabled city to life with visits to mud brick, earthen mosques and museums that show the history of the once-important trading post. But after Islamist militant occupation and attacks in 2012, tourism went into a free fall. The next year, the French military intervened and conditions improved, but numbers dwindled further

after a series of suicide bombings in 2015 and lingering insecurity. Now the top half of Mali is all but divorced from the southernmost half, at least for foreigners. Even if Paoletta, who has lived in Mali for a decade, wanted to go visit Nialy, he'd be turned around by officials before he got to Timbuktu.

As Nialy explained how dire the guide industry in Timbuktu had become, the idea for their venture clicked for Paoletta.

After a successful test run to determine whether a postcard from Timbuktu would get to its destination in other countries, they assembled a team of ghostwriters and set up a website. The process for ordering a card written and postmarked in Timbuktu is fairly simple: pay \$10, dictate the verbiage and choose a design.

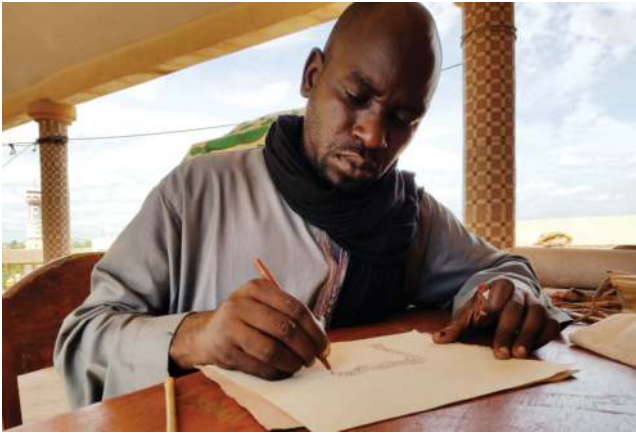
Some of the images on the cards Paoletta shot himself, others were gifted by professional photographers, and some are public-domain historical pictures of Timbuktu. Alternatively, the sender can opt to have a design colored by kids at the elementary school. There's no telling what will be drawn on the card, but the proceeds will help the students get new school supplies (which more recently have included hand sanitizer).

From there, one of the unemployed guides hand-writes the message (usually in English, German or French, but they'll try their best with any language or alphabet submitted), and off it's sent.

While the concept is straightforward, Paoletta said the execution in Mali often follows a more meandering path. On average, the cards take two or three weeks to arrive, but there have been exceptions. The biggest problems Paoletta and Nialy have encountered is an inability to track the postcards. Once they've been dropped off at the post office, they have no way of knowing where in the world they are. Still, they've had very few complaints, which Paoletta finds refreshing.

"We've become so accustomed to ordering something and being able to track it down to the meter," Paoletta said. "But these cards go on long, unpredictable journeys. It's surprising and nice that people seem to accept this timeline."

The wording for the myriad dispatches have spanned the substance spectrum. Some people write love letters,



PHIL PAOLETTA/The Washington Post

Calligrapher Boubacar Sadeck works on a Postcards From Timbuktu order in July 2018. Customers pick the image and dictate what they want the postcards to say.

some try to fool others into thinking they're actually traveling, and some send cryptic messages anonymously. Paoletta said they have even witnessed family mediations via the team's handwritten letters. Passive-aggressive notes, presumably, hit differently when they've come from a city on the edge of the Sahara desert.

Of the \$10 fee for the card, the guides usually make a little more than \$3 on average, though it varies depending on how much it costs to ship the card. Some of the funds also go toward printing and website fees.

"We have grown up in [tourism], so this alternative income is very important for us in such a way that we can fulfill our daily needs and help our families," Nialy explained.

When there are big orders, the guides do fairly well — at least compared with other workers in Timbuktu. The average salary in Mali is just under \$80 a month, a sum they can reach penning roughly two dozen postcards. While it's not as much as they were making as guides (when it was safer for tourists to visit Timbuktu, they earned about \$40 a day during peak season), it is consistent. Without this project, the guides probably wouldn't have any income at all — jobs are scarce, and many have been guides since they were 7 or 8 years old, so they lack formal education.

"I don't want to say it's a long-term solution, but it is critical for them, especially since 2015," Paoletta said.

Writing the cards also allows them to continue sharing their city with others.

"I have the feeling that I'm doing what I like the most, which is tourism, even though the context is different," Nialy said.

Paoletta echoed that sentiment, saying the guides know there's a whiff of the mystical around their city, and "they enjoy showing people that it's a real place, with real people, with interesting things happening there."



PHIL PAOLETTA/The Washington Post

Above and top: collection of postcards dispatched by Postcards From Timbuktu. The West African business began as a way to employ out-of-work tour guides in the ancient city.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Where deer roam

Visitors to Nara Park in Japan are encouraged to feed the animals

By ERICA EARL
Stars and Stripes

If you have ever fantasized about having a woodland princess moment straight out of a fairy tale, a visit to Nara Park in the south-central portion of Japan's main island may be in order.

The park is home to more than 1,000 free-roaming deer, considered to be messengers of the gods in Japanese culture. Locals have considered Nara Park sacred since its establishment in 1880.

In a gorgeous setting of shrines and temples, guests can purchase rice crackers at the park to hand-feed the deer. It's a sweet moment that makes for great photos and videos.

Be warned, the deer get quite ravenous. When I went, the deer started following me in hordes as soon as I bought the crackers. While that was adorable, it was

also a little intense to have more than a dozen deer licking me, crawling around my feet and chomping at me in competition with one another to get fed. A smallish deer even took a bite at my backside.

One of the deer snack stalls had a pamphlet suggesting that a dip in tourism due to the coronavirus pandemic contributed to the deer being exceptionally eager to nibble.

Prices vary from stall to stall, but on average a small packet costs \$1 and a larger packet costs about \$3. Both go very fast as the deer do not patiently wait for you to break and scatter the treats and will nab the entire stack right out of your hand if you aren't careful.

In addition to hand-feeding the deer like Snow White, at your own risk, there is more to Nara Park that makes it a worthy destination, such as the Todai-ji Temple.

Until 1998, the massive structure was



CHRISTINA YATES/Stars and Stripes

Nearly 1,000 deer roam freely at Nara Park in Nara, Japan. The park is considered sacred, and deer are thought to be messengers of the gods in Japanese culture.

the world's largest wooden building. It features a beautiful bronze Buddha statue, but the most memorable feature is Buddha's Nostril.

The "nostril" isn't actually in the statue's nose, but a hole in one of the temple's large wooden pillars. It is said that guests who crawl through the pillar will be granted enlightenment and atonement in their next life.

Nara Park is a public park, and admission is free, although there is no free parking on the property so guests will need to find a paid lot. Entrance to the temple is about \$5.

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On the QT

DIRECTIONS

About six hours by car or three hours by bullet train from central Tokyo. Google Plus code: MRPV+26 Nara

TIMES

The public park is open 24/7, although daylight hours are the best time to see the deer. Todai-ji is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

COSTS

Admission to the park is free. Rice crackers for the deer cost \$1-\$3, depending on size. Entrance to Todai-ji is about \$5. Entrance to the Nara National Museum is about \$7 for adults and free for high school students and below.

FOOD

The park offers snacks inside some of its gift shops, and immediately outside the park is a row of cafes.

Erica Earl



ERICA EARL/Stars and Stripes

Built in 1880, Nara Park is home to a host of temples and shrines.



NANCY HUANG

One of the more notable attractions at Nara Park is Buddha's Nostril, a narrow passage in one of the pillars at the Todai-ji.



ERICA EARL/Stars and Stripes

Deer get up close and personal at Nara Park in Nara, Japan.

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WEEKEND: FOOD

A delicious holiday tradition reimaged

Turn your annual cookie swap into a virtual party

BY ANN MALONEY
The Washington Post

We might have to do without some of our favorite traditions in this 2020 holiday season, but there was one that I was determined to experience: a holiday cookie swap with friends.

With social distancing, the swap couldn't involve inviting a big group of pals to the house to lay their trays of cookies out on the dining room table. Instead, a small group of us selected a batch of sturdy sweets and agreed to ship them on a certain date. Then, we gathered for a virtual cookie swap on Zoom.

We did our swap in late October as a test run so that we could share our tips with you as the height of holiday cookie season approaches. Our group was scattered across the United States, so we got a good sense of how long cookies take to arrive.

We wanted to keep this loose and fun, so each person picked a cookie with the only criterion that it could survive bouncing its way across the country and that we would end up with varied flavors and ingredients.

We shipped the cookies on Oct. 19 and set the Zoom call for seven days later, just to be sure the cookies would arrive on time. All went well. The only thing that dampened our experience: Postage cost. Each of us spent a total of \$50 to \$60 shipping four packages of a dozen cookies each to four friends.

"I was surprised how expensive it was to ship," said Adriana Garcia of New Orleans, a sentiment echoed by everyone.

If that extra expense isn't a dealbreaker for you and you want to host your own swap, here's what we learned:

Pick a ringleader

You need a swap coordinator, who can help the group pick a reasonable deadline for choosing each cookie, collect addresses

and select a shipping date with enough lag time — at least five to seven days — before the mutually agreed-upon virtual swap-party date. Also, this person should check in with folks periodically with reminders to make sure everything is progressing smoothly.

Keep it simple

It's hard to leave anyone out, but we wanted to keep the group to just five people to keep it manageable. This is the time for a sweet exchange, so no competition for a best cookie prize and no requirements to send along recipes.

Safety first

Coronavirus transmission by food is unlikely, experts say, but always remember to thoroughly wash your hands before, during and after cooking. You may wish to wear a mask or food-safe gloves as an extra layer of protection. If, however, you are sick, do not make food for others.

Think sturdy cookies

This is not the time for cream-filled confections or treats with delicate, soft frosting. Think dense bar cookies, biscotti or drop-style cookies, such as chocolate chip or oatmeal. Also, pick cookies that you know or think will taste good even when they're several days old. And be sure the selected cookies are different enough from one another to provide variety. Imagine them together on a platter.

Decide how many cookies

We each shipped a dozen cookies to each participant, so that meant everyone had to make at least four dozen. That also meant each of us ended up with four dozen (in addition any extras we made for ourselves to keep) — Good for those of us with bigger households; kind of a lot for couples. If your households are smaller, consider having folks ship just a half-dozen cookies each. Or, if you end up with



TOM McCORKLE/For The Washington Post

To make sure the cookies are received intact, pick sturdy transportable cookies and ship them in reusable containers. Decorative tins are a nice choice for the holidays.

a lot of cookies, remember most unfrosted cookies will freeze well for about six months. (And, just FYI: Most raw dough can be frozen for six months as well.)

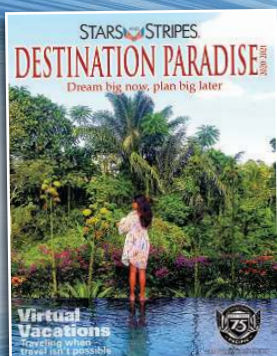
Ship in reusable containers

Pack cookies in airtight, durable, uncrushable containers, such as common food storage containers or decorative tins. Make sure the cookies fit snugly, using parchment or wax paper to cushion them so that they don't jostle and get crushed in shipping. If your container isn't airtight, consider placing the cookies inside zip-top bags first. Secure your container with colorful ribbons or tape, if necessary. Place the containers inside a larger shipping box lined with crumpled paper or

other filler insulation.

Wait for the cookies to arrive

For most of us, the waiting was the easiest part, but Hope Boos of South St. Paul, Minn., said it was tough for her kids to see cookie after cookie arrive in the mail and not dig in. So your group should decide if it is OK to open the cookies as they arrive or ask everyone to open all at once for the big reveal. Garcia opened hers as they arrived and shared her daughter's cookie "reviews" via Facebook messenger. In either case, when the time is right, gather your cookies, pour a glass of milk (or a cocktail) and join your friends on a Zoom or FaceTime — or whatever service you use — to nibble, ooh and aah and catch up.



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WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE

No Christmas without lights

These tips will help you safely, festively and economically illuminate your home for the holidays

BY LAURA DAILY

Special to The Washington Post

What's Christmas without holiday lights? For starters ... no worries that a hot bulb will melt your favorite plastic Snoopy ornament, or fears that adding one more string of lights will plunge your den into darkness. And maybe your heart won't skip a beat when you receive your December utility bill.

Yes, they have a reputation for being a hassle. But holiday lights have changed. Thanks to LED technology, the nightmares of Christmases past have largely been resolved. Even Clark Griswold would approve of the more reliable, energy-efficient options available these days.

As a consumer expert, I know how to find a great deal, but I haven't untangled a string of lights in years — since I moved to the city from a larger home in the mountains. So I asked several experts for their advice on light features, safety, storage and more. Here are our illuminating tips.

Make a plan. It doesn't have to be elaborate. Mike and Jenn Onstott, whose spectacularly lit Commerce City, Colo., home attracts thousands of spectators annually, suggest asking yourself: Do I want lights everywhere, or in a few select spots? A classic look, or more modern? Showy, or subdued? Take some measurements. Remember: A 10-foot rail might need 16 feet of lights if you plan to wrap it tightly so the lights are close together. Choose a theme or color scheme.

Frank Skinner, director of marketing for online retailer Christmas Lights, Etc, says: "If you know you like Christmas and will be decorating for years to come, build up a collection. Initially, you might buy clear lights and then add colors in subsequent years. You aren't locked in, because you can mix and match and rearrange strings."

Choose your bulb. With their soft, warm glow, traditional incandescent lights evoke cozy memories for many. But the more vibrant LEDs have come a long way. LEDs use far less electricity, stay cool to the touch, last longer and come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, lens styles, colors and finishes.

Over the past six years, the Onstotts have converted 90% of their 27,000 lights to LED, mostly to save on electricity, reserving the remaining incandescent lights for special displays.

Whether you opt for incandescent or LED, experts agree it's best not to mix the two in one display. Not only will the lights visually clash, but you may also experience power issues.

Decide how much you want to spend. Would you rather save money now, or over time? A box of 50 mini-incandescent lights can cost as little as \$3 in a big-box store, whereas a 50-count string of LED lights may start at \$10. Outdoor-specific or commercial-grade lights will cost more. Although incandescent lights are less expensive, they use significantly more electricity and typically last one to three seasons. Though pricier, LED lights are energy-efficient, allowing you to plug more lights



into one outlet. And although most LED light manufacturers say they will last up to five seasons, Skinner says test sets lit 24/7 at his company offices are still burning bright after seven years.

Buy with confidence. Take note if lights are rated "indoor" or "indoor/outdoor." The latter are usually more durable. Depending on your local climate, you might want to buy commercial-grade lights that hold up to extreme heat or cold. If you are especially picky, check a sample light string if the lights are on display in the store. Major brands, such as Wintergreen or Kringle Traditions, that supply detailed specifications (such as wire style, color or plug) to manufacturers will stamp their name on the tube near the plug. That's a clue that the product is of a higher quality.

Try outside-the-box tricks. Substitute icicle lights (normally used outside) for traditional strings if you want a well-lit indoor tree, suggests Albie Mushaney, host of the HGTV holiday special "You'll be Home for Christmas." Instead of wrapping your tree 20 times, you may only need two strands and three to four wraps to achieve the same amount of coverage and light.

Jenn Onstott says to look for lights with faceted bulbs and add reflective ornaments to your tree, so you don't need as many lights. If you have children or pets,

consider erecting and decorating some sort of barricade around your lit tree. Incandescent lights do get hot to the touch, and pets that chew might find light strings tempting. The Onstotts use a baby gate. Mushaney, who has two Great Danes, built a small picket fence.

Know your power. I've said it before, but it bears repeating: The biggest difference between LED and incandescent lights is the amount of electricity used. For example, Mike Onstott redid a reindeer display at his home. The original, with 300 incandescent lights, used 122 watts; the new version, with 360 LED lights, uses three watts.

"When you're not pulling as much power, you can put up more lights without short-circuiting your home," Jenn Onstott says.

You need to determine not only what outlets are available, but also what else in your home — lamps, electronics, appliances — is being powered by that circuit. A kilowatt meter (\$20 to \$30) easily monitors an outlet's power usage, so you don't overload it and trip the breaker.

Minimize hazards. Remember: Water and electricity do not mix. For outdoor displays, buy lights with a "sealed connection." That means the base of each bulb has an acrylic seal to permanently affix it to the wire, keeping moisture out. To avoid standing water (or snow), Mike

Onstott recommends using stakes to keep plugs above the ground. He also wraps any electrical connections in plastic bags secured by a rubber band.

And Skinner says you shouldn't use a staple gun to hang lights. "You risk nicking or ripping off the wire coating, causing a potential electrical short." Instead, use inexpensive clips to attach lights to your roof or gutters. As a timesaver, in lieu of clips, Mushaney rims his house and windows with small screw-in hooks and leaves them up year-round.

Take the easy route. Sure, you could invest the time, money and effort in hand-wrapping lights around the trunks of outdoor trees or artfully decorating bushes, but you don't have to. Manufacturers have developed reasonably priced trunk-wrap lights (essentially lights woven into netting with loop clasps) that expand and stretch around a tree trunk. Net lights can be easily draped over bushes and hedges. So he doesn't have to run out nightly, Mushaney uses a solar switch on a timer. At sunset, his outdoor lights automatically turn on, then turn off a few hours later.

Store lights properly. Everyone has their own preferred method for keeping their lights organized when they aren't in use. Skinner says to simply wrap lights in a circular pattern or roll them into a ball. Then store them in a box. The Onstotts suggest looping them, but instead of using the "palm and elbow" technique commonly used to store extension cords, start by dangling the strand and make decent-size loops, as if you were spooling a cord onto a vacuum cleaner without a hook at the bottom. Use Velcro or zip ties to keep cords together. Sort lights into plastic bins, and label either by location or specific tree. Mushaney hangs outdoor lights over chairs to dry, then puts lights in plastic grocery bags — one strand per bag — with the plug hanging out. Bags go into storage tubs labeled "inside" or "outside."

Take advantage of post-Christmas sales. Although retailers run sales in November and December, to get the best deals, shop right after Christmas. You can often find lights and other decorations discounted by as much as 75% to 90%. Mushaney says he sets the following year's theme based on what he scores at a discount.

Get online help. You'll find all sorts of guides for holiday lighting on topics including artfully wrapping tree trunks, safely hanging lights on gutters or calculating wattage. Christmas Lights, Etc has a collection of lighting and decorating resources on its website, christmaslightsetc.com. Serious decorators should check out the Planet Christmas Forum (planetchristmas.com) or search for fellow holiday light enthusiasts in Facebook groups.

Make memories. No matter the design, Christmas lights brighten the holidays, and they may spread joy far beyond your front yard. "I grew up poor, and my family had to find ways to entertain us kids, so we drove around looking at holiday lights on houses," Mushaney says. "That created wonderful memories I'll always remember. Now, maybe my house will be one that families drive by and build memories, too."

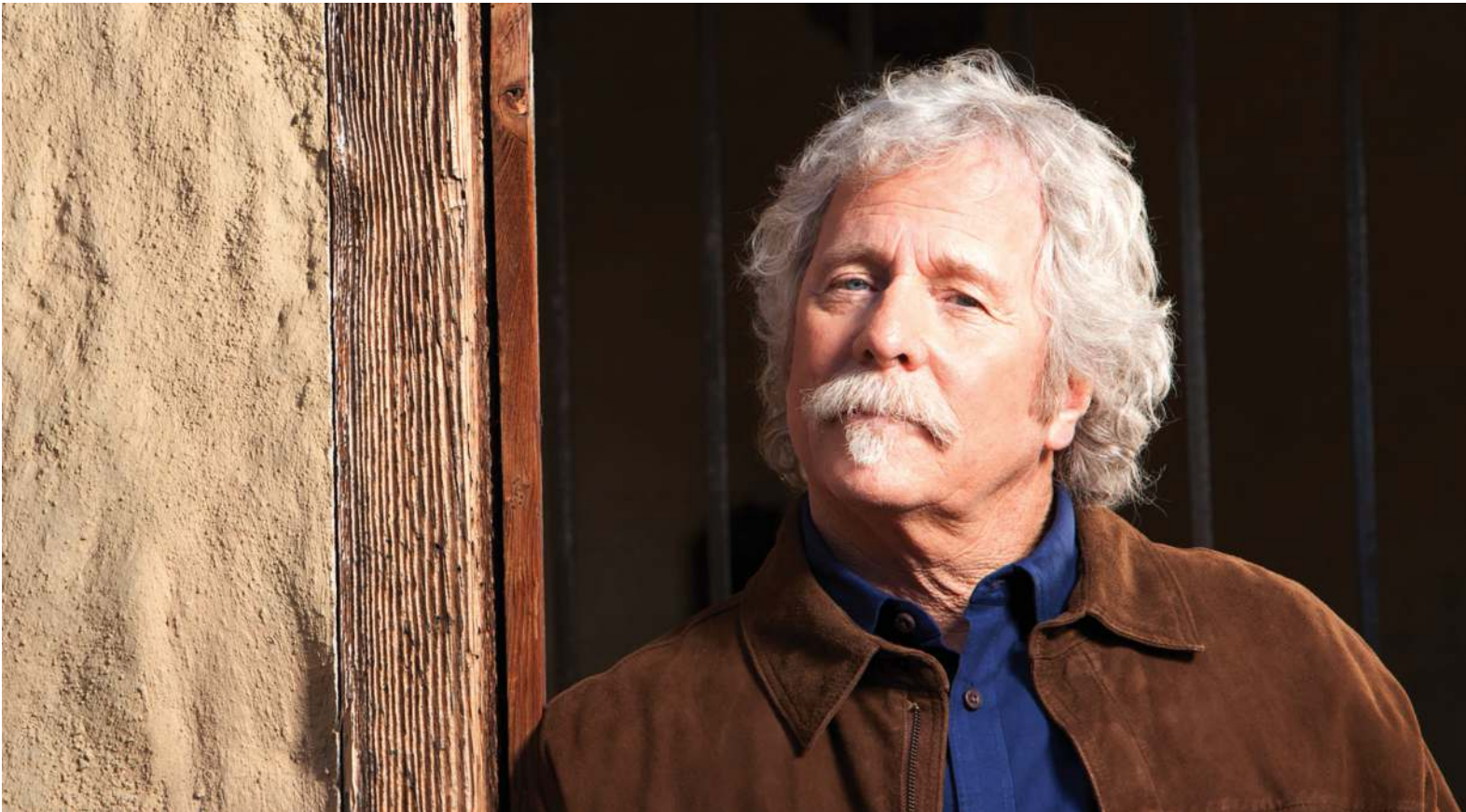
WEEKEND: BOOKS

Eight band man

Byrds’ Hillman writes memoir of musical passion and redemption

By JOHN ROGERS
Associated Press

Tom Petty once described him as one of rock music’s most well-kept secrets, and Chris Hillman is fine with that. Fifty-one years after he picked up his first guitar, Hillman says music was never about becoming rich and famous, something he mocked in the whimsical 1967 hit “So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star” that he co-wrote with fellow bandmate Roger McGuinn for the Byrds. It was never about getting into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, either, although Hillman, McGuinn and their fellow Byrds are there, too. That’s thanks in large part to the group having laid the groundwork for the musical subgenres folk-rock and country-rock in the late 1960s with songs like Hillman’s “Between Time” that put a driving, rock-based melody to a country heartbreak ballad, and the band’s interpretation of songs like Bob Dylan’s “Mr. Tambourine Man” that famously featured McGuinn’s jangling, 12-string electric guitar. None of it was deliberate, but organic, Hillman says now, explaining how he went through a half-century of performance simply pursuing the music that he loved, from bluegrass to folk to country to rock. “I just had such a passion for the music,” he said by phone recently from his sun-dappled hillside home overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Ventura, Calif.. “I never thought I would get paid,” added Hillman, a friendly, modest man of 76. “I was just having so much fun.” That passion is revealed in his just-published memoir “Time Between: My Life as a Byrd, Burrito Brother, and Beyond.” It recounts how a carefree surfer kid from a small California beach town had his idyllic 1950s life



LORI STOLL/AP

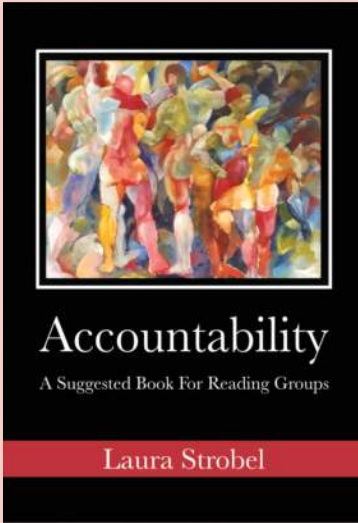
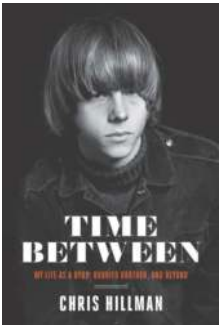
Chris Hillman, shown Dec. 3, is a founding member of the Byrds and Flying Burrito Brothers, and one of the architects of country-rock and folk-rock. His memoir is called “Time Between: My Life as a Byrd, Burrito Brother, and Beyond.”

redirected at age 15 when his mother, having given into his repeated pleas, bought him a \$10 guitar with the promise that if he actually learned to play the thing, she’d eventually help him get a better one. Not that he didn’t face and overcome plenty of dark moments over the succeeding half-century, beginning with the first and probably darkest, his beloved father’s suicide when Hillman was just 16. In the following years he’d see numerous friends fall victim to what he calls the hedonistic lifestyle that lured so many musicians of his generation. Most prominent of them was likely Gram Parsons, who played with Hillman in both the Byrds and the Flying Burrito Brothers and died in a hotel room of a drug overdose at age 26. A few years before, Parsons and Hillman had written the song “Sin City,” a searing indictment of the Los Angeles music scene’s dark side of money, drugs and fame in those years with the words, “On the 31st floor, a gold-plated door, won’t keep out the Lord’s burning rain.” Hillman, who credits his Christian faith with steering him past much of that tumult, doesn’t go into great detail about those moments in the book other than to observe that Parsons and others made bad choices. “I didn’t want to write about

somebody with a drug habit or finding them passed out or dying,” he says, adding he warned his publisher not to expect that. “I’m not going to hand you a rock and roll salacious book because I didn’t really live my life like that,” he says he told them. One could make the case that enough others already have, which is one of the things he says inspired him to begin his own book. “A lot of people would write things who were not even around or alive at that point in time,” he says. “One book out, the guy never even talked to me.” Initially, he thought his would be something to set the record straight for his children and grandchildren. But as he progressed, he began to see it as a story of redemption that might have broader appeal. It tells how his mother held the family together after his father’s death, moving them from the bucolic San Diego-area beach town of Rancho Santa Fe to Los

Angeles and, soon after, how she had enough faith in her teenage son to allow his return back so he could join the Scottsboro Squirrel Barkers, San Diego’s hottest bluegrass band at the time. By this point he’d become skilled on both guitar and mandolin and he played the latter with the Squirrel Barkers, whose members also included Eagles cofounder Bernie Leadon at one time. After moving on to another bluegrass ensemble, he returned to Los Angeles, where he’d pick up the bass guitar this time and join the Byrds. Soon they were making country-rock and folk-rock history with songs like “Eight Miles High” and “I’ll Feel a Whole Lot Better.” Over the years, he would play in eight different bands alongside a veritable Who’s Who of LA musicians of the time, including David Crosby, Stephen Stills and Richie Furay. “Roger asked me six months ago, ‘How many bands were you in?’ he says of McGuinn. “I said

eight. He said, “That’s unbelievable.” “I guess I kept all the insane people sane. That was my job in the band,” he says, laughing heartily before quickly adding, “No, just kidding.” Staying close to home with his wife, Connie, these days because of the pandemic, he recently performed a concert from his office with his old Desert Rose Band mates Herb Pederson and John Jorgenson, at which he also offered signed books for sale. He also did a livestreamed show sponsored by the Grammy Museum Dec. 9, but he’s anxious to get back in front of live audiences. He recently took part in a “car concert” at the Ventura County Fairgrounds, but says that just wasn’t the same. “I’m singing and all I hear are car horns. That was their applause,” he says, laughing again. “They’re going beep, beep, beep and I’m going, ‘Oh God, I hope that’s not my last live performance.’ ”



“Their departure is interrupted and in sudden recognition, Aurora’s hands shoot to her mouth and she whispers, ”Oh, my -” as a black and white police car slowly advances toward them.”

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WEEKEND: MUSIC



BRENT N. CLARKE, INVISION/AP

Garth Brooks performs during the 2020 Gershwin Prize Honoree's Tribute Concert at the DAR Constitution Hall on March 4 in Washington. Brooks is the youngest recipient of the Gershwin Prize for Popular Song, an honor that has been bestowed upon Smokey Robinson, Carole King and Paul Simon.

Garth Brooks promoting 'Fun' although he's been having none

BY JON BREAM

Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

He's been performing without live audiences, appearing on all kinds of TV programs and promoting his new album, "Fun," which dropped Nov. 20. But Garth Brooks isn't having any fun himself.

It was apparent in his voice over the telephone.

"I understand these football games can go on without the crowd, and you hear the simulated audience and you forget. It just doesn't work that way for concerts, man," he said. "Nothing replaces getting to play for people in the same room. That's the fun about entertaining."

The country megastar insists that he misses concerts more than his millions of fans do.

"Ain't nobody on this planet who misses it more than me. That's your gas," he said with the kind of Garth-gantuan hyperbole that juices his outsized personality onstage. "When I retired to be home with the girls (his three school-age daughters for nearly 10 years in 2001) or taking a year off so your band and crew need to get fueled back up, those are things you can live with. But when you were on a roll and someone else throws the red light up on you like COVID has, that's hard to take. But at the same time, I can't (expletive) about it because people are suffering really, really bad."

He knows firsthand. His youngest daughter has recovered from COVID, although he's concerned about any subsequent repercussions.

Brooks understands the role

"... the thread through all of us is love, and I'm not talking about hugging one another."

Garth Brooks

music can play in crisis.

"We sometimes seek for answers in music," said the singer-songwriter, 58, who is prone to deep thoughts and sincere pronouncements when the spotlights are off. "I know we seek for comfort."

With "Fun," he's serving up a smorgasbord of Garth Brooks comfort food — honky-tonk stomps, sentimental ballads, a



cowboy song, an island tune, a New Orleans romp, message music and a cover of a pop hit.

But one selection stands out — the topical "Where the Cross Don't Burn," featuring country legend Charley Pride.

It's a true story about songwriter Troy Jones, a white Mississippian's friendship with a Black kid from the other side of the tracks. The song has been

around for about a decade.

"I can't imagine not having this song," Brooks said. "It's like one of your kids — as part of the Garth Brooks catalog 100 years from now. I love that message."

The album-closing "(Sometimes You've Got to Die to) Live Again" is a signature Brooks power ballad with a different twist: He uncorks a striking falsetto, previously heard on his 1999 project as alter-ego rocker Chris Gaines. He didn't blame the high voice on tight jeans, though.

"My jeans can't get any tighter," he said picking up on the straight line. "Especially in the pandemic with as much weight as I've gained."

"Fun" also features a duet with his wife, country star and cookbook author Trisha Year-

SEE BROOKS ON PAGE 33

WEEKEND: MUSIC

Mendes returns with an amorous, gooey new album

MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

On his 14-track fourth album, Shawn Mendes is airy, grand, intense and rapturous. It is the sound of a man totally and hopelessly in love.

Adoration is baked into “Wonder,” from the almost religious-sounding title track as Mendes sings “I wonder what it’s like to be loved by you,” to the last song, where, with a voice shaking with emotion, he sings over acoustic guitar: “I can’t imagine what a world would be without you.” The album’s cover captures Mendes ecstatic, floating in waves.

Though she is mentioned only once — in the liner notes, thanked right after his family — it’s not hard to find the source of this ardor: Mendes’ longtime romantic and quarantine partner, singer Camila Cabello. Whatever happens to this couple in the future, she has inspired a hopelessly romantic set.

“Teach Me How to Love” flirts with ’80s disco (with An-



derson .Paak on drums) and “305” (the area code to Cabello’s Miami) is a candy-colored piece of ’60s doo-wop in which Mendes sings to his lover, “If there’s a door to heaven, baby you’re the key.” The lovers are finding a new home to share in “24 Hours” — “It’s a little soon but I wanna come home to you,” he sings.

Mendes’ falsetto soars with pure glee atop a pillow of strings on the standout “Look Up at the Stars” (where Mendes sings “the universe is ours” in a Coldplay “Yellow” way) and “Always Been You” is both



ABC/AP

Shawn Mendes performs at the American Music Awards at the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles on Nov. 22. Mendes’ new album, “Wonder” (inset), is a hopelessly romantic set of songs seemingly inspired by his romantic and quarantine partner, singer Camila Cabello.

soaring and triumphant. This is music you’d hear in a mall in heaven.

The only tune that veers out of the love zone is Mendes’ duet with Justin Bieber, “Monster,” an outstanding moody banger about how early fame messes

with you, sung by a rising heart-throb singer-songwriter and an established one.

In-demand producer Kid Harpoon, who took Harry Stiles to new heights on “Fine Line,” is all over this gooey album. There’s little of the urgency

Mendes has shown before — no “There’s Nothing Holdin’ Me Back” or “In My Blood” — and “Wonder” is sometimes hard to take during extended plays — especially its pointless intro — but to find fault with it is to find fault with love itself,

Brooks: Singer says country fans are more than stereotype

FROM PAGE 32

wood, on “Shallow,” the smash made famous by Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper in the 2018 movie “A Star Is Born.” Yearwood’s stunningly soaring voice reminds how few women artists are being heard on country radio these days.

Brooks said country programmers think that female listeners, the format’s dominant demographic, want to mostly hear male singers. He disagrees.

“What I’ve always enjoyed as a country music fan is the different opinions from the different voices. I find that women sing about a lot more poignant things than men do,” he said. “They’ve picked those harder subjects to listen to, and I think we become better people by hearing it. Country music is a family, and it takes all kinds in this family.”

During 2020, Brooks has been collecting prestigious hardware — Billboard’s Icon Award and the Gershwin Prize for Popular Song, the youngest recipient of an honor bestowed on the likes of Smokey Robinson, Carole



On “Fun,” Garth Brooks and his wife, Trisha Yearwood, cover “Shallow,” the smash hit sung by Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper in the 2018 film “A Star Is Born.”

King and Paul Simon.

“It should have been James Taylor or somebody else standing up there,” said Brooks, putting on his familiar Mr. Humble hat. “What I loved about it was to look out and not be able to tell the Democrats and Republicans from each other in D.C. because they were all just dancing together. It just made me feel like music might be the voice of hope or reason.”

He knows the stereotype of country fans, that they’re pick-

up-driving, flag-waving, red-voting conservatives.

“We’re probably divided 50/50 like everybody else. But because it’s country music and they think it’s 90/10, it’s not. It’s just voices,” he said. “That’s why everyone pushed so hard for the vote. The only way you’re going to break stereotypes is let your voice be heard within the stereotype. I was raised where I speak for myself. That’s all I can do. My message forever is tolerance. And don’t vote party, vote person.”

Then Brooks stayed on his soapbox for a moment.

“Is it in our nature to divide? Are you Democrat or Republican? Are you Black or white? Are you Ford or Chevy? I think it’s in our nature to build a wall between us. We set up cliques. We should be focusing on inclusion. We immediately set up walls to not like people instead of finding reasons to bring them in like family.”

Brooks got into a little political hot water when he was photographed in February wearing a football jersey emblazoned

with the name “Sanders” and the number 20. Social media pundits thought he was endorsing Sen. Bernie Sanders for president. No, he was acknowledging his fellow Oklahoma State University alum Barry Sanders, the Hall of Fame running back of the Detroit Lions.

“In ‘Forrest Gump,’ Tom Hanks says, ‘Stupid is as stupid does.’ Music can’t fix stupid. I’m sorry. The whole Sanders thing was nothing other than just ignorance and just silliness. You’re in Detroit wearing a Barry Sanders jersey. The whole thing that made it fun for me was here comes a tweet from Barry Sanders saying: ‘I’m running for office; won’t you (Brooks) be my vice president?’ And that put everything in its place. It was very funny.”

Brooks is well aware of what the Twin Cities — his biggest concert market — has gone through this year with the killing of George Floyd at the hands of police. His message?

“Try to remember that one day doesn’t paint an entire existence. One act doesn’t paint an

entire life. We’re all learning. We’re all growing. If there can be a blessing in the curse, reach for it. Find it.”

He’s been to Minneapolis, playing to more than 500,000 people during his last three engagements here. He thinks he knows Minnesotans.

“That community is a community we should all try to be like,” he continued. “Things aren’t ever always going to be roses. So you got to face these things and hopefully you become better people for them. If not, then we live and die for nothing.”

“And the pandemic has not helped. The election has not helped. But my thing is bet on us. Bet on the human race. Find your purpose. And what you’re going to find is the thread through all of us is love, and I’m not talking about hugging one another. I’m talking about forgiveness. I’m talking about empathy. Those big words that mean so much. To walk in each other’s shoes, to feel each other’s color, to feel each other’s culture. And listen. Those are big, big things to do right now.”

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

Beating the odds

Talk show host Tamron Hall's career going strong as daytime talk series secures third year with Disney

By HELENA ANDREWS-DYER
The Washington Post

Before they started dating, Tamron Hall's future husband had one cheesy (but effective) pickup line on repeat.

Over the course of a year, Hall and music executive Steven Greener, who knew one another in that "oh hey, it's you" sort of way, would have random run-ins at parties, on planes and, once, poolside in Los Angeles. Each time, Greener would shoulder up to the veteran TV anchor and ask, "What are the odds?"

That same question is probably looping through the minds of every network executive, station manager and talent scout who counted Hall out after her abrupt, possibly career-ending exit from NBC three years ago.

What are the odds? Pretty good, it turns out.

In the handful of years since her headline-making departure, Hall has married, had a baby and debuted a hit show in a notoriously tough time slot.

Since its debut in September 2019, the veteran journalist's nationally syndicated daytime talker, "The Tamron Hall Show," has gobbled up ratings and big-name gets. A month after its Season 2 premiere, Disney announced in October that Hall would be renewed, marking the first time a new daytime talk series secured a third-year run since "The Steve Harvey" show did it six years ago.

Don't call it a comeback. Hall has been betting on herself — and winning.

"I don't want this platform to be seen as the 'Ha-ha, look, they got it wrong.' That's not what I want," Hall said of her name-sake show and its out-the-gate success. The better story is what she got right.

In 2017, Hall left NBC after she lost her dream job as the first Black woman to co-host an hour of "Today" in its then-62-year history. The network decided to take a right turn with Megyn Kelly as host of the third hour and, consequently, Hall's long-held roles on both the behemoth morning show and cable news outlet MSNBC would be significantly diminished. Hall walked.

"It was very scary at the time," said Jennifer Llamas, Hall's good friend and former executive producer at "MSNBC Live with Tamron Hall." Llamas was on the phone with Hall as the broadcaster walked out the doors of 30 Rockefeller Plaza for the final time.

"That was such a big moment," Llamas added. "While she believed in herself, she didn't know what was coming."

Hall was 47, and jobless for the first time since she was 14. Unsurprisingly, the news junkie was left wondering whether it was all over, her three decades in the business reduced to bullet points on a dusty résumé. The calls that were coming in mentioned words she hadn't heard in years: "side-kick" and "fill-in." This couldn't be it.

"I knew my value, and I knew that that wasn't matching my value," said Hall, who made a promise to herself in those moments — after some prerequisite pity-partying. She wouldn't let anyone else choose her ending. She'd never again be



JEFF NEIRA/Walt Disney Television

made to plead her case, asking for "permission to stay."

"At some point you learn that this is all so subjective. Sometimes the list of things you can bring in simply don't matter if that's not what the other person is interested in. And I was okay with that — by Day 3," Hall joked.

Soon came more beginnings, and endings. She landed a talk show development deal with Harvey Weinstein's company. Then the #MeToo movement happened. But again, Hall tucked and rolled. She signed with Disney, and her show — a mix of celebrity, confessionals, hard news, sit-downs and even silliness — premiered in the fall of last year. Six months later, a global pandemic shut down production. The show recalibrated again and came back from Hall's kitchen in Harlem in late March with two laptops and a baby monitor to keep track of her

1-year-old son, Moses.

The secret sauce to her success? "I channeled my inner Liam Neeson," Hall explained. "I have a particular set of skills."

For a few years, you could flip through the channels and catch Hall lightly roasting a politician on MSNBC, cooking on a pretaped "Today" segment and investigating a murder on "Deadline: Crime with Tamron Hall." Hall knew she still had a place in the industry, especially if her following was to be believed.

There was the "lovely little old white lady" in Three Rivers, Mich., who rolled up to Hall during a blizzard to ask the journalist what she was doing next. In New York, Hall would run into Black women on the streets of Manhattan who'd shout, "Girl, you got to go get it. You got to go show them!" In the airport in Arkansas, she learned to listen for a familiar

name: "Tamra! Tamra! I can't wait to see you back on." They all knew her from somewhere, if not the same place. And they all wanted her back.

"Let me pull in all of these different and real sides of me — the reporter for many years in Chicago, the reporter for many years in Dallas, the anchor — you know, all of that, and make it one show," Hall said.

That was it. That was the pitch. And the first question out of every executive's mouth? Why you? Much more "famous" people have crashed and burned under the bright lights of the daytime landscape. Call them one- (or two-) season wonders. Queen Latifah, Wayne Brady, Tony Danza, Harry Connick Jr., Meredith Vieira, Megyn Kelly — the list goes on. How was Hall going to do any better?

"I said, I don't know if I can, but here's my theory of why or how I can," Hall recalled. She started by pulling together the different parts of her own personal and professional journey, in hopes of gathering the viewers who'd watched her on channels scattered across the TV spectrum.

She was the little girl from Luling, Texas. The granddaughter of a sharecropper who never learned to read; Hall read for a living. She was the daughter of a single mom. The woman who found her soul mate at 47. The "late-in-life mother" who had a baby at 48. The sibling whose older sister, Renate, was murdered in 2004, a victim of domestic violence. The journalist who hadn't stopped shining a light on that story since. An anchor, a host, a producer.

"She's lived a lot of life," said Candi Carter, who joined "The Tamron Hall Show" as executive producer and showrunner in the midst of the pandemic.

A veteran of "The Oprah Winfrey Show," Carter described Hall as a "multilayered human" whose authenticity is her biggest asset. Cliche? Yes. True? Also yes.

Too often, daytime is considered an easy A, the genre anyone with a following can conquer. But it's much tougher than it looks, especially if the show's headliner can't manage to connect with the folks on the other side of the screen.

"That host has to be willing to share their life authentically because people see through it," Carter said. "They call bulls—, and they turn the channel."

Hall's show — and its virality — is proof that her many sides and many fans could come together.

There was the hard-hitting journalist hat she put on to interview Andrew Gillum, the Florida politician who, after narrowly missing the opportunity to become the state's governor, was photographed naked and intoxicated in a Miami hotel room. When she welcomed reality star Tamar Braxton to her studio in October, months after it had been reported that the reality star attempted suicide, Hall began with: "How are you?" For the intro to the show's "Fresh Prince of Bel-Air" reunion segment, Hall dressed in a neon yellow '90s get-up and rapped the famous theme song.

"I feel more comfortable than ever. I feel more like myself. I feel, oddly enough,

SEE HALL ON PAGE 35

WEEKEND: TELEVISION

Hall: Host stays true to herself, fans

FROM PAGE 34

liberated,” she said. “I looked at the tree and I look at the branches and there are many, and I am not being untrue to any part of myself.”

That includes the newly minted businesswoman who’s now responsible for an entire staff and crew. Hall approaches the show like running a small business, and there have been bumps in the road. This summer, as Season 1 wrapped, there were reports that Hall had fired and not paid 20 staffers in the midst of the pandemic. Not true, she said. Hall and Carter made changes to the show staff ahead of Season 2, but everyone was paid through their original contract plus a 20-day extension. Those rumors got to her.

“We know every company that’s run by a man, that’s run by a white man, would not be questioned for trying to make the company better. That’s what I was stunned by,” Hall said. Too often, women are not expected to be business-minded and strategic, she added, and fall into the “likability trap.” “I just thought, Wow, are we still there? We’re still at a point where a woman can’t say, ‘Let’s do better?’”

More recently, BuzzFeed published an article about crew members’ concerns that the show was becoming a coronavirus hotspot as several staffers tested positive. Unnamed sources placed the blame on Hall and questioned the fact that those closest to her were being tested more frequently than others. Hall called the report heart-breaking, but maintained that the show’s COVID-19 protocols were in line with Disney’s standards.

“When you have your name on the show, you are responsible. My name matters. It matters if it’s associated with something I don’t have control over or not,” Hall said.

Control is something Hall has learned to let go of — when she can. She had no control over NBC’s decision three years ago, or the fact that some executives passed on her show idea because they didn’t get what she was trying to do, or how a global pandemic would send the media world scrambling.

“Sometimes we have to just be OK with not having that control and accepting the moment,” she said.

Right now, the moment is hers: “The underdogs, the kids that the industry didn’t bet on and perhaps some still wouldn’t? We’re still here.”



NETFLIX/TNS

Writer and comedian Ayo Edebiri takes over as the voice of Missy Foreman-Greenwald on “Big Mouth.” The show airs on Netflix.

Reinventing ‘Big Mouth’

Comedian Ayo Edebiri joins the show as both a writer and the new voice of Missy

BY TRACY BROWN
Los Angeles Times

One thing that is abundantly clear on “Big Mouth” is that experiencing change is just a part of growing up.

And character Missy Foreman-Greenwald’s journey in the fourth season of Netflix’s animated series, now streaming on the site, includes becoming more aware about her racial identity and figuring out what being Black means to her.

It’s in this context that writer and comedian Ayo Edebiri makes her debut as the voice of Missy. Edebiri, who also joined the “Big Mouth” writers room for the fifth season, takes over the role from Jenny Slate, who had voiced the character since the series premiered.

“I’ve always found Missy funny and weird, and it was cool to get to be a writer for a season where we were uncovering her as a character even more and giving her a lot of fun things to do,” Edebiri said. “(Season) Four is a really great start, I think, to the beginning of what Missy’s journey is going to be like, discovering not just her Blackness but herself.”

In her conversation with The Los Angeles Times, Edebiri discussed why it’s important not only to have diverse voices in the room but also to listen to them, and how she drew on her awkward middle-school years for her work on “Big Mouth.”

The following has been edited for clarity and condensed:

Los Angeles Times: What are your thoughts on Missy as a character? What about her do you find the most relatable?

Edebiri: I’ve always appreciated and related to Missy. I don’t think I was a bucktoothed kid who wrote joint fan fiction with my friends and took Latin for fun, so I think you can draw whatever parallels you want to from that. There was also a period of my education where I went to (predominantly white institutions), and I think similarly to

Missy I had to reckon with discovering myself in that context.

What was your reaction to hearing that the show was going to start exploring Missy’s race and that aspect of her identity more?

They discuss identity a lot on that show in a lot of different ways, so I think it makes sense. It’s a show where things are discussed, so why not give this the same airtime and have it treated right? But also it was like, “How do you discuss this when Jenny is white? What do you do about it?”

There are characters who are characters of color, but they were voiced by white people, so they didn’t have those conversations, when maybe they could have if the actors were Black. Or maybe they wouldn’t have. Maybe the stories wouldn’t have to be about race and could just be about character. That’s what I think is exciting about this. Like, I’m Black. And sometimes I talk about it; sometimes I don’t. That’s the reality of race — sometimes you talk about it; sometimes you don’t.

What are your thoughts on how we approach issues around race in an authentic way in entertainment?

We’re living through figuring that out. And I think expecting to have the right answers is part of the problem. Because we don’t have them. This could even end up being wrong. I know there are people who are half-Black and half-white who are like, “Well, why didn’t they cast somebody who was exactly half-Black and half-Jewish then?”

We’re figuring it out. But I think that part of doing that means having conversations. Sometimes, maybe, they’ll be funny. Sometimes they’ll be serious. Sometimes, they’ll be nice. And sometimes they’ll be uncomfortable and not completely concrete, or you might not be getting the answer that you want or need. But I think having those conversations is a big part of it.

I think another big part is having people in the room and actually listening to them. Not just hiring people because they check off a box. Like, hiring them because you value

their voice and what they have to say. I think part of the recasting, not just came from Jenny but also from having Black writers and other writers of color in the room who said, “This needs to happen.” Making sure that you’re actually listening to those voices and uplifting them and promoting them and not just having them on camera or in front of the camera or the vocal talent or whatever, but having them in positions of influence.

“Big Mouth” really takes me back to what I remember about my own awkward middle-school years. What is it like to have to dig into that regularly for work?

Oh, man. Both very fun and very excruciating. Like, my interview for the job, I remember we just strictly talked about puberty, which was such a horrible time for me. I left the interview feeling so bad, because I just talked about all that stuff. And I (thought) I was not funny. And I was just talking about me at, like, 13, being a freak. This is not good. And my manager was like, “OK, please calm down. It’ll be fine.” And I was like, “I ruined it!”

But they were like, “No, you got the job. We know you’re funny. We read your script, and we’ve seen your stand-up. We just wanted to make sure you had stuff to draw from. That’s why we were asking you questions about puberty and the bad stuff.”

What has been the most exciting thing creatively, working on a show like “Big Mouth”?

It’s a show that’s always made me laugh. Getting the writing job felt like a dream come true on its own. Being given the opportunity to voice a character on the show has only heightened that feeling. And while it’s definitely a bit nerve-racking, we’re very much in the middle of these conversations about diversity and inclusion and equity. So I don’t know if excited is the right word, but I’m grateful that as a show we know the importance of that while also remembering that the show itself is funny and fun, and we get to deliver that.

WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

BY SAMANTHA SCHMIDT

The Washington Post

It took a global pandemic and a badly timed breakup for Manny Argueta to realize just how far he had grown apart from his guy friends.

In the spring, after the 35-year-old had left the home he shared with his former girl-friend and moved into a studio in suburban Falls Church, Va., on his own, he would go an entire week without saying a word. There were no more game days with the guys, no more Friday nights in downtown bars, and Argueta was starved for social interaction. He returned to his PlayStation 4, jumping on the microphone with a stranger while playing “Overwatch” just to hear someone’s voice. He discovered the messaging app Discord and started chatting with his old gamer friends and watching them play “Mortal Kombat 11” — even when he didn’t have the game set up himself.

He started recognizing how dependent his friendships had become on those Sunday football games and nights at 14th Street lounges, on venting about Republicans or why the Washington Capitals didn’t make the playoffs. They hardly ever talked about relationships or family, or just how they were doing. He had never met many of their family members.

For more than a decade, psychologists have written about the “friendship crisis” facing many men. A 2006 analysis published in the *American Sociological Review* found that while Americans in general have fewer friends outside the family than they used to, young, white, educated men have lost more friends than other groups.

Male friendships are often rooted in “shoulder-to-shoulder” interactions, such as watching a football game or playing video games, while women’s interactions are more face-to-face, such as grabbing a coffee or getting together for a glass of wine, said Geoffrey Greif, a professor at the University of Maryland School of Social Work who wrote a book about male friendship. When Greif surveyed hundreds of men about how they most often socialized with friends, 80% of men said “sports” — either watching or participating in them together.

Because of this, many men have probably had a harder time than women figuring out how to adapt their friendships in a pandemic that is keeping them apart.

“The rules for guys pursuing other guys for friendships are not clear,” Greif said. “Guys don’t want to seem too needy.”

But the pandemic might be forcing this dynamic to change.

In emails and interviews with *The Washington Post*, dozens of men shared stories about Zoom poker games, backyard cigar nights, neighborhood-dad WhatsApp chains, Dungeons & Dragons groups and Fantasy Football leagues where casual chats about sports and politics have suddenly led to deep conversations — about the struggles of virtual schooling, family illness, breakups, births, wedding postponements and job losses.

The moment feels heavier and so do the conversations. Some men said their friendships have begun to look more like those of their wives and girl-friends. For the first time in their lives, they’re going on walks with male friends just to catch up. They’re FaceTiming old college friends and checking in on neighbors — not only to talk about the NBA draft picks or their children’s soccer schedule, but to ask how they’re doing.



iStock photos

BONDING BEYOND THE BAR

The pandemic is forcing some men to realize they need deeper friendships

Argueta was used to avoiding talking about personal details in his conversations with male friends. But after struggling with his mental health and going through therapy this year, he said, he wants to start finding ways to tell his friends what’s actually going on.

Niobe Way, a professor of developmental psychology who interviewed hundreds of boys for her 2013 book “Deep Secrets: Boys’ Friendships and the Crisis of Connection,” argues the lack of vulnerability in male friendships is rooted in a misogynistic, homophobic culture that discourages emotional intimacy between men. But it’s also part of a culture that does not value adult friendship in general.

“The goal of adulthood is to find a partner, not to find a best friend,” Way said. “There’s nothing in our definition of success or maturity ... that includes friendships.”

But research shows that close friendships and social networks are essential. A Brigham Young University study found that social connections — with friends, family, neighbors or colleagues — improve a person’s odds of survival by 50%.

In 2018, the suicide rate among men was 3.7 times higher than among women, according to statistics from the National Institute of Mental Health. But some surveys show men are less likely than women to admit they are lonely, while other research suggests men derive more of their emotional intimacy from the women in their lives. In one study, married men were more likely than married women to list their spouse as their best friend.

In this time of unprecedented isolation,

Way said, many men may be forced to change the way they think about their friendships and to connect in new, deeper ways: “I think they’re being forced to for survival.”

A few years ago, Stephen Davis, 33, a tax manager in suburban Alexandria, Va., joined a group text with one of his best friends and some other guys he vaguely knew from college. The conversation was, at first, solely focused on the world of professional wrestling. They called it “Five MB,” short for Five Man Band.

But recently, the group has evolved into a space to vent about so much more. It’s gotten them through multiple job changes, home moves and the births of four of their children — including two during the pandemic. When Davis was struggling with ideas for how to keep his son occupied when playgrounds were closed, one of the other dads in the group suggested an obstacle course of pillows for his son to run through. When Davis’ wife’s water broke, he texted the Five Man Band before anyone else — even before his parents.

The group has become closer than ever during the pandemic. They now send nearly 100 text messages a day, a constant stream of consciousness about what’s going on in their lives. The conversations feel more vulnerable, more honest than others Davis has ever had with friends in the past. They’re the kind of conversations he would have never been able to have while sitting at a bar and watching a game.

“There’s always too much noise to get to that next level,” he said.

Jonathan Gordon sometimes wishes his college buddies would talk about more

serious topics. The group of four men, who met on their freshman floor at the University of Virginia and are now in their 30s, have been groomsmen in each other’s weddings. They have gone on international trips together. They consider the other men in the group their closest friends.

So why don’t they ever actually talk about their feelings?

“I’ve always thought it’s funny that we talk about things that are completely inconsequential 80 to 90% of the time,” said his friend, Alex Hyde, 32, over a recent joint Zoom call.

When the friends get together in person, for a beer or dinner, the deeper details “sneak in by accident,” Hyde said. Now that they can’t, the more serious topics don’t come as naturally over text.

It feels more raw, Hyde said. “In general with other guys, there’s a certain amount of harassment that goes with anything you say... you got to be ready for that.”

It feels impossible not to revert to making fun of one another, Gordon said. “We have no self restraint ... I can’t not crack up. We set each other off,” he said. “In an ideal world, we wouldn’t do that.”

These are the kinds of conversations Argueta, in Falls Church, had come to expect from his friendships with men.

When a couple of friends came over to help him set up his PC, Argueta expected them to roast him for looking like a “broke college student” in his new studio, where he has barely put anything on the walls and he has cords all over his desk. Instead, the two friends asked him to talk about what led up to his breakup, and how he was handling the past few months. Argueta opened up to them — about his past relationship, the move, the pandemic, everything. He was more personal with them than he had ever been before.

One of his friends reminded him he could call the group on Discord anytime. “Just talk, just say anything,” the friend said. “Somebody’s going to answer.”

Argueta planned to send them a group text message soon, thanking his friends for coming over and for “bailing me out in more ways than you think.” He wanted to keep being honest about what he was going through.

“I’m going to be real,” he said. He wondered if they would do the same.

WEEKEND: FAMILY/BOOKS

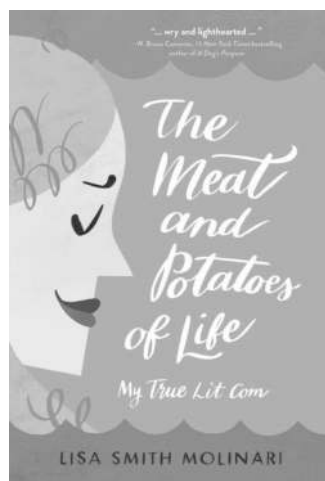
Literature and laughs

Military author crafts hilarious narrative out of family columns

BY KATE MAISEL
Stars and Stripes

Thoughtful, entertaining gifts can be hard to find at the best of times. As the window closes on holiday shopping, it can seem all but impossible to find that special item that says “I thought of you, even if I bought this close to the last minute.” If this sounds all too familiar, we have a literary suggestion — and you might want to pick up one for yourself as well.

Humor columnist Lisa Molinari has compiled her weekly missives into a book, “The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com.” The chapters are grouped into seasons of the Molinari family’s life, taking readers all the way from wedding to empty nest, with plenty of mayhem involving three kids, one dog and many moves in between.



The bite-sized chapters make the book easy to enjoy a few minutes at a time, but it’s certainly entertaining enough to hold readers’ attention for longer. With chapter headings such as “Does This Baby Make My Husband’s Butt Look Big?”, “Lord of the Houseflies” and “Fifty Shades of Mattress Shopping,” Molinari excels in finding humor in relatable circumstances.

Like so many things in 2020, Molinari’s book publishing journey began with high hopes. She has experienced a lot of uncertainty since May 1, when “My True Lit Com” hit the market. Though a book at first seems like a pandemic-proof endeavor, publicity has been a challenge with in-person events at a standstill. Molinari says she would especially like her collection of stories to reach military families, as they will be able to relate like no other to her experiences.

Molinari’s column runs weekly in Stars and Stripes. We chatted with her via email about bathroom reads, the biggest compliment she’s received and what her family thinks about their foibles being leveraged for laughs in print.

Stars and Stripes: What prompted you to write a book?

Molinari: When you write a humor column, you have to dredge up all kinds of stories to tell. After years of telling these stories in my columns, I began to see a pattern, an overarching tale about a military spouse and her family, coming of age. In 2013, I joined a writer’s group where we were stationed in Newport, R.I., and began rewriting, organizing and reading what I’d written to the group. I made one curmudgeon in the group laugh a lot, and he told me, “Your stories read like episodes of ‘The Middle’ or ‘The Wonder Years.’” This got me thinking about a book — not a compilation of my columns, but a real book — with plot, scenes and dialogue, written like a readable sitcom. For the next six years, I developed the manuscript draft that became “The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com.”



Anna Molinari

Military spouse Lisa Molinari mined her family’s humorous stories over the decades for “The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com.”

Can you explain the title?

I named my column “The Meat and Potatoes of Life” because to me, it was all about weeding out the nonsense to see the nuggets of truth. The humor comes in because it’s fun to laugh at all the meaningless stuff we get caught up in today. I was elected class clown in high school, so I’ve always seen humor as a virtue. It’s a common bond between my husband and I, and we have taught our kids to develop keen senses of humor, too.

What does your family think of your columns? Do they ever object to the way they’re portrayed?

This is the most common question I get asked. Everyone wants to know, “Does Francis get mad at you over what you’ve written about him?” Believe it or not, no! Not only does my husband never get mad at me for writing stories about him, he frequently suggests that I write about him. My husband grew up in a big family where every kid fought for attention. He is our “loveable narcissist” because everyone in our family knows that Francis’ favorite topic is, hands down, himself. Anytime I write about him — the good, the bad, and even the ugly — he’s happy to bask in the limelight. The kids on the other hand, show very little interest in anything I write. It’s just something that Mom has done for 10 years. I’ve read my columns to them over the years, and so far, none of the kids have objected to how I portrayed them, but then again, they probably weren’t listening. If they ever manage to read my book, it will likely be because they will find it many years from now, while they are cleaning out my house after I’ve died. In all seriousness, our whole family thinks it’s pretty cool that our life is memorialized in print, and that both military and civilian families relate to the stories of chaos, joy, disappointment, pride, frustration and love contained in the book.

What are your hopes for this book?

My hopes for this book have always been pretty simple. Back when I told my writer’s group about my plans to write a manuscript in the style of a readable sitcom, one member asked incredulously, “You don’t want to write a bathroom book, do you?” I thought about it a minute, and told her, “It’d be okay with me if people enjoyed my book in the bathroom.” She was flabbergasted. What she didn’t understand is that I just wanted to write something that would make readers laugh, smile, or even tear up a little. The biggest compliment to me is that I’ve written a “feel-good” story, because that’s exactly what so many of us need right now.

“The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com” is available on Amazon.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Will it be the rack, or the rocking chair?

“My lower back started hurting again,” I told my new primary care doctor at the base clinic, who appeared to be about 12 years old. My last PCM was also female, but a little closer to my age. The one before that was a nurse practitioner, and the three before that were middle-aged men.

Each time the Navy assigns me a new PCM, which happens frequently, I have to explain myself all over again. Once, my PCM changed a week before my pap smear appointment, and I didn’t know it until I was sitting in the examining room in a paper gown. He walked in, told me to put my feet in the stirrups and to “scootch down to the end of the table.”

Military dependents get used to these cringe-worthy moments in our health care. Due to our mobile lifestyles, we become accustomed to changing everything from hairstylists to churches to pizza joints to schools to dentists to mechanics. Why would our experience with medical doctors be any different?

“My back started hurting a few years ago,” I explained to the young PCM I’d been assigned, “and Dr. ... what was her name? She sent me for physical therapy. It worked. Well, until now.”

After giving me a blank stare which seemed to say, “Cry me a river,” my new PCM sent me for a fresh X-ray.

“Mild to moderate degenerative arthritis,” she told me, but all I heard was, “Go find a rocking chair and some tapioca pudding, because you’re officially ancient.” I was referred for another round of physical therapy sessions.

Although I knew the PT would help to alleviate my back pain, memories of my last round of physical therapy convinced me that it could wait until after the holidays.

“Now, pull your right knee up to your left ear,” my previous physical therapist had told me in all seriousness three years ago. I had to look out the window to see if any pigs were flying by.

I had envisioned myself being gently guided through therapeutic motions intended to heal my stiffened spine, but no one bothered to tell me that I would have to break a sweat, not to mention turn myself into a human pretzel.

Every PT session followed the same general routine: Before I had the chance to get into a good People Magazine article in the waiting area, I was greeted by one of the therapists and brought into the cheerful PT suite with its colorful workout equipment, entertaining background music, happy houseplants and padded tables.

Although I would have preferred to nod off on a padded table while enjoying the music, I was always asked to warm up on a treadmill, followed by rolling my under-stretched thighs repeatedly over a foam cylinder on the floor. Piece of cake, or so I thought. Who knew that the harmless limbering exercise would elicit visions of being strapped to “the rack” by Medieval King Longshanks?

I was then allowed to lounge on one of the padded tables, which would have been lovely, if it were not for the dog leash I had use to pull my extremities into positions that made me look like a Cirque du Soleil reject.

While the therapist cleaned the table, I had to endure a final melange of strengthening exercises. Isometric lunges, step ups, wall squats and something affectionately referred to as “monster walks” — pacing back and forth across the room in front of everyone, legs splayed out in a semi-squat with a giant rubber band around my thighs.

Despite the painful memories of my last PT sessions, I am fully confident that my next physical therapist will teach me to touch my knee to my ear again, and that my back will feel better for it.

No need to buy that rocking chair just yet.

Read more at themeatandpotatoesoflife.com, and in Lisa’s book, *The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com*. Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com

WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

SIX-PACK

BY ERIC BERLIN / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Eric Berlin, of Milford, Conn., is the assistant publisher of Penny Publications, a puzzle-magazine company, and the creator of the website Puzzlesnacks. He is the author of “The Puzzling World of Winston Breen” (Penguin) and two sequels. When he started constructing, Eric says, “my goal was to sell exactly one puzzle to The New York Times, just to say I did it.” That was almost 20 years and more than 40 Times crosswords ago. — W.S

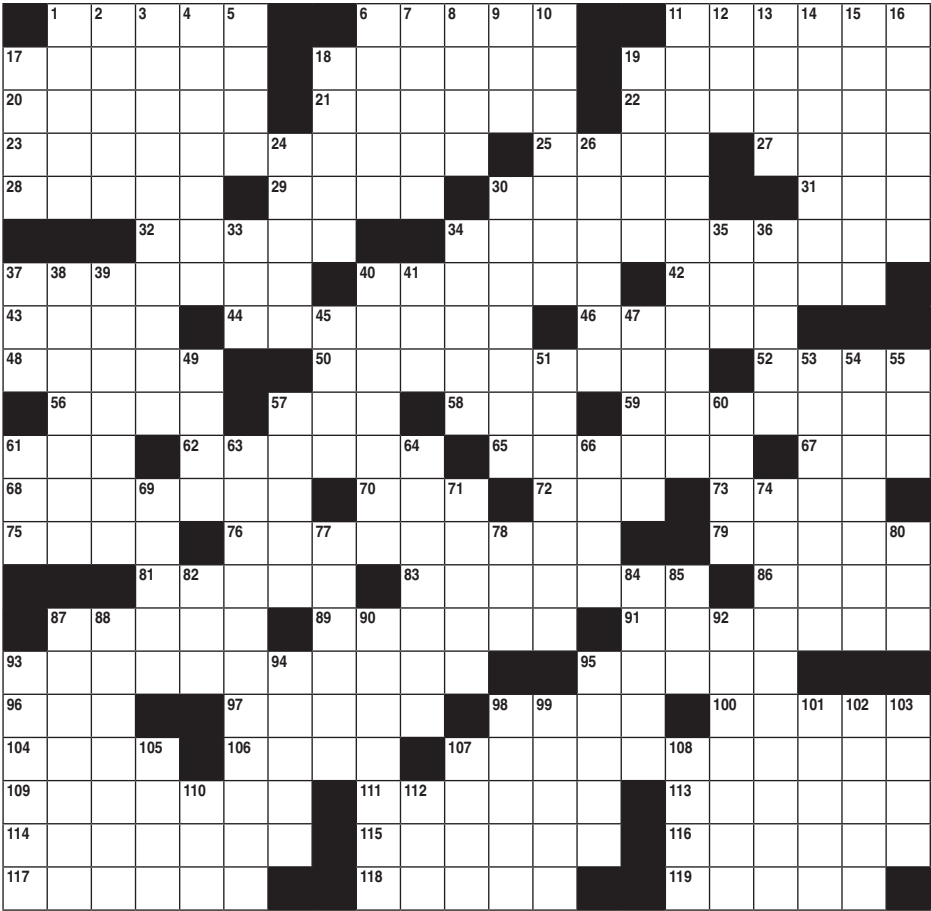
ACROSS

1 Its logo has a blue, red, orange, yellow and green “M”
6 Win every game
11 Blitzed
17 Beethoven’s Third
18 Snoopy sort?
19 You can scratch with it
20 Materials from mollusk shells
21 Tried to respond, as a “Jeopardy!” contestant
22 Gave the latest news
23 Very short-lived gemstones
25 Nicolas ____, standout player in soccer’s Premier League
27 Drake’s output
28 Thinly veiled criticism, in modern slang
29 Blow off steam, say
30 Possible fallout of a controversy, informally
31 RR stop
32 Name shouted in “The Chipmunk Song”
34 TV quiz program about an epic poem
37 Handed a hand
40 Bully’s threat
42 World view you might open up to?

43 Suffix with towel
44 NoDoz, for one
46 Help with the dishes
48 Fragment
50 Look back fondly
52 Disney-owned cable channel
56 Ask to be handed a hand?
57 Vereen who won a 1973 Tony for “Pippin”
58 Prefix akin to mal-
59 Haphazardly organized
61 Having four sharps, musically
62 ____ Regal, big name in Scotch
65 “And so on and so forth”
67 Expected
68 General Motors division until 2010
70 Resident: Suffix
72 One-named singer with the 2019 Song of the Year nominee “Hard Place”
73 Some “Babe” characters
75 Designer Gucci
76 Beat box?
79 A brother of 32-Across
81 Zing
83 “Concentration” puzzles
86 Reasonable
87 “The Divine Comedy” poet
89 Brand of cologne with a literary name
91 Jazzed (up)

93 Magnificent plan of action
95 Bone in the leg
96 Key to get out
97 Maya Angelou’s “And Still ____”
98 Nev. neighbor
100 Cloth used in theater backdrops
104 ____ Defense (classic chess opening)
106 Cozy home
107 Dance celebrating 2010 legislation
109 Glad ____ (good news)
111 Turn up
113 One of 17 in Monopoly
114 Manages, barely
115 Bibliophile
116 Tightfisted sorts
117 Back up again
118 Hip-hop’s ____, the Creator
119 First name in cosmetics

9 Actor Wallach
10 Friends you may never have met
11 Salon job named after a comic book hero
12 Danson of “The Good Place”
13 Building girder
14 Actress Lyonne
15 Compulsive thieves, informally
16 “An apple a day keeps the doctor away,” for one
17 Hydrocarbon suffixes
18 The thought is there
19 Serving of tea, to Brits
24 River near Rotterdam
26 Some lawn maintenance tools
30 Who wrote “Undeniable: Evolution and the Science of Creation”
33 Recipient of special treatment, in brief
34 Very cold
35 Klingons, e.g., for short
36 What Hypnos is the Greek god of
37 ____ Plaines, Ill.
38 Liquor component
39 Over
40 Outdoor
41 Part of a glass ... or glasses
45 Before: Abbr.
47 More dangerous to drive on, in a way
49 Metric prefix
51 Natural bridge



53 Supporting musician in a jazz band
54 Guest’s guest
55 Family tree word
57 Chin-up target, informally
60 Leaders of the pack?
61 Bitter brew, for short
63 Pounding on a pie topping
64 Cloud ____
66 Followers of bees

69 SpongeBob SquarePants and others
71 Opposition
74 Entertainment host Ryan, that smart aleck!
77 To wit
78 Belt in judo
80 Mustachioed Springfield resident
82 Baseball’s Mel
84 One of the Schuyler sisters in “Hamilton”

85 One sharing a bunk bed, briefly
87 Animosity
88 Places to play Skee-Ball
90 Turn off and on again, say
92 With regard to
93 Get worse through neglect
94 “Give it ____!”
95 Need in Boggle
98 Withstand

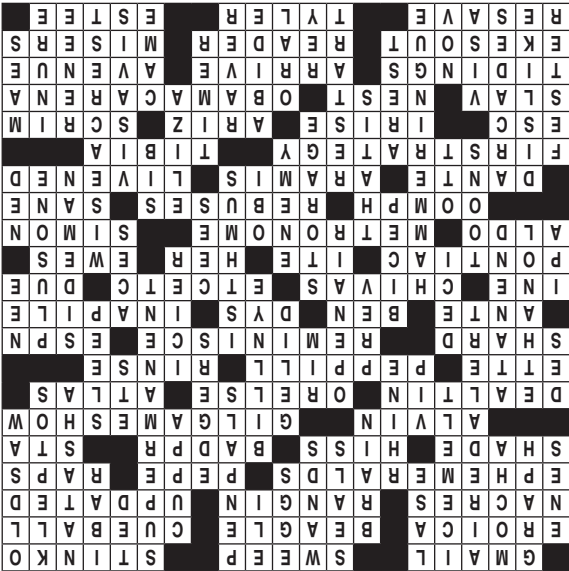
99 Dancer with glow sticks, often
101 Actress Zellweger
102 Get accustomed (to)
103 Fannie ____ (some securities)
105 Charging option
107 Said aloud
108 Showed up
110 Cyber Monday mo., usually
112 Daisy Ridley’s “Star Wars” role

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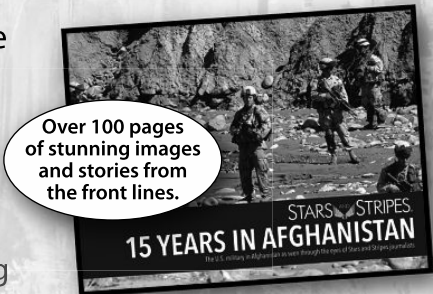
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FACES

Soderbergh at helm for 2021 Oscars

By JOSH ROTTENBERG
Los Angeles Times

Amid a global pandemic that has upended the usual business of Hollywood’s awards season, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced Tuesday that filmmaker Steven Soderbergh and producers Jesse Collins and Stacey Sher will team up to produce the 93rd Academy Awards.

In June, facing a summer surge in COVID-19 cases and an uncertain path ahead, the academy decided to postpone the Oscars telecast from Feb. 28 to April 25. Now, as the nation enters the most dangerous phase of the pandemic yet, much is still to be determined about how the Oscars will be held, including whether it will be an in-person event or a virtual ceremony.

In handing the reins to Soderbergh, Collins and Sher — all of whom have deep résumés in Hollywood, but none of whom has ever produced the Oscars before — Academy leaders are banking that they will be able to adapt a show that is deeply rooted in nearly a century of tradition.

“The upcoming Oscars is the perfect occasion for innovation and for re-envisioning the possibilities for the awards show. This is a dream team who will respond directly to these times,” academy President David Rubin and academy Chief Executive Dawn Hudson said in a joint statement. “The Academy is excited to work with them to deliver an event that reflects the worldwide love of movies and how they connect us and entertain us when we need them the most.”

“We’re thrilled and terrified in equal measure. Because of the extraordinary situation we’re all in, there’s an opportunity to focus on the movies and the people who make them in a new way, and we hope to create a show that really FEELS like the movies we all love,” Collins, Sher and Soderbergh said in their own joint statement.

A prolific and unpredictable filmmaker, Soderbergh has directed more than 30 movies since breaking out in 1989 with his feature debut, “sex, lies and videotape,” including “Contagion,” “Out of Sight,” “Magic Mike” and “Ocean’s Eleven” and its two sequels.

He won a directing Oscar in 2000 for the drama “Traffic” and earned a nomination for directing “Erin Brockovich” that same year and earlier earned a screenplay nod for “sex, lies, and videotape.” He’s also has produced a wide range of projects, including “Bill & Ted Face the Music,” “Citizenfour” and “Michael Clayton.”



SONY PICTURES CLASSICS/AP

Ziyi Zhang, left, and Chen Chang in a scene from “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.” Wednesday marks the 20th anniversary of the release of Ang Lee’s movie, filmed in China and shot in Mandarin.

Martial arts masterwork

Ang Lee on ‘Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon’ 20 years later

By JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

It’s physically impossible to get to the forest fight scene that hovers atop slender bamboo trees in “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” and not say out loud, “Whoa.”

Twenty years later, the exhilarating grace of Ang Lee’s martial arts masterwork is just as breathtaking. The way figures glide across the water. The extraordinary lightness of it. Its craft and choreography are only further evidence of a mantra uttered in the film: “A sword by itself rules nothing. It only comes alive in skilled hands.”

Take that scene, where Chow Yun-fat and Zhang Ziyi clash in a dance across bamboo stalks. Asked what he remembers about shooting it, Lee doesn’t hesitate: The sweating. Not from heat, but from the stress of suspending a few of Asia’s biggest movie stars high in the air, held aloft by cranes over a valley.

“You use very heavy ways to imitate lightness,” said Lee, speaking by phone from Taiwan during a recent trip from his home in New York. “Each actor hanging up there, you need 30 people down on the ground mimicking how the bamboo swings in the wind. I probably did about a third of what I wanted to do. The way you dream about a movie, it’s very difficult to make real.”

Tuesday marked the 20th anniversary of the release of “Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon,” an occasion being celebrated with a new limited-edition 4K UHD Blu-ray. It remains a movie unlike any other.

An international co-production filmed in China and shot in Mandarin, it still ranks, easily, as the most successful non-English language film ever in the U.S. The \$17 million movie grossed \$128.1 million in North America.

Arguably more than any other film, “Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon” exposed mainstream American moviegoers not just to a new genre known predominantly in Asia—the wuxia tradition—but to subtitled films in general. It set another record with 10 Academy Awards nominations, a mark since equaled by “Roma” and “Parasite.” “Crouching Tiger” took home four Oscars.

Did Lee feel that when Bong Joon Ho’s “Parasite” became the first non-English language best-picture winner in February that he had helped pave the way?

“Yeah, I did,” says Lee, laughing. “I wouldn’t say it happened because of me. But as people paved the way for me, I paved the way for that movie. And that movie paved the way for future movie-makers and goers. We’re a community. We’re all part of a history.”

“Crouching Tiger” is poised between worlds. Its elegantly choreographed action scenes have the meter of poetry. Its conflicts between duty and freedom, master and disciple take on soulful dimensions—particularly in scenes with the film’s antagonist: the rebellious Jen Yu (Zhang), a commanding figure of feminist fury and empowerment who at the time drew comparisons to Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Twenty years later, she still feels like a brilliant outlier in a male-dominated genre.

The film is a fusion of East and West, of Asian film history and Hollywood, of action movie and art house. Lee and writer-producer James Schamus — who together adapted Jane Austen in 1995 — took to referring to it as “Sense and Sensibility” with martial arts.” Over five months of prep and a five-month shoot across China, Lee agonized over the delicate balance of “Crouching Tiger.”

“Halfway through our difficulties, I remember thinking this is a B-movie, supposedly. I’m fighting the genre, trying to make a great movie,” Lee says. “I didn’t have experience in martial arts. It’s a very special skill and cinematic sense, which I learned from the Hong Kong crew — the choreographer Yuen Wo-ping and the cinematographer Peter Pau. I learned so much about moviemaking. Not just about action, but about the essence of the medium.”

Every project tends to become all-consuming for Lee, the protean director of “Life of Pi,” “Brokeback Mountain” and “The Ice Storm.” “Sometimes it feels like every movie is a lifetime,” he says, chuckling. But he considers “Crouching Tiger” his most difficult film. Not just for the technical challenges but because of the pressure he put on himself to capture the cinema of his youth.

That’s also what Lee ascribes the film’s success to: its sense of childlike wonderment.

“What I think people respond to is the innocence,” Lee says. “Putting yourself in an unknown situation, somehow you have a better chance to find that innocence. It’s the reason we go to the theater.”

Benefit concert has star power

Associated Press

Taylor Swift, Cher, Billie Eilish, LL Cool J and Dolly Parton are adding their voices to Cyndi Lauper’s annual concert to combat youth homelessness, an issue the “True Colors” singer says has only gotten worse during the pandemic.

“You can say ‘Stay home; protect yourself.’ What do you do if you’ve got no home?” Lauper told The Associated Press. “I think it’s time that we make sure all young people have access to lifesaving services without fear of violence or discrimination.”

Her Home for the Holidays benefit concert will premiere Friday on Lauper’s TikTok channel at 8 p.m. EST, with an additional stream Sunday at 8 p.m. EST on Lauper’s YouTube and Facebook handles. This year’s concert will be free to watch, with donations encouraged.

The lineup also includes Adam Lambert, Amanda Shires & Jason Isbell, Bette Midler, Billy Porter, Boy George, Brandi Carlile, Brittany Howard, Carson Kressley, Harvey Fierstein, Henry Rollins, Jackson Browne, Judy Gold, Kim Petras, King Princess, Meg Myers, Phoebe Bridgers, Sharon Osbourne, Shea Diamond and Whoopi Goldberg.

Franklin among Women’s Hall of Fame honorees

“Queen of Soul” Aretha Franklin and Nobel laureate and “Beloved” author Toni Morrison will be inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame Thursday as part of a posthumous class of Black honorees that also includes Henrietta Lacks, whose cells were widely used in biomedical research; Barbara Hillary, the first Black woman to travel to both the North and South Poles; and civil rights activists Barbara Rose, Johns Powell and Mary Church Terrell.

The evening ceremony will be the first in a series of planned virtual inductions meant to correct a lack of diversity among honorees, hall officials said in a news release.

“In order to openly acknowledge and amend the disparities within the nomination pool, the virtual induction series will recognize and induct other marginalized women of achievement including those from the Latinx, Asian, Native American, LGBTQ+ sisterhoods, as well as additional Black women,” it said.

Franklin had dozens of hits over a half-century and her signature song, “Respect,” has stood as a cultural icon. She won 18 Grammy awards and, in 1987, became the first woman inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Franklin died of pancreatic cancer at her home in Detroit in 2018. She was 76.



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OPINION

DOD needs an agent of change

MAX BOOT
Special To The Washington Post.

If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change. — “The Leopard” by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa

Small wars can sometimes send a big message. During the Italo-Turkish War in 1911, an Italian pilot in Libya carried out the world’s first bombing raid just eight years after the Wright Brothers’ first flight. During the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939, German forces pioneered the blitzkrieg tactics they would use in World War II. During the Israel-Syria war in 1982, Israeli forces obliterated Syrian air defenses, offering a preview of the technology and tactics that U.S. forces would use eight years later in the Gulf War.

Now add this fall’s Nagorno-Karabakh war to the list. In six weeks of fighting, the oil-rich nation of Azerbaijan defeated Russia’s ally Armenia to reclaim territory it had lost in the early 1990s. A key to Azerbaijan’s triumph was its use of killer drones such as Turkey’s Bayraktar TB2, which is armed with antitank missiles and is similar to the U.S. Reaper, and Israel’s “kamikaze drones,” which home in on radar emissions. Armenia’s outdated, Russian-made air defenses could not stop the onslaught, and its ground forces suffered heavy losses. P.W. Singer of the New America think tank provided me with data, based on open-source reporting, that indicates that 47% of Armenia’s combat vehicles were damaged or destroyed, along with 93% of its artillery.

This one-sided outcome, which follows the success of Turkish drones in the past year in Syria and Libya, shows that the transformation of warfare by unmanned technology is accelerating and spreading around the world. The United States was a pioneer in this field — it first used an armed

drone in Afghanistan in 2001 — but it is now struggling to transform its armed forces to incorporate advances in fields such as robotics, artificial intelligence, hypersonics, directed energy and quantum computing. We need a defense secretary who can drive innovation in ways that a recently retired general such as Lloyd Austin — President-elect Joe Biden’s reported choice — is unlikely to do.

The Defense Department, to be sure, has made a major commitment to unmanned platforms ranging from tiny surveillance drones to major combat systems such as the Air Force’s XQ-58A Valkyrie, an unmanned fighter, and the Navy’s Orca, an unmanned submarine. But the military services remain heavily invested in “legacy” systems such as tanks and aircraft carriers that are increasingly vulnerable. (China’s “carrier-killer” missiles reportedly hit a moving ship in a test in August.)

“We are not moving nearly fast enough to cheaper, more attributable aircraft,” former undersecretary of defense Eric Edelman told me, referring to unmanned aircraft whose “attrition” in combat would not be as catastrophic as the loss of manned aircraft. “We have an inertia towards manned platforms, whether at sea, land, air,” Singer agreed, adding there is also a predisposition for a small number of costly weapons systems over a larger number of cheaper ones.

That inertia is reinforced by the “iron triangle” of defense contractors, members of Congress and the Pentagon bureaucracy. The new defense authorization bill set to be passed by the House on Tuesday authorizes 93 F-35 fighters — 14 more than the Pentagon requested — and an extra Virginia-class submarine that the Pentagon did not ask for. A Virginia-class submarine costs about \$3 billion, and an F-35 at least \$80 million.

That’s a lot of money — but it’s chicken

feed compared with the cost of building new aircraft carriers that could become target practice for Chinese missiles. The new Gerald R. Ford, still not complete, cost \$13 billion, and the Navy is building two more in its class. In 2018, then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis proposed that the Harry S. Truman be retired halfway through its service life. But President Donald Trump overruled him. The Navy will need to spend \$20 billion to keep this flat-top, already a quarter-century old, at sea for another 25 years.

The one military service that is taking real risks to retool is the Marine Corps. It has gotten rid of all of its tanks and is reducing the number of cannons, infantry and helicopters, to focus on a new island-hopping strategy of using missiles and unmanned aircraft to fight China. The other services are trying to maintain their existing forces while adding unmanned systems as an adjunct. But there won’t be enough money in the future to do everything. In an era of urgent domestic priorities, the defense budget (currently \$741 billion) is likely to shrink. Hard choices will need to be made.

And that brings me to the possible nomination of Austin as secretary of defense. He is an experienced soldier and a minority trailblazer, but there is nothing in his record to indicate that he is a bold or unconventional thinker. After 41 years in the Army, he is unlikely to shake things up at a time when technological advances are transforming the battlefield. We need a smart civilian running the Pentagon who is more likely to grapple with the paradox at the heart of di Lampedusa’s novel. If we want to maintain U.S. military dominance, the U.S. military must change in ways that will make a lot of entrenched interests very uncomfortable.

Boot is the Jeane J. Kirkpatrick senior fellow for national security studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

COVID violators not American heroes

Baltimore Sun Editorial Board

During World War II, did Americans cheer for those who refused to use ration cards for their meat and butter? Did we pour into the streets to support keeping public pools open during the worst of the polio outbreak? Did news outlets give space to anti-science misfits who denied any link between open city sewers and the spread of deadly cholera? No doubt there are examples of all three, but in each instance, the vast majority of the nation sucked it up and did the right thing, often making considerable sacrifices for the greater good and for the welfare of future generations.

That proud history comes to mind as the nation hurtles toward the next phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, which might aptly be titled the “winter of our discontent.” If the first 10 months of the outbreak seemed painful, the next several may prove excruciating. Not simply because the numbers are moving in the wrong direction with the U.S. now recording its most coronavirus-related deaths in a week (exceeding the worst of April), but because people are hitting a wall. They are frustrated and angry, not just at the virus but by government-ordered restrictions and their adverse economic consequences.

On Monday, Maryland State Police announced the running tally for police agen-

cies statewide that have been enforcing those COVID-19 restrictions from limited indoor seating in houses of worship to shuttered playgrounds. The numbers loom large: 42,166 compliance checks, 4,688 calls for service and 132 charges filed or arrests made. In theory, police should never have to be called to enforce rules during a pandemic that has already killed more than 280,000 Americans, but human nature being human nature, there are inevitably people who are indifferent, unthinking, unaware or some combination of all three. The same could likely be said of some during World War II, but back then, we didn’t hold them up as heroes in some form of culture war.

And there’s a lot of that going on. Just tune into Fox News or One America News Network. Want to get some adulation from the right-wing? Charge an elected official who approved COVID-19 restrictions with hypocrisy for eating a meal out, preferably a pricey one. Or make a video explaining why restrictions hurting your business aren’t fair because there’s another business (it need not be comparable or even especially nearby, apparently) that is not as heavily restricted. In either case, you will get around-the-clock coverage and sympathetic news readers pleading your case.

Make no mistake, nothing about the pandemic is fair. And you can always find “do

as I say, not as I do” in public office. But is selective “gotcha” the biggest story around, when more than 2,000 Americans are dying from the virus daily? And as far as restaurant and bar owners and others hit hard by restrictions, we hear them. And, yes, in some cases, there are inconsistencies in restrictions and enforcement (in part because there’s also a lot of denial going around). But ultimately, these restrictions have a purpose — to slow the spread of the virus until vaccinations can be administered. For most people, that reprieve is still months away. We can’t lose sight of that.

We are in a war of sorts with a brutal, unyielding enemy. Some sacrifices must be made, whether it means restricting holiday celebrations to Zoom or a local bar closing at 9 p.m. or perhaps not opening at all for a time. In turn, there should be help extended to those from whom we have asked so much. A return to Paycheck Protection Program direct aid, for example, or mailing out another round of federal stimulus checks to individuals or simply encouraging families to order takeout from their favorite local eatery. It would be nice to think that Americans come together in our “finest hours” when times are tough just as they did 80 years ago fighting the Axis powers. The reality is probably never quite that simplistic or tidy, but surely it should be our proud, patriotic aspiration.

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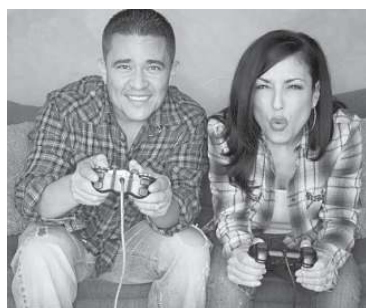


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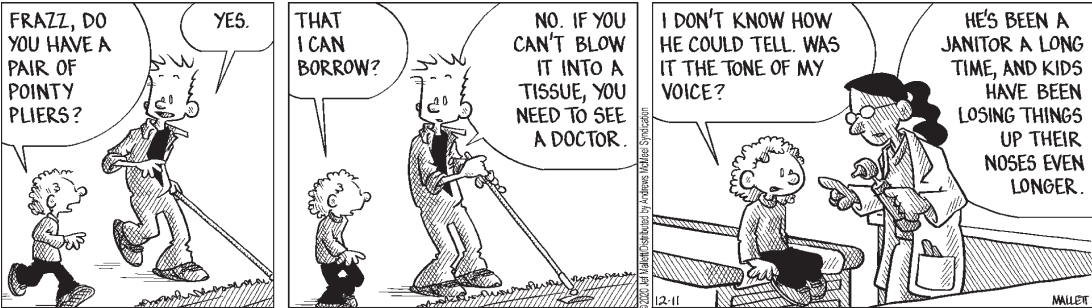


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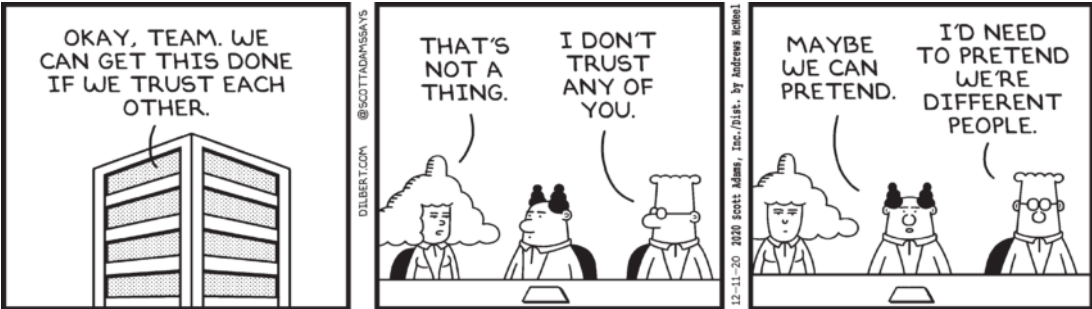
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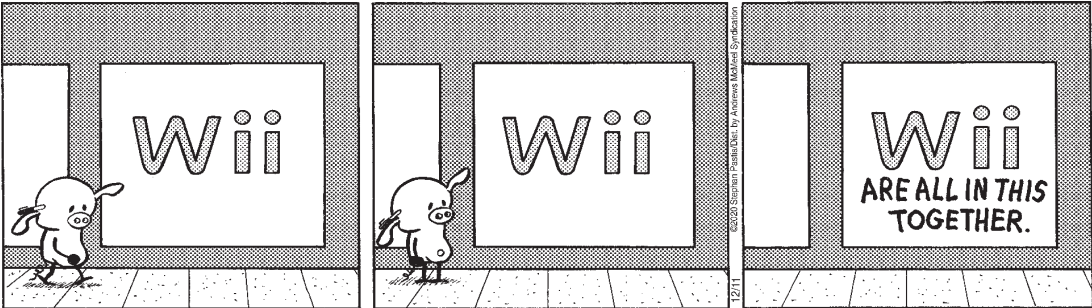
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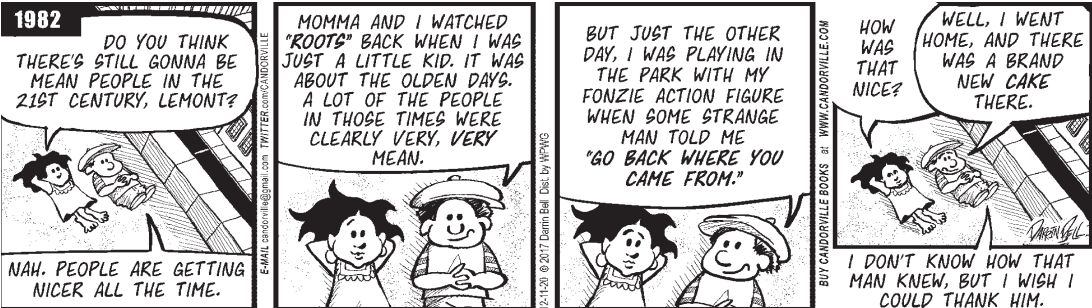
Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



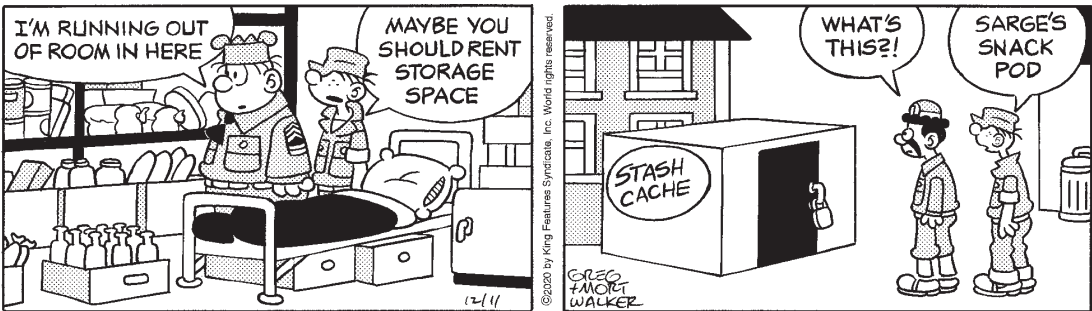
Candorville



Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6		7	8	9	10	11
12				13				14				
15				16			17					
18				19								
20			21		22				23	24	25	26
			27	28			29	30				
31	32	33					34					
35					36		37					
38					39	40			41	42	43	44
				45				46		47		
48	49	50	51							52		
53						54				55		
56						57				58		

- ACROSS
- 56 Summomed with a beeper
- 57 Pink Floyd's Barrett
- 58 \$ dispenser
- 23 January, to Juana
- 24 Genetic stuff
- 25 Tire filler
- 26 AOL rival
- 28 Ostrich's kin
- 30 Storm center
- 31 300, to Cato
- 32 Plato's P
- 33 Comics cry
- 36 Nitwit
- 37 Expensive
- 40 Russian range
- 42 — nova
- 43 Not moving
- 44 Coffee break hr.
- 45 Pitt of "Troy"
- 46 Lose traction
- 48 Mom's mate
- 49 In the style of
- 50 Pot-bellied pet
- 51 First lady?
- DOWN
- 1 Rural spreads
- 2 From Dublin
- 3 "That's it!"
- 4 Skillets
- 5 Votes for
- 6 Fighting
- 7 Muppet prawn
- 8 Actress Lupino
- 9 Wee bite
- 10 Summer on the Seine
- 11 Old map letters
- 17 Tater
- 21 Chicago airport

Answer to Previous Puzzle

P	A	C		C	I	T	E		S	P	A	M
E	G	O		R	V	E	R		L	A	L	A
C	O	N	T	E	S	S	A		E	W	E	S
			G	O			S	T	A	U	N	C
G	E	R	A	L	D		O	R	T			
A	S	E		E	O	S		C	H	E	S	S
S	A	S		W	A	D		S	M	U	T	
P	U	S	H	Y		W	E	S		O	R	A
			A	E	R		N	E	U	T	E	R
S	U	N	D	A	E	S		T	M	I		
O	R	E	O		S	A	N	T	A	C	O	N
B	L	O	W		E	T	R		O	R	E	
S	S	N	S		W	E	A	R		N	B	A

12-11 CRYPTOQUIP

“PVHHB DXVHJ” DXUZV OKZ

ODJ NDAZYJ NZV THLBP

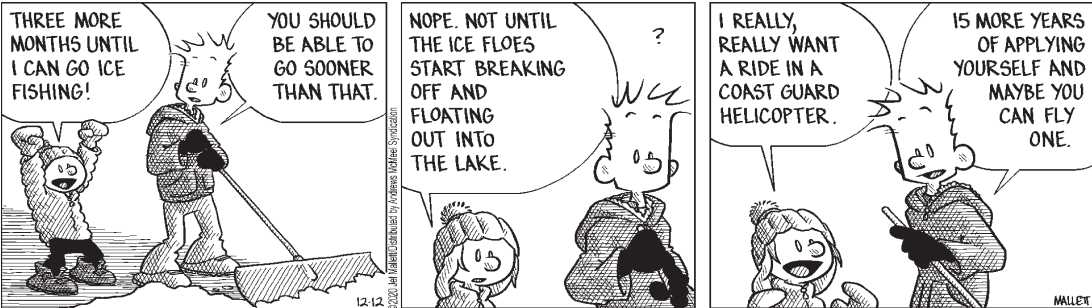
GHVE LVVLUDTMH, BHVGZYZ

DBF UZYXKE: HFPE DMTHVU.

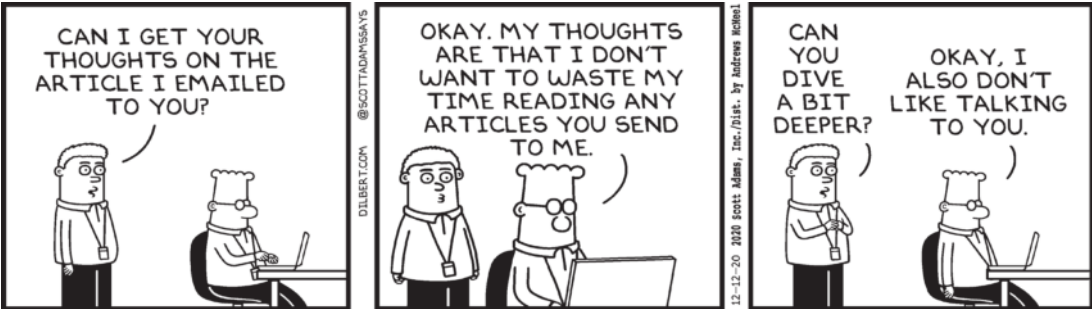
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I AM QUITE FOND OF HEARING MIDDLE EASTERN ROCK GROUPS. IN PARTICULAR, I LIKE THE QATAR SOLOS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: P equals G

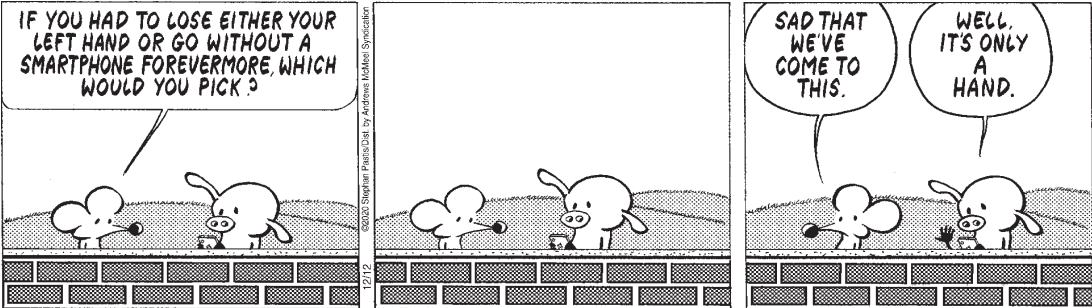
Frazz



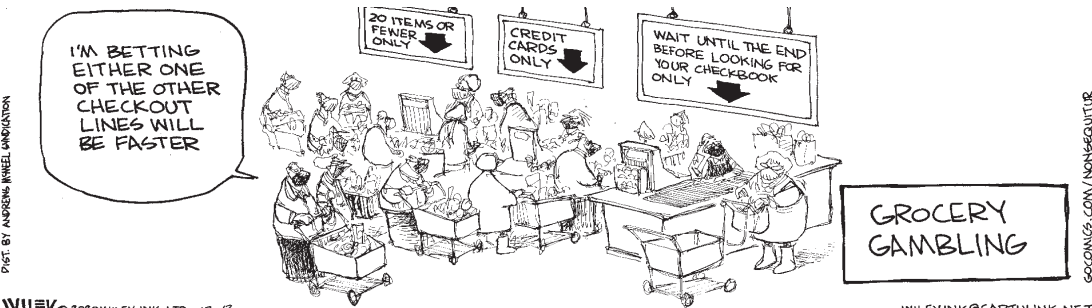
Dilbert



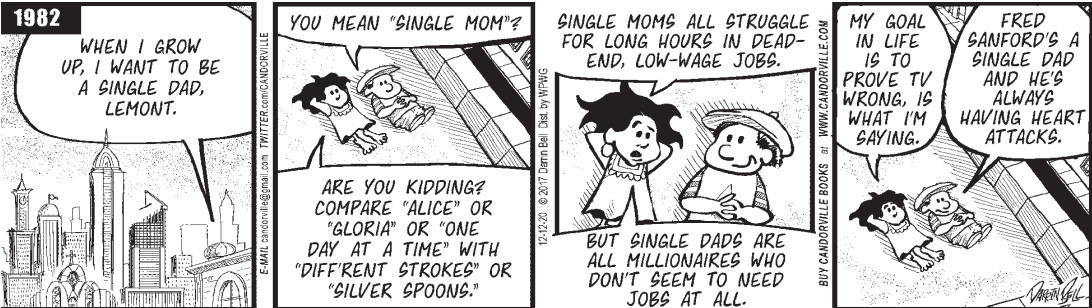
Pearls Before Swine



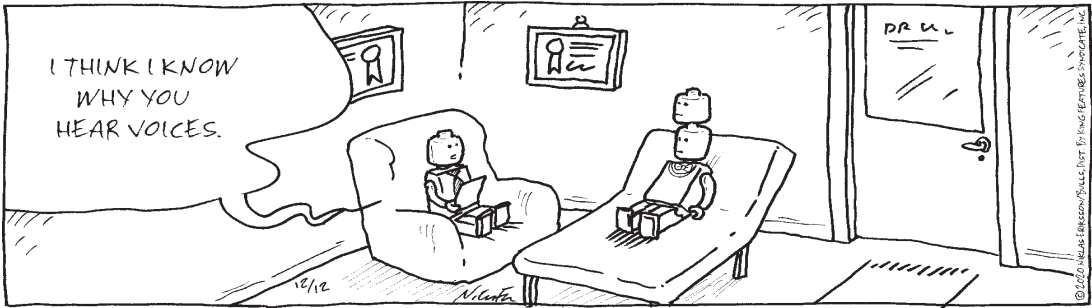
Non Sequitur



Candorville



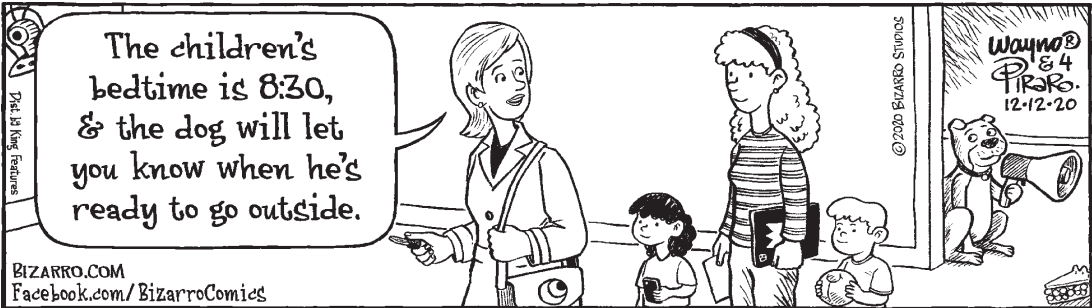
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12				13					14			
15				16					17			
18			19					20				
			21			22						
23	24	25				26				27	28	29
30					31				32			
33				34				35				
			36				37					
38	39	40				41				42	43	44
45					46				47			
48					49				50			
51					52				53			

- ACROSS
- 1 Boom times

4 Recedes

8 "Downton Abbey" countess

12 Menlo Park monogram

13 Talk up

14 Some deer

15 In the style of

16 Celestial bear

17 Actor Omar

18 Late November through January, in general

21 Dog doc

22 That fellow

23 Roman robes

26 Lair

27 Passing craze

30 Golf bag item

31 Math ratios

32 Kid's plea

33 "Blue Bloods" extra

34 Predetermine

35 Peculiar

36 Chest muscle

37 Male swan

38 Customizable recipe direction

45 General assembly?

46 Teeny

47 Joke

48 Computer debut of 1998
- 49 Arrive

50 — -la-la

51 Wood strip

52 Espy

53 Melancholy
- DOWN
- 1 Six-sided state

2 — Alto, Calif.

3 Barking mammal

4 Chopin pieces

5 Sacha Baron Cohen role

6 Booked solid

7 Squirrels (away)

8 Coffee add-in

9 "I'm a klutz!"

10 Seized vehicle

11 Org.

19 Tennis great Lendl

20 Aachen article
- 23 Spasm

24 Spanish gold

25 Republicans

26 Use a shovel

27 Corpulent

28 Picnic crasher

29 Hobbyist's abbr.

31 Park outings

32 Castro's land

34 Classic car

35 Answer to "Are we there?"

36 Intimidate, with "out"

37 Vodka cocktail

38 Go yachting

39 Witty Bombeck

40 Latin 101 word

41 Sporty car roof

42 Pvt.'s superiors

43 Skater Lipinski

44 "Zounds!"

Answer to Previous Puzzle

F	I	B		P	E	A		P	I	N	E	S
A	R	I		A	L	T		E	D	I	T	S
R	I	N		N	E	W	S	P	A	P	E	R
M	S	G		S	C	A	P	E				
S	H	O		T	R	U		E	D	A	M	
			H	E	S		D	E	N	N	I	S
C	R	E	A	M			Y	E	A	R	N	
C	H	E	R	U	B		P	E	R			
C	O	K	E		O	U	R		O	B	I	T
			B	O	R	I	S		O	N	E	
P	A	P	E	R	B	A	C	K		S	E	N
O	L	I	V	A		L	E	I		S	R	A
P	A	G	E	D		S	Y	D		A	T	M

12-12

CRYPTOQUIP

ZFWG SFW CQIW IQC ACPNWC

DWIQRW PGNUBNWA PG Q DPK

LIQGAQB, P ZUYBA LQT FW

KQPGWA RUSUC-PWST.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: "GREEN ACRES" ACTOR WHO WAS FAMOUS FOR BEING VERY IRRITABLE, NERVOUS AND TOUCHY: EDGY ALBERT.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: R equals M

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SCOREBOARD

COLLEGE FOOTBALL									
Schedule									
Friday's games									
SOUTH					SOUTH				
W. Carolina (0-3) at North Carolina (7-3), ppd.					Wake Forest (4-3) at Louisville (3-7)				
					Houston (3-3) at Memphis (6-3)				
					Troy (5-5) at South Alabama (4-7), ppd.				
					Texas A&M (7-1) at Tennessee (2-6), ppd.				
					Coastal Carolina (10-0) at Troy (5-5)				
					North Carolina (7-3) at Miami (8-1)				
					Duke (2-8) at Florida St. (2-6)				
					Tennessee (2-6) at Vanderbilt (0-8)				
					Appalachian St. (7-3) at Georgia Southern (7-4)				
					LSU (3-5) at Florida (8-1)				
					Auburn (5-4) at Mississippi St. (2-6)				
					Virginia (5-4) at Virginia Tech (4-6)				
					MIDWEST				
					Georgia (6-2) at Missouri (5-3)				
					N. Illinois (0-5) at E. Michigan (1-4)				
					Minnesota (2-3) at Nebraska (2-4)				
					Miami (Ohio) (2-1) at Bowling Green (0-5)				
					Illinois (2-4) at Northwestern (5-1)				
					W. Michigan (4-1) at Ball St. (4-1)				
					Vanderbilt (0-8) at Missouri (5-3), ppd.				
PRO FOOTBALL									
NFL									
Saturday, Dec. 19									
AMERICAN CONFERENCE					SOUTHWEST				
East					Alabama (9-0) at Arkansas (3-6)				
W. Carolina (0-3) at North Carolina (7-3), ppd.					Louisiana-Monroe (0-10) at Arkansas St. (4-7), ppd.				
					UAB (4-3) at Rice (2-2)				
					Incarnate Word at Arkansas St. (4-7)				
					Oklahoma St. (6-3) at Baylor (2-6)				
					Louisiana Tech (5-3) at TCU (5-4)				
					Mississippi (4-4) at Texas A&M (7-1), ppd.				
					FAR WEST				
					Washington (3-1) at Oregon (3-2)				
					Boise St. (4-1) at Wyoming (2-3)				
					Southern Cal (4-0) at UCLA (3-2)				
					Utah St. (1-5) at Colorado St. (1-3)				
					San Diego St. (4-3) at BYU (9-1)				
					California (1-3) at Washington St. (1-2)				
					Fresno St. (3-2) at New Mexico (1-5)				
					Stanford (2-2) at Oregon St. (2-3)				
					UNLV (0-5) at Hawaii (3-4)				

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball American League

BOSTON RED SOX — Announced the invitation of Worcester Red Sox (Triple A), Portland Sea Dogs (Double A), Greenville Drive (High A) and Salem Red Sox (Low A) to become affiliates of their player development structure.

MINNESOTA TWINS — Announced the invitation of St. Paul Saints (Triple A - who officially accepted the offer), Wichita Wind Surge (Double A), Cedar Rapids Kernels (High A) and Fort Meyers Mighty Mussels (Lower A) to become affiliates of their player development structure.

TEXAS RANGERS — Announced the invitation of Round Rock Express (Triple A), Frisco RoughRiders (Double A), Hickory Crawdads (High A) and Down East Wood Ducks to become affiliates of their player development structure.

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS — Placed T Le'Ron Clark on injured reserve.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS — Signed WR Manasseh Bailey to the practice squad. Released P Lachlan Edwards and K J.J. Molson. Designated RB Justin Jackson to return from injured reserve.

LOS ANGELES RAMS — Signed LS Colin Holba to the practice squad.

MIAMI DOLPHINS — Placed CB Jamal Perry on the reserve/COVID-19 list. Promoted S Nate Holley to the active roster as a COVID-19 replacement.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS — Waived LB Jack Cichy. Signed DB Dayon Lake and WR Devin Smith to the practice squad.

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS — Activated OT Terron Armstead, G Dennis Kelly and practice squad WR Lil'Jordan Humphrey from the reserve/COVID-19 lists. Designated DB Justin Hardee to return from injured reserve.

NEW YORK JETS — Designated CB Bless Austin and TE Trevan Wesco to return

NBA



TAMI CHAPPELL / AP

Atlanta Hawks guard Trae Young, center, and his high-scoring sidekick John Collins are entering a new season with a strong surge of new help as they adjust to the additions of Danilo Gallinari, Bogdan Bogdanovic, Kris Dunn and Rajon Rando. The offseason moves have made Atlanta a playoff contender.

Hawks' prospects soar as newcomers give Young help

By CHARLES ODOM
Associated Press

ATLANTA — Trae Young said it's going to take some time to adjust to the Atlanta Hawks' new mix following the additions of such veterans as Danilo Gallinari, Bogdan Bogdanovic, Kris Dunn and Rajon Rando.

"It's not something that just happens overnight," Young said Tuesday.

"We've added a lot of new guys with different talents who bring a lot of different things to the game. It's going to be fun learning and figuring out where they like the ball the best and things like that."

There's not much time to find the new mix. The NBA season opens on Dec. 22. The Hawks' preseason opener is Dec. 11.

Just don't suggest to Young that it'll be an adjustment for him to share the ball with established shooters in Atlanta's lineup. Young was fourth in the league in scoring and shots from the field last season, but he's quick to note he also was second in assists.

"Passing is nothing new for me," Young said. "I love getting my teammates involved and when my teammates are open I'm going to find them and I'm going to put my teammates in the best position to succeed. That's just my job as a point guard and as a leader of this team, to help my teammates be in the best position."

The offseason additions by general manager Travis Schlenk make Atlanta a contender to return to the Eastern Conference playoffs for

35.5%

Percentage of the Atlanta Hawks' scoring done last year by Trae Young and John Collins. Young averaged 29.6 points per game and Collins averaged 21.6. No other player on the team averaged more than 16 points a game.

Source: NBA.com

the first time since 2017. Bogdanovic, Gallinari and others provide needed help for an offense that relied too heavily on Young and forward John Collins.

Young averaged 29.6 points and 9.3 assists last season. Collins averaged 21.6 points and 10.1 rebounds. The returning core also includes former first-round picks De'Andre Hunter, Kevin Huerter and Cam Reddish.

Seeking to improve the Hawks' three-point shooting, defense and depth, Schlenk also traded for Tony Snell and signed free agent Solomon Hill.

The Hawks had free-agent funds available and they found veteran players eager to join the rebuilding effort.

"This is the new free-agent destination," Hawks coach Lloyd Pierce said Tuesday. "Everybody wants to come to Atlanta and that's how we want to keep it. ... They know we can do something special here and they're excited to be a part of it."

Another player poised for his Atlanta debut is center Clint Capela, who was recovering from an injury

when he was acquired from Houston last season.

This year's first-round draft pick, former Southern Cal center Onyeka Okongwu, should add more defense while he is expected to play behind Capela and Collins.

The wealth of depth is a new luxury for the Hawks.

"You look at all the positives and your mind just starts to race," Collins said.

Suddenly, there will be a more intense competition for starting spots and playing time.

"I think we're all interested to see how that's all going to mesh together," Collins said, adding the depth "also creates a competitive edge and gives guys that mindset that every possession counts and if I do mess up or whatever there's another guy on the bench who can take my spot."

The Hawks won only 20 games before the coronavirus pandemic left them in the bottom eight and excluded from the NBA bubble in Orlando.

"Obviously it hurt to not be there," Collins said.

The Hawks have missed the playoffs while finishing with fewer than 30 wins for three consecutive seasons. The busy offseason created a buzz that has been missing in Atlanta.

"It's good to have people talking about Atlanta basketball right now," Young said. "I want it to stay this way. The city deserves it, this organization deserves it. We have a lot of exciting pieces, a lot of exciting players."

Ranking the teams by substance, style

By BEN GOLLIVER
The Washington Post

Opening night is now just a few weeks away, so here's how the 30 NBA teams stack up by entertainment value. From "must-see" to "please clap," this list considers both substance and style. Fresh faces, intriguing offseason additions and novel philosophies earn bonus points.

1. Dallas Mavericks: Luka Dončić — skilled, fearless and joyful — will soon be the NBA's top showman. The 2020-21 MVP candidate's competitive drive is worth watching every night.

2. Brooklyn Nets: Kevin Durant's return will be aided by the gutsy hiring of Steve Nash and a deep rotation. Expect a freewheeling style and title talk, but Kyrie Irving could bring it all down.

3. Los Angeles Lakers: LeBron James, Anthony Davis and company are favorites to repeat after welcoming Dennis Schroder and Montrezl Harrell.

4. Portland Trail Blazers: Damian Lillard should finally have a nine-man rotation to support him once Zach Collins is back from injury. Portland will be in the mix for the NBA's top offense.

5. Denver Nuggets: If Jamal Murray brings his Disney World magic back to the Mile High City, this ranking might be too low. It's too bad Jerami Grant, who left for Detroit, couldn't see the vision.

6. Milwaukee Bucks: A reshuffled rotation around Giannis Antetokounmpo won't alter their strategies and aesthetics much. Coming off a dream regular season, regression is possible.

7. Los Angeles Clippers: Let's hope this group didn't blow its best shot at a title in 2020. A resurrection starts with Kawhi Leonard and Paul George clicking more effectively together.

8. Boston Celtics: What Boston lacks in dramatic personalities, it makes up for with smart, disciplined and unselfish play. Jayson Tatum is poised to enter the MVP conversation.

9. Miami Heat: The East's reigning champs have established stars and a rising cult hero in Tyler Herro. Will a team known for its tireless work ethic still be exhausted from its bubble run?

10. Phoenix Suns: While Chris Paul is an ideal fit, he must stay healthy or the whole plan falls apart. Paul, Devin Booker and Deandre Ayton could all catch All-Star buzz.

11. Golden State Warriors: Stephen Curry is back but the loss of Klay Thompson ravaged a weak supporting cast. There's a thin line here between "exhilarating" and "terrible."

12. Utah Jazz: Donovan Mitchell made a leap in the bubble and

has more help this year. Bojan Bogdanovic is back from injury and Derrick Favors return.

13. New Orleans Pelicans: There are a lot of lineup fit questions. Even so, Zion Williamson is irrepressible, Stan Van Gundy is a treat and lowered expectations should help.

14. Toronto Raptors: Losing Serge Ibaka and Marc Gasol makes them small and spunky. Pascal Siakam, Fred VanVleet and OG Anunoby are a formidable rising core, but they need an A-lister.

15. Philadelphia 76ers: Here comes the referendum on the Ben Simmons and Joel Embiid partnership. Daryl Morey got them shooters so there are no more excuses.

16. Memphis Grizzlies: Electric guard Ja Morant deserved more than three national television appearances.

17. Atlanta Hawks: Their incompetent defense remains a limiting factor.

18. Minnesota Timberwolves: Karl-Anthony Towns and D'Angelo Russell will finally get to put their friendship to work on the court.

19. Washington Wizards: Russell Westbrook guarantees a roller-coaster ride, but the All-Star guard won't shore up an atrocious defense.

20. Indiana Pacers: Victor Oladipo's future presents questions, but there's a strong, if uninspiring, starting lineup.

21. Sacramento Kings: New season, same faint hope that a De'Aaron Fox All-Star breakthrough and good health from Marvin Bagley III can squeak out a playoff spot.

22. Charlotte Hornets: LaMelo Ball represents the ultimate curiosity factor.

23. Chicago Bulls: The best reason to watch is to see which young players enjoy breakthroughs now that Jim Boylen is gone.

24. Houston Rockets: A perennial West power came unglued, losing Morey, Mike D'Antoni and Westbrook.

25. Cleveland Cavaliers: It will be another dismal campaign unless Darius Garland and Collin Sexton make major strides.

26. San Antonio Spurs: A frustrating roster remains stuck between identities.

27. Orlando Magic: Inactivity reigns for the Magic.

28. Oklahoma City Thunder: Headed for an ugly tank and shot at drafting Oklahoma State's Cade Cunningham.

29. Detroit Pistons: Check back in 2023.

30. New York Knicks: Still the Knicks.

NFL

Weekly statistics

AFC individual leaders					
Week 13					
Quarterbacks					
	Att	Com	Yds	TD	Int
Mahomes, KC	463	316	3815	31	2
Watson, Hou	401	276	3542	24	6
Allen, Buf	428	299	3403	26	8
Rivers, Ind	426	290	3263	18	9
Herbert, LAC	455	295	3224	23	9
Roethlisberger, Pit	484	324	3105	27	7
Carr, Las	395	269	3027	22	5
Tannehill, Ten	379	246	2997	26	5
Burrow, Cin	404	264	2688	13	5
Mayfield, Cle	327	205	2442	21	7
Rushers					
	Att	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
Henry, Ten	271	1317	4.9	94t	12
J.Robinson, Jac	212	968	4.6	39	7
Chubb, Cle	133	799	6.0	59	7
Jacobs, Las	206	782	3.8	24	9
Hunt, Cle	171	739	4.3	33	4
Edwards-Helaire, KC	151	692	4.6	31	4
Gordon, Den	149	685	4.6	65	6
Jackson, Bal	116	669	5.8	50t	4
Conner, Pit	145	645	4.4	59	5
Harris, NE	126	641	5.1	41	2
Receivers					
	No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
Kelce, KC	82	1114	13.6	45	8
Hill, KC	74	1079	14.6	75t	13
Diggs, Buf	90	1037	11.5	49	4
Allen, LAC	90	923	10.3	28	7
Fuller, Hou	53	879	16.6	77t	8
C.Davis, Ten	53	801	15.1	50	4
Beasley, Buf	66	797	12.1	35	4
Boyd, Cin	73	797	10.9	72t	4
Cooks, Hou	57	784	13.8	57t	3
Waller, Las	77	742	9.6	38t	7
Punters					
	No	Yds	Lg	Avg	
Bailey, NE	34	1641	65	48.3	
Martin, Den	48	2280	69	47.5	
Cooke, Jac	45	2135	67	47.4	
Huber, Cin	54	2562	70	47.4	
Sanchez, Ind	31	1464	60	47.2	
Long, LAC	46	2167	63	47.1	
Anger, Hou	43	2016	67	46.9	
Berry, Pit	34	1560	62	45.9	
Townsend, KC	36	1651	67	45.9	
Mann, NYJ	60	2707	60	45.1	
Punt returners					
	No	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Grant, Mia	27	327	12.1	88t	1
McCloud, Pit	22	263	12.0	57	0
Roberts, Buf	20	239	12.0	38	0
Renfrow, Las	15	156	10.4	27	0
Erickson, Cin	18	182	10.1	29	0
Raymond, Ten	21	195	9.3	40	0
Kickoff returners					
	No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
Duvernay, Bal	16	468	29.3	93t	1
Rodgers, Ind	21	614	29.2	101t	1
Roberts, Buf	25	717	28.7	60	0
B.Wilson, Cin	21	571	27.2	103t	1
McCloud, Pit	19	447	23.5	49	0
Olsewski, NE	17	397	23.4	33	0
Peoples-Jones, Cle	17	368	21.6	33	0
Scoring					
Touchdowns					
	TD	Rush	Rec	Ret	Pts
Hill, KC	14	1	13	0	84
Henry, Ten	12	12	0	0	72
Newton, NE	11	11	0	0	66
Claypool, Pit	10	2	8	0	60
A.Brown, Ten	9	0	8	1	54
Jacobs, Las	9	9	0	0	54
J.Robinson, Jac	9	7	2	0	54
Kicking					
	PAT	FG	LG	Pts	
Sanders, Mia	27-27	28-29	56	111	
Carlson, Las	35-36	24-26	54	107	
Bass, Buf	36-37	23-29	58	105	
Blankenship, Ind	30-32	24-27	44	102	
Butker, KC	36-42	22-24	58	102	
Tucker, Bal	35-35	21-23	55	98	
Fairbairn, Hou	28-30	20-24	54	88	
Bullock, Cin	24-25	21-26	55	87	
Folk, NE	26-28	20-22	51	86	
Boswell, Pit	31-35	18-19	59	85	

NFC individual leaders					
Week 13					
Quarterbacks					
	Att	Com	Yds	TD	Int
Wilson, Sea	436	305	3479	32	11
Ryan, Atl	466	296	3436	18	8
Rodgers, GB	415	286	3395	36	4
Goff, LAR	450	308	3372	17	10
Brady, TB	474	307	3300	28	11
Stafford, Det	428	271	3278	21	9
Cousins, Min	363	246	3073	26	12
K.Murray, Ari	426	285	2987	22	10
Bridgewater, Car	366	257	2819	14	8
Wentz, Phi	437	251	2620	16	15
Rushers					
	Att	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
Cook, Min	251	1250	5.0	70t	13
Jones, TB	162	820	5.1	98t	5
Elliott, Dal	199	784	3.9	24	5
Drake, Ari	178	768	4.3	69t	8
Jones, GB	145	754	5.2	77t	7
Kamara, NO	143	673	4.7	49	9
K.Murray, Ari	102	665	6.5	48	10
Gibson, Was	141	659	4.7	40	11
Montgomery, Chi	159	647	4.1	57	3
Sanders, Phi	118	631	5.3	74t	3
Receivers					
	No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
Metcalf, Sea	63	1119	17.8	62	9
Jefferson, Min	61	1039	17.0	71t	7
D.Adams, GB	84	1029	12.3	49	13
Hopkins, Ari	85	1019	12.0	60	5
McLaurin, Was	71	977	13.8	68t	3
Moore, Car	50	924	18.5	74t	4
Anderson, Car	75	912	12.2	75t	2
Ridley, Atl	59	905	15.3	63	7
Robinson, Chi	77	904	11.7	42	5
Cooper, Dal	76	891	11.7	58	4
Punters					
	No	Yds	Lg	Avg	
Fox, Det	45	2244	67	49.9	
Dickson, Sea	45	2233	67	49.6	
Johnston, Phi	55	2654	66	48.3	
Way, Was	52	2509	61	48.3	
Wishnowsky, SF	43	2074	60	48.2	
Hekker, LAR	49	2281	63	46.6	
O'Donnell, Chi	54	2495	64	46.2	
Colquitt, Min	43	1956	59	45.5	
Pinion, TB	44	1994	62	45.3	
J.Scott, GB	36	1629	62	45.3	
Punt returners					
	No	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Harris, NO	17	207	12.2	42	0
Lamb, Dal	18	152	8.4	27	0
Ward, Phi	15	107	7.1	22	0
Mickens, TB	15	99	6.6	14	0
S.Sims, Was	17	105	6.2	19	0
Webster, LAR	19	102	5.4	15	0
Kickoff returners					
	No	Yds	Avg	LG	TD
Patterson, Chi	29	873	30.1	104t	1
Harris, NO	16	436	27.3	75	0
Agnew, Det	18	432	24.0	35	0
Cooper, Car	18	430	23.9	38	0
Pollard, Dal	26	608	23.4	67	0
Edmonds, Ari	17	395	23.2	54	0
Johnson, Was	22	487	22.1	46	0
Scoring					
Touchdowns					
	TD	Rush	Rec	Ret	Pts
Cook, Min	14	13	1	0	84
D.Adams, GB	13	0	13	0	78
Kamara, NO	13	9	4	0	78
Thielen, Min	12	0	12	0	72
Evans, TB	11	0	11	0	66
Gibson, Was	11	11	0	0	66
K.Murray, Ari	10	10	0	0	60
Kicking					
	PAT	FG	LG	Pts	
Koo, Atl	23-26	32-33	54	119	
Succop, TB	36-38	22-24	50	102	
Lutz, NO	41-41	20-23	53	101	
Slye, Car	26-28	24-31	56	98	
Gano, NYG	17-18	26-27	55	95	
Myers, Sea	39-41	16-16	61	87	
Gonzalez, Ari	38-39	16-22	56	86	
Zuerlein, Dal	20-23	22-28	59	86	
Crosby, GB	43-46	14-14	53	85	
Prater, Det	30-31	18-25	59	84	



BRUCE KLUCKHOHN / AP

Minnesota Vikings running back Dalvin Cook looks for an opening during overtime of Sunday's game against the Jacksonville Jaguars in Minneapolis. The Vikings won 27-24.

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

Giants, Vikings shed slow starts, join playoff chase

By JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

The New York Giants and Minnesota Vikings are in position to pull off remarkable turnarounds.

The Giants have bounced back from an 0-5 start to the season and are now tied for first place with Washington in the NFC East after winning five of the past seven games. The Giants swept the season series from Washington so they have the inside track at the division title if they can maintain this level of play down the stretch.

Of the 110 teams that started a season 0-5 in the Super Bowl era before this year, none made the playoffs so the Giants would be quite the outlier.

There is at least some precedent for what the Vikings (6-6) are trying to do. Minnesota has won five of six following a 1-5 start and is currently tied with Arizona for the seventh and final playoff spot in the NFC.

Of the 183 teams that started 1-5 in the Super Bowl era, only the 1970 Bengals, 2015 Chiefs and 2018 Colts made the playoffs.

One of the other teams that started 0-5 this season shares a stadium with the Giants but hasn't pulled off an in-season turnaround. The Jets fell to 0-12 after an inexplicable last-second collapse against the Raiders. The Jets are the 12th team to lose their first 12 games, with three of them ending up winless: the 0-16 2008 Lions and 2017 Browns, and the 0-14 expansion 1976 Buccaneers.

Of the 110 teams that started a season 0-5 in the Super Bowl era before this year, none made the playoffs. The New York Giants can be the first by doing it this year.

SOURCE: Associated Press

It took some work to get there with the Jets allowing a 46-yard TD pass from Derek Carr to Henry Ruggs III against an all-out blitz with 5 seconds left in a 31-28 loss to the Las Vegas Raiders. It was just the fifth time since 2000 that a team that was trailing threw a game-winning TD pass of at least 40 yards in the final 15 seconds.

Tremendous tight ends: Kansas City's Travis Kelce is having another prolific season. He has 82 catches for 1,114 yards, trailing Seattle's DK Metcalf by 5 yards for the NFL lead. Kelce could become the first tight end ever to lead the league in yards receiving.

Kelce needs to average 66 yards receiving in the final four games to break the single-season record for a tight end set by George Kittle two years ago. Kelce already has become the first tight end with five straight 1,000-yard seasons.

Kelce isn't the only AFC West tight end putting up big numbers. Las Vegas' Darren Waller had 13 catches for 200 yards and two TDs last week against the Jets, joining Jackie Smith, Rich Caster and Shannon Sharpe as the only tight ends with at least 200 yards and

two TD catches in a game.

Remarkable rookies: Minnesota's Justin Jefferson and Jacksonville's James Robinson had far different paths to the NFL but both are having special seasons.

Jefferson, a first-round pick, had nine catches for 121 yards last week to reach 1,039 yards receiving on the season. Jefferson is the fifth rookie with at least 1,000 yards receiving in his first 12 career games in the Super Bowl era, joining Odell Beckham Jr. (2014), Marques Colston (2006) Anquan Boldin (2003) and Randy Moss (1998).

Robinson, who was undrafted, had 108 yards from scrimmage in the same game, his seventh game with at least 100 yards from scrimmage this season. Robinson has 1,278 yards from scrimmage this season, tied with Philip Lindsay (2018) for the second most by an undrafted rookie in the common draft era, trailing only Dominic Rhodes' 1,328 for Indianapolis in 2001.

Running Cam: Cam Newton ran for two more TDs last week for New England, setting an NFL record for quarterbacks with his fourth game this season with at last two TD runs.

Newton also has the most two-touchdown run games in a career for a quarterback with 10. With 11 TD runs this season, Newton has reached double digits in three seasons (14 in 2011 and 10 in 2015). Newton also leads the NFL with 69 TD runs since entering the league in 2011.

NFL

Jags RB Robinson looks like ‘real deal’

By MARK LONG
Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla.— Jacksonville’s next regime won’t have to start from scratch. The Jaguars have a surprising number of building blocks in place, none more impressive this season than running back James Robinson.

The undrafted rookie from Illinois State has been the team’s top newcomer and most consistent player, and it’s not even close.

Robinson had 968 yards rushing through 12 games, the third-most in the NFL behind Tennessee’s Derrick Henry and Minnesota’s Dalvin Cook.

Robinson and Henry, who will be on opposite sidelines Sunday when the Jaguars (1-11) host the Titans (8-4), are two of three players to top 100 yards from scrimmage in at least seven games this season.

“James is the real deal,” Jaguars quarterback Mike Glennon said. “He’s a legit starting running back in the NFL. The thing I love about James is he never has lost yards. He’s always falling forward. He turns what could be second-and-10s into second-and-6s, and those add up over time.

“He keeps the game in manageable situations, and he’s a special talent. How he fell to out of the draft, I have no clue. We are lucky to have him because he’s one of the better backs in the League.”

The ultra-quiet Robinson leads all rookies in rushing and yards from scrimmage (1,278), and he ranks second in total touchdowns (nine). He needs 32 yards against the Titans to become the first undrafted rookie in NFL history to reach 1,000 yards rushing through the first 14 weeks of a season.

Only three previous undrafted rookies have surpassed 1,000 yards rushing: Indianapolis’ Dominic Rhodes (1,104 in 2001), Denver’s Phillip Lindsay (1,037 in 2018)



JIM MONE / AP

Jaguars rookie running back James Robinson, right, is third in the league in rushing with 968 yards. He also has 310 receiving yards.

and Tampa Bay’s LeGarrette Blount (1,007 in 2010).

Only Lindsay made the Pro Bowl, and none of the three were named NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year.

Robinson has an outside shot at both.

“He’s almost not human the way he, week in and week out, is able to perform and keep his body healthy,” Jaguars receiver and fellow rookie Collin Johnson said. “It’s just impressive and motivating, too, seeing an undrafted guy come in here and put up the numbers he’s doing and being such a good teammate.

“It’s motivating. He’s a great guy for our locker room and just a beast.”

Pass rusher Josh Allen, linebacker Myles Jack, safety Daniel Thomas, receivers DJ Chark, Johnson and Laviska Shenault, and defensive tackles DaVon Hamilton and Doug Costin are part of a young nucleus that gives the team hope moving forward.

Robinson might be atop the list.

He has six consecutive games with more than 90 yards from scrimmage, the longest active streak in the NFL.

“I’m not worried about him slowing down,” said coach Doug Marrone, who also raved about Robinson’s work ethic and demeanor. “I’ve had players where I knew when they came into the building, I knew what type of day it was going to be, meaning, ‘This guy’s ready to go, he’s focused. (Or), oh, shoot, I’m going to have to kick him in the butt and get him going.’

“With James, you know what you’re getting every day. You’re going to get everything he has every day. I think, as a coach, for myself, that’s greatly appreciated. ... He’s focused. It’s a little bit unique. It’s unique and it’s greatly appreciated.”



NOAH K. MURRAY / AP

Las Vegas Raiders tight end Darren Waller, left, gets past the Jets’ Marcus Maye for a touchdown during the first half on Sunday, when Waller had 13 catches for 200 yards and two touchdowns.

Waller gives Raiders cheat code vs. blitz

By JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

When the New York Jets kept sending blitzes at Derek Carr, the Las Vegas quarterback kept looking Darren Waller’s way.

For good reason.

The athletic tight end has proven to be one of the most difficult matchups in the NFL, with the speed to get loose from bigger linebackers and safeties, and the size to outmaneuver smaller cornerbacks.

“Whenever you know you have a guy that it’s man-to-man coverage and you know he can win, you can confidently, against any blitz, take your drop, step up and throw him the ball,” Carr said Wednesday. “The knowledge that before you take that snap, you know you have a guy that can win like that, it makes all the difference in the world. You can play more confidently at the position.”

Waller had 13 catches for 200 yards and two touchdowns Sunday against the Jets, becoming the fourth tight end with at least 200 yards receiving and two TDs in a single game.

Waller racked up 10 of those catches for 115 yards when new York blitzed. But he even made contributions when he wasn’t getting open for receptions. Waller stayed in to block to give Carr time to beat an all-out blitz in the

closing seconds for the game-winning 46-yard TD pass to Henry Ruggs III.

“The dude is unbelievable,” Carr said. “He gets the credit because the fantasy stat people love him, but especially on stuff like that, he doesn’t get nearly enough credit for what he can do in the run and pass game protection-wise. He’s the complete package. I think he’s the best in the league.”

Waller’s journey to stardom has been an inspiring one. After nearly squandering his career in Baltimore because of a drug addiction, he has developed into one of the most dependable pieces on the Raiders.

Waller was suspended four games in 2016 and all of 2017 because of drug violations. He spent most of 2018 on the Ravens’ practice squad before the Raiders plucked him away late that season.

He blossomed into one of the top tight ends in the league last season with 90 catches for 1,145 yards, which helped him earn a long-term deal with the Raiders.

He has built on that this year, ranking second among all tight ends with 77 catches for 742 yards to go along with seven TDs.

“I feel like this season I’ve improved as a player and a person,” Waller said. “Of course, there’s

been games where the numbers weren’t what people may have expected. Every week my mindset is whether I have 20 yards or 200, I still come to work the next week with the same mindset each day and stay on top of my habits and let the results take care of themselves.”

Waller has been Carr’s security blanket this season, getting 27.9% of the quarterback’s targets, the highest mark of any tight end and fifth-highest in the league.

While many of those passes have been of the short variety, contributing to Waller’s rather pedestrian 8.5 yards per catch over the first 12 weeks, he was able to deliver some big plays against the Jets.

Six of his catches went for at least 15 yards, including a 38-yard touchdown. The only other Raiders player with that many catches for at least 15 yards in a single game in the past 30 years was Tim Brown, who did it three times in the 1990s.

“We’re looking to get Waller the ball as many times as possible because he’s a great player,” coach Jon Gruden said. “The opportunity presented itself. They blitzed 40 times and a lot of those blitz coverages involve man-to-man coverage, so you try to go to your top dog and that’s what we did on several of those occasions.”

NFL

AFC contenders nip at the heels of Chiefs, Steelers

Bills, Browns, Titans, Dolphins and Colts lurk closely

BY DENNIS WASZAK JR.
Associated Press

Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs are already in. No surprise for the defending Super Bowl champions.

Ben Roethlisberger and the Pittsburgh Steelers are undefeated no more, but they're also on the verge of clinching an AFC playoff spot.

After that, well, there are plenty of other contenders who might have something to say about the conference being just a top-heavy twosome.

Buffalo and Cleveland are 9-3, with Tennessee, Miami and Indianapolis all 8-4. They'd all be in the playoffs right now with this season's expanded, seven-team format.

Baltimore and Las Vegas are still in the mix at 7-5. And it's never smart to count out a Bill Belichick-coached team, especially with New England surging with four wins in its last five games to get to .500 at 6-6.

A division-by-division look at the AFC playoff race going into the final quarter of the season:

AFC East

Josh Allen and the Bills could make a massive statement when they take on the Steelers at home Sunday night. The third-year quarterback has played his way into the MVP conversation and another impressive performance — and a win — would justify that buzz. It would also put Buffalo

well in line for its first division title since 1995.

But the Dolphins are still swimming right there with the Bills. Miami and rookie quarterback Tua Tagovailoa are just a game behind Buffalo in the race for the division, but host the Chiefs on Sunday. Still, there's a chance the regular-season finale at Buffalo on Jan. 3 could decide who finishes on top.

The Patriots have been that team for 11 straight years — with Tom Brady at quarterback, of course — but that streak appears in serious jeopardy. Belichick's bunch has this going, though: After a road game Thursday night against the Rams, New England's final three opponents are all in the division — at Miami, home vs. Buffalo and home against the currently 0-12 New York Jets.

AFC North

The Steelers were just cruising along, giving those undefeated '72 Dolphins something to think about when — whoa! — the Washington Football Team dashed any dreams of perfection in Pittsburgh with a stunning 23-17 upset Monday night.

Now, winning the division is far from a certainty, especially with Baker Mayfield and the Browns on a four-game winning streak and looking like the scary squad many have been expecting. Pittsburgh still has a two-game lead and could clinch with a win and a Browns loss to Baltimore, but the



CHARLIE RIEDEL / AP

Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes has led the defending Super Bowl champion Chiefs into a guaranteed playoff spot and they can clinch the AFC West title with a win or tie at Miami on Sunday.



KEITH SRAKOCIC / AP

Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger has led his team to a 10-1 record, but winning the AFC North means holding off the Cleveland Browns, who have won four in a row.

division could come down to these two playing in what will likely be chilly Cleveland in the the regular-season finale.

Oh, and don't forget about Baltimore, which might be out of the division race, but got Lamar Jackson back from a one-game COVID-19 absence and snapped a three-game skid with a 34-17 win over Dallas on Tuesday night. The Ravens host the Browns next, but then finish with three straight opponents currently with losing records: home vs. Jacksonville (1-11) and the New York Giants (5-7), and at Cincinnati (2-9-1).

AFC South

Tennessee and Indianapolis split their two regular-season meetings and fittingly sit tied atop the division with four games left.

Ryan Tannehill and the Titans would seem to have the easier path to winning the South — which would be their first division title since 2008 — with only one team with a winning record (Green Bay at 9-3) remaining on their schedule. They also have: at Jacksonville, home vs. Detroit (5-7) and wrap up the regular season at Houston (4-8).

Meanwhile, the Colts are win-

ners of three of their last four, with the only loss during that stretch coming at home against the Titans two weeks ago. Philip Rivers' squad will be at Las Vegas (7-5), home vs. Houston, at Pittsburgh and home vs. Jacksonville to wrap things up. The Texans have been competitive under interim coach Romeo Crennel, going 4-4 after an 0-4 start with Bill O'Brien. They're probably too far back to contend, but could make things interesting down the stretch with games against Indy and Tennessee.

AFC West

The Chiefs earned a playoff berth last week and would have already clinched their fifth straight division title if not for since-fired Jets defensive coordinator Gregg Williams' bizarre play call that allowed the Raiders to pull off a stunning 31-28 victory at New York last Sunday.

Kansas City can take care of business itself by winning (or tying) Sunday at Miami — in the stadium where the Chiefs won their first Super Bowl in 50 years in February. A loss (or tie) by the Raiders at home against Indianapolis would also give coach Andy Reid and his Chiefs the division.

Las Vegas has been up and down all season and was 5 seconds from staring at a three-game skid, capped by an embarrassing loss to the lowly Jets. But fate — and Williams' Zero Blitz call — intervened. Jon Gruden hopes to have running back Josh Jacobs back soon from a sprained ankle and safety Johnathan Abram from a knee injury, and the Raiders will probably need them to stay in the hunt. The Broncos (4-8) and Chargers (3-9) could be looking at coaching changes after the season, but both could have an impact in the AFC playoff hunt.



ROSS D. FRANKLIN / AP

Buffalo Bills quarterback Josh Allen has played his way into MVP consideration and a win over the Steelers at home Sunday puts the Bills in line for their first AFC East title since 1995.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL/MLB

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

No. 2 Bears roll in first home game

Associated Press

WACO, Texas — Davion Mitchell and No. 2 Baylor came into this most unusual season ready for unexpected changes. The unbeaten Bears have responded well when they actually get a chance to play.

Adam Flagler scored 11 of his 14 points before halftime as Baylor took control early on the way to an 83-52 win Wednesday night over Stephen F. Austin. It was the home opener for the Bears — a day later than scheduled and against a different opponent than planned.

“We’re just blessed to have this opportunity. I mean, we kind of knew how this season was going to go,” said Mitchell, who had 11 points, seven assists and four steals.

It was the first game for the Bears (4-0) since a much-anticipated showdown against No. 1 Gonzaga was called off only 90 minutes before tipoff Saturday, and after expected home-opening opponent Nicholls State had virus issues like the Bulldogs did.

“Well, I think they laugh every time I give them updates. Like, what do we got now?” coach Scott Drew said. “When you know it’s game day and the ball is going to get tipped, you’ve got to make the most of it, because I can tell you they’d much rather be playing games right now than practicing.”

Five players scored in double figures as Baylor played for the first time since an 82-69 win over then-No. 5 Illinois at the Jimmy V Classic in Indianapolis a week earlier. That was the only one of the first six games on their initial schedule that the Bears have played.

Cameron Johnson had 11 points for the Lumberjacks (3-1), the defending Southland Conference champions who had their 18-game winning streak snapped. Gavin Kensmil added 10 points.

Flagler’s three-pointer in the closing seconds of the first half was the Bears’ third three in a row — LJ Crayer and Matthew Mayer had the others — as part of a half-ending 11-2 run that put them up 38-22.



TONY GUTIERREZ / AP

Baylor guard MaCio Teague shoots over Stephen F. Austin’s Nana Antwi-Boasiako, left front, David Kachelrie, left rear, and DeAndre Heckard, right, during the Bears’ 83-52 win Wednesday in Waco, Texas.

“Coming off finals, I was obviously worried about the players’ energy and rhythm with not practicing as much,” Drew said. “But I thought they did a great job. That run at the end of the first half and the beginning of the second half was really the difference.”

The Lumberjacks had 17 turnovers by halftime and finished with 35 that led to 40 Baylor points. Mitchell drew several charges on the defensive end.

No. 13 Wisconsin 73, Rhode Island 62: Brad Davison scored 23 points and the host Badgers won a nonconference game with the Rams that was added to the schedule two days ago.

Wisconsin (4-1) originally was slated to host No. 25 Louisville on Wednesday as part of the Big Ten/ACC Challenge, but the Cardinals canceled their second consecutive game following a positive COVID-19 test within the program. Rhode Island was added as a replacement Monday.

Micah Potter had 13 points and Aleem Ford scored 11 for the Badgers, who bounced back from a 67-65 loss to Marquette on a

buzzer-beating tip-in of a missed free throw Friday.

Jeremy Sheppard had 13 points for the Rams (3-3).

No. 13 Texas 74, Texas State 53: Freshman Greg Brown scored 18 points and the host Longhorns’ won their final non-conference tuneup before the start of Big 12 play.

Texas (5-1) had nine dunks on 12 baskets in the first half. Jericho Sims started the scoring with a slam and the floodgates opened from there.

Mason Harrell scored 14 points for the Bobcats (3-2) .

No. 17 Texas Tech 51, Abilene Christian 44: Kyler Edwards scored 19 points and the host Red Raiders avoided a major upset in a defensive struggle.

Texas Tech (5-1) trailed with seven minutes remaining before Edwards made one of two free throws to get even. Nimari Burnett, who scored 10 points, made a pair to put the Red Raiders up for good at 38-36.

The Wildcats’ reputation for strong defense held up well, with Texas Tech shooting 28% while

having a difficult time getting open looks and missing many of the ones they did get.

Coryon Mason scored 14 points for Abilene Christian (5-1), a Southland Conference team that made the move from Division II less than 10 years ago.

No. 19 Richmond 78, Northern Iowa 68: Tyler Burton had 21 points and 13 rebounds and the host Spiders used a 21-6 run in the second half to pull away.

Grant Golden added 17 points and 11 rebounds for Richmond (4-0). Blake Francis scored 16 points and Jacob Gilyard had 12 points and 11 assists.

Tywhon Pickford scored 16 points for the Panthers (1-4), Austin Phyfe had 15, and Trae Berhow 13.

No. 20 Florida State 69, Indiana 67 (OT): Scottie Barnes banked in a runner with with two seconds left in overtime to lift the Seminoles past the Hoosiers in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge for their 25th straight home victory.

The freshman had nine points, five assists, four rebounds and four steals for Florida State.

Scoreboard

Wednesday’s men’s scores

EAST

Fairleigh Dickinson 79, CCSU 71
Hofstra 72, Stony Brook 67
St. Francis (NY) 93, Bryant 91

SOUTH

Campbell 79, New Orleans 70
Clemson 67, Maryland 51
Florida St. 69, Indiana 67
Jacksonville 78, Florida National 69
Lamar 63, Louisiana-Monroe 60
Lipscomb 80, SE Missouri 74
Louisiana Tech 78, SE Louisiana 69
Marshall 84, Coll. of Charleston 72
Morehead St. 77, Pennsylvania 55
Radford 98, Mars Hill 50
Richmond 78, N. Iowa 68
The Citadel 102, Carver 51
Tulane 58, Southern Miss. 38
UAB 89, Tuskegee 64
UNC-Wilmington 116, St. Andrews 66
VCU 95, NC A&T 59

MIDWEST

Chattanooga 77, Bellarmine 68
Chicago 88, Chicago St. 51
Cincinnati 78, Furman 73
Drake 90, McKendree 66
E. Michigan 95, Adrian 35
Evansville 68, E. Illinois 65
Georgia Tech 75, Nebraska 64
Miami (Ohio) 67, W. Illinois 57
Michigan 91, Toledo 71
Missouri 69, Liberty 60
Pittsburgh 71, Northwestern 70
Valparaiso 80, SIU-Edwardsville 58
Wisconsin 73, Rhode Island 62
Xavier 99, Oklahoma 77
Youngstown St. 72, Point Park 52

SOUTHWEST

Ark.-Pine Bluff 75, Arkansas St. 74
Arkansas 79, Southern U. 44
Baylor 83, Stephen F. Austin 52
Providence 79, TCU 70
Tarleton St. 84, Arlington Baptist 43
Texas 74, Texas St. 53
Texas Tech 51, Abilene Christian 44

FAR WEST

Arizona 85, CS Bakersfield 60
Boise St. 74, BYU 70
N. Colorado 87, Colorado Christian 62
Oregon 87, Florida A&M 66
Pepperdine 74, California 62
S. Utah 81, Utah Valley St. 71
San Jose St. 87, Fresno Pacific 79
Santa Clara 76, Cal Poly 69
UCLA 83, San Diego 56
Washington 73, Seattle 41
Washington St. 61, Idaho 58
Wyoming 83, Denver 61

Wednesday’s women’s scores

EAST

Bryant 78, St. Francis Brooklyn 61
St. Francis (Pa.) 67, Kent St. 64
Villanova 78, La Salle 52

SOUTH

Davidson 85, Charleston Southern 56
East Carolina 58, VCU 55
Florida 70, UNC-Asheville 48
Georgia 68, Jacksonville St. 47
Georgia Tech 86, Boston College 68
High Point 108, NC Wesleyan 71
James Madison 79, George Washington 69
Kentucky 79, Marshall 45
Liberty 67, Hampton 45
Louisiana-Lafayette 80, McNeese St. 48
Louisville 73, Duke 49
NC State 76, Elon 47
Troy 95, Chattanooga 74
Tulane 81, Middle Tennessee 78
W. Carolina 63, Newberry 44

MIDWEST

Cent. Michigan 82, W. Michigan 71
Iowa 82, Iowa St. 80
Michigan 93, Butler 54
Michigan St. 81, Minnesota 68
Purdue 82, Buffalo 70
SIU-Edwardsville 63, St. Louis College of Pharmacy 44

SOUTHWEST

Arkansas 79, SMU 47
TCU 79, Lamar 53
Texas 73, Idaho 48
Texas Tech 87, Angelo State 42

FAR WEST

Grand Canyon 66, N. Arizona 58
S. Utah 74, William Jessup 46
UCLA 102, UC Santa Barbara 45

Freeman among trio of Braves on All-MLB first team

By **MIKE FITZPATRICK**
Associated Press

NEW YORK—National League MVP Freddie Freeman was one of three Atlanta Braves selected to the All-MLB first team on Wednesday night.

The slugging first baseman was joined by Braves designated hitter Marcell Ozuna and starting pitcher Max Fried. Atlanta outfielder

Ronald Acuña Jr. was chosen for the second team.

San Diego had two players on the top team: shortstop Fernando Tatis Jr. and third baseman Manny Machado.

Cy Young Award winners Trevor Bauer of the Cincinnati Reds and Shane Bieber of the Cleveland Indians also made the first team. Chicago Cubs right-hander Yu

Darvish and New York Mets ace Jacob deGrom rounded out the five starters.

The rest of the first team featured Kansas City catcher Salvador Perez, New York Yankees second baseman DJ LeMahieu, and outfielders Mookie Betts from the World Series champion Los Angeles Dodgers, Mike Trout of the Los Angeles Angels and Juan Soto

of the Washington Nationals. The relievers were Tampa Bay’s Nick Anderson and Oakland’s Liam Hendriks.

AL MVP José Abreu of the Chicago White Sox was the first baseman on the second team, which also included Philadelphia catcher J.T. Realmuto, Rays second baseman Brandon Lowe, Dodgers shortstop Corey Seager and Indi-

ans third baseman José Ramírez. Acuña was joined in the outfield by Michael Conforto of the Mets and Mike Yastrzemski of the San Francisco Giants.

The starting pitchers were Gerrit Cole of the Yankees, Clayton Kershaw of the Dodgers, Dinelson Lamet of the Padres, Kenta Maeda of the Twins and Hyun-Jin Ryu of the Toronto Blue Jays.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Tunnel vision

Buffaloes focusing on Utah, not on Pac-12 title game scenarios

By PAT GRAHAM
Associated Press

Colorado linebacker Carson Wells prefers to treat football games much like rounding up 600-pound cattle on his family's ranch — one at a time.

Easier that way.

That's why he's not even thinking about a possible spot in the Pac-12 Conference title game, because a few scenarios would have to transpire in order for the No. 21 Buffaloes (4-0, 3-0 Pac-12) to even have that chance.

It all starts with this: Beating Utah (1-2, 1-2) at Folsom Field on Friday night.

Then, it moves on to this: Needing UCLA (3-2, 3-2) to knock off No. 16 Southern California (4-0, 4-0), which currently owns a tiebreaker over Colorado, courtesy of the Trojans having one more victory within the division.

"We've got to control what we can control and that's go 1-0 each week. We've done that so far and have to do that this week," said Wells, whose team had its Nov. 28 Pac-12 South showdown at USC canceled due to COVID-19 issues within the Trojans program. "Our goal this season was to win a Pac-12 championship."

Entering the season, not many outside the program shared that sort of vision. The Buffaloes were picked to finish fifth in the Pac-12 South during the preseason

media poll.

But they've climbed into the Top 25 this week for the first time since 2018 behind a new coach, a quarterback who was all set to leave town and a running back who missed last season with a knee injury.

It's been quite a start for coach Karl Dorrell, whose team is bowl eligible for the first time since 2016 despite no spring practice or much of a summer workout plan due to the pandemic.

"I've been very impressed how resilient the team has been," Dorrell said.

Colorado was scheduled to play at USC in a game that could've gone a long way in determining the South champion. But the contest was canceled on Thanksgiving Day due to virus concerns with the Trojans (the Buffs instead picked up — and beat — San Diego State as a replacement). The first tiebreaker in determining a Pac-12 division winner is the head-to-head result, which in this case is negated.

The next one is record in games played within the division. But Colorado had its game against Arizona State canceled due to COVID-19 issues within the Sun Devils program.

Now, the best the Buffs can finish within the division is 3-0, while the Trojans can go 4-0.

"Anything can happen," Dor-



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI / AP

Colorado running back Jarek Broussard is second in the nation in yards per game with 183.3.

rell said.

And that's why their focus remains only on Utah, which is the defending Pac-12 South champ.

"All of that will be for naught if we don't play well this week," said Dorrell, who was hired in February after Mel Tucker left for Michigan State. "We know that's going to be a tough task."

Colorado started fast in 2018, going 5-0 before losing the final seven to miss out on a bowl game and leading to a coaching change.

It's a feeling Wells knows well.

"I was a part of being 5-0 and we just need to keep playing," said Wells, who has helped his father raise cattle in Florida. "We can't get complacent."

One of the surprises this season has been the emergence of tail-

back Jarek Broussard, who rushed for 301 yards in a win at Arizona over the weekend to earn Pac-12 offensive player of the week honors for a second time this season. By Dorrell's estimation, Broussard's not even 100% yet. He's wearing a brace to protect a left knee that's been injured twice, including an injury in September 2019 that sidelined him for the season.

Broussard has gained 733 yards rushing in four games, which is six more than Rashaan Salaam had in his first four games when he won the Heisman in 1994.

"It means a lot to be in that kind of company with that sort of player," said Broussard, whose 183.3 yards per game ranks sec-

ond nationally behind Jaret Patterson's 230-yard average for Buffalo.

Then there's Sam Noyer, a quarterback converted to safety who was planning to leave town after last season before being recruited back by the new coaching staff to play QB again. He's provided another spark.

Ditto for a revamped defense led by Wells and fellow linebacker/roommate Nate Landman.

"We're still trying to prove to each other what type of program we are," Dorrell said. "We can control how well we play and we can control if we're prepared and whether we're playing with the right mindset. Those are the things I'm continually preaching."

Figueroa sparks USC's defense with determination

By DAN GREENSPAN
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The recruitment of defensive end Nick Figueroa came down to Southern California and UCLA.

"But I've always been a USC kid," he said.

Nearly two years after making that decision, Figueroa has emerged as an unlikely star for the No. 16 Trojans and can show the Bruins just what they missed out on when the cross-town rivals play Saturday.

Figueroa has 3 ½ sacks and six tackles for loss for USC (4-0, No. 15 CFP), leading the team in both categories ahead of defensive tackle Marlon Tuipulotu and outside linebacker Drake Jackson, two of the most sought-after high school recruits in the country in their respective classes.

There was little interest in Figueroa, who had been focused on baseball and only played football in his senior season at Cajon High School in San Bernardino. He ended up at Cal Poly and was on the scout team during a redshirt season in 2017, when the Mustangs won one game.

However, Figueroa had higher aspirations, which prompted a transfer home to attend Riverside City College.

"A lot of it had to do with the fact that com-



ALEX GALLARDO / AP

Southern California defensive lineman Nick Figueroa, center, sacks Washington State quarterback Gunner Cruz, left, during the second half of Sunday's game in Los Angeles.

ing out of high school I had a few teammates that, like, went to major Division I programs," Figueroa said. "I kind of saw how they worked in practice and, like, saw the

kind of people that they were and thought I had a shot to compete at that level."

Interest from those programs soon followed, with Figueroa being recruited by

multiple Pac-12 schools and the likes of Tennessee, Indiana and North Carolina. He signed with the Trojans on Dec. 19, 2018, and had 10 tackles, a sack and recovered a fumble as a backup last season.

Roster turnover and the arrival of a new defensive coaching staff, including coordinator Todd Orlando and defensive line coach Vic So'oto, created an opening in the starting lineup that Figueroa has capitalized on. It culminated with a breakout performance in the 38-13 win over Washington State on Sunday when he had three sacks, one shy of the school single-game record.

Figueroa showed quickness on his first sack, darting past left guard Jarrett Kingston to pull down Cougars quarterback Jayden de Laura. He also has the requisite size at 6-foot-5 and 260 pounds.

But what really allows Figueroa to thrive is his work ethic, Orlando said.

"Well, smart and tough can get you a long way in life," Orlando said. "It's no surprise to me that he's thriving in this package, but that's the person. He's got talent, but a lot of people have got talent. It's the internal talent that to me measures a person, how much success they're going to have, and he has that in bunches."

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Late: Rhattigan leads Knights with 67 tackles

FROM PAGE 56

dy. Rhattigan leads the Black Knights in tackles with 67, eight of them for losses, and he's tied for the team lead with two interceptions, one that he returned for a touchdown. On Monday he was named one of 18 semifinalists for the Bednarik Award, presented annually to the nation's top defensive player, a nice start to the week as Army (7-2) prepared to play Navy (3-6) at Michie Stadium on Saturday.

"I think he made up his mind in the offseason that he was going to be a leader for us," Woody said. "He stepped up and took on a role that we desperately needed. I can't tell you how tremendous of an asset he's been."

Rhattigan simply had to wait his turn. He was behind two-year captain Cole Christiansen on the depth chart, and Christiansen is now in the NFL with the Chargers.

"I guess it just happens," Army coach Jeff Monken said. "You don't always find yourself at the top of the depth chart right away. We knew he was a good player, but I felt like we had some good players there that were playing, too."

Rhattigan's high school coach said his former star understood and never once griped.

"It's tough when you're not playing, but I never heard him once get down on himself or the team or anything like that," Naperville coach Bill Ellinghaus said. "He knew that he was behind a really, really unique player and he was willing to put the work in to be as good as he could be when the time was right. When I talked to him last summer, he said, 'You know what? I think it's my time.'"

LSU self-imposes bowl ban

Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. — LSU is self-imposing a one-year ban on postseason play for this season as part an effort to cooperate with an NCAA probe into rules violations.

"LSU leadership made this decision after careful deliberation and review of the NCAA rules violations that have been discovered in the university's cooperative investigation with the NCAA" and Independent Accountability Resolution Process, the athletic department said in a statement. "This decision reflects LSU's commitment to compliance with NCAA regulations and maintenance of institutional control."

Much of the NCAA's investigation of LSU's football program predates the promotion Ed Orgeron to head coach during the 2016 season and hiring of current athletic director Scott Woodward in 2019.



Orgeron

Growing up with two older, athletic brothers — brother Joe was a star tailback at Princeton — taught Rhattigan valuable lessons that have served him well at West Point.

"If there's one thing that Jon is really good at, it's enduring those kinds of things," said Rhattigan's father, T.J. "He was in the shadow of both of his older brothers most of his life. He's a survivor. He perseveres. He just will not quit. I'm sure it was difficult for him. He wouldn't say anything."

Rhattigan, at 6-foot-1 and 245 pounds, had several offers from both the Ivy League and Mid-American Conference and some interest from Big Ten schools before suffering a torn knee ligament early in his junior year in high school. He rebounded with a solid senior year and chose West Point during a trip east to visit several schools.

After a stop at Brown of the Ivy League, it was on to West Point to the surprise of his father, whose attempt to dissuade him failed.

"I said, 'What are you doing? You're not going to go to West Point. You don't know what you're getting yourself into,'" T.J. Rhattigan recalled. "And he said, 'We have to go. This coach, when everybody else gave up on me (because of the injury, long-time Army assistant) Tucker Waugh kept calling.'"

When former Army tight end Kelvin White, a family friend, was there waiting at West Point to be a tour guide, that pretty much sealed the deal.

"I loved what coach Monken was doing with the program," Rhattigan said. "I saw a lot of potential. I was very intrigued."

tion of LSU's football program predates the promotion Ed Orgeron to head coach during the 2016 season and hiring of current athletic director Scott Woodward in 2019.

"I respect the university's decision to proactively address NCAA issues from the past," Orgeron said. "I share the disappointment of our student-athletes who will not be able to compete this season in a bowl game. I am especially proud of our players' dedication to the program during these unprecedented times in our country."

Some of the more serious allegations involved LSU booster John Paul Funes, who is a former chief executive for a Baton Rouge hospital foundation. He has been accused of paying a player's father \$180,000 for a "no-show job" between 2012 and 2017.



PHOTOS BY JOHN RAOUX / AP

Florida quarterback Kyle Trask has arguably the deepest receiving corps in the country.

Gators perfectly happy being one-dimensional

By MARK LONG
Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Florida coach Dan Mullen doesn't even really bother trying to run the ball anymore.

Sure, the sixth-ranked Gators hand it off here and there, mostly when they're leading and/or trying to run out the clock. But they're as one-dimensional as any Florida team in nearly two decades. And no one is complaining.

Not Mullen. Not quarterback and Heisman Trophy front-runner Kyle Trask. And surely not any of Trask's receivers, a group widely considered the best in the country.

The pass-happy Gators are simply happy passing. Florida (8-1) enters Saturday's regular-season finale against reigning national champion LSU (3-5) with the nation's 103rd-ranked ground game. The Gators are averaging 126.2 yards rushing, the program's least-productive ground attack since coach Steve Spurrier's final season in Gainesville in 2001.

That was Spurrier's best passing team in his 26 years as a head coach, spanning Duke, Florida and South Carolina. With Rex Grossman at the helm, the Gators led the nation by averaging 405.2 yards through the air.

Trask and the Gators aren't quite there, but they aren't far behind. And the ground game has been a victim of their own passing prowess.

"If I want to go put our energy into it, I'm sure we can figure it out," Mullen said.

Mullen even threatened to open in the wishbone against the Tigers, just to prove to naysayers that Florida can run the ball if it wants.

No one is criticizing the Gators for being so pass-heavy, especially after pedestrian offenses becoming close to a pastime in Gainesville under former coaches Will Muschamp and Jim McElwain.

Florida fans are enjoying the air show. Trask's 376.7 yards passing per game lead the Football Bowl Subdivision. He also tops the nation with 38 touchdown passes, eight more than his closest competitor and the third-highest total through nine games in FBS history.

Only Houston's Andre Ware (40 in 1989) and Ha-



No. 6 Florida doesn't really even try to run the ball anymore, and that's fine with coach Dan Mullen.

waii's Colt Brennan (39 in 2006) had more at this point in a season. Trask has put up his numbers against an SEC-only schedule — few, if any, cupcakes.

The Gators also boast star tight end Kyle Pitts, dynamic playmaker Kadarius Toney and fellow receivers Trevon Grimes, Jacob Copeland and Justin Shorter. And Mullen has freshmen receivers Trent Whittemore, Xzavier Henderson and Ja'Quavion Fraziers waiting their turn.

All that talent comes after Florida lost four receivers — Van Jefferson, Tyrie Cleveland, Freddie Swain and Josh Hammond — to the NFL.

"It's good to be able to run the ball; it's never a bad thing," Trask said. "But at the end of the day, we're going to do what we have to do."

The general belief is Florida will need to be more balanced against top-ranked Alabama in the Southeastern Conference championship game next week in Atlanta. The Crimson Tide have won six in a row against Florida, which has averaged 13.5 points during the skid.

"We know we can run the ball when we need to," left tackle Stone Forsythe said. "Maybe that game is coming down the road. But we can do it."

SPORTS



On the verge

Giants, Vikings close in on playoff berths after slow starts » **NFL, Page 50**

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Better late than never

Army's Rhattigan wasn't starter until final season

BY JOHN KEKIS

Associated Press

Army linebacker Jon Rhattigan is right where he always wanted to be as the biggest game of his life looms. It just took a little longer than he imagined.

A football captain in high school in Naperville, Ill., Rhattigan's first three years with the Black Knights went like this: no varsity action in 2017; played in one game in 2018, the season finale in the Armed Forces Bowl; appeared in all 13 games last year and registered six tackles while playing on special teams.

Not an easy row to hoe.

"Toughness and humility. That was the first three years," Rhattigan said. "It was a grind, as college football should be. I think this program, especially, is built on toughness and humility, and I think that's a great way for me to describe the first three years. I was fine in my role on the team and doing the best I could each year. Thankfully, that role has changed."

Has it ever.

This year, Rhattigan has been a key as a starter on a defense ranked fourth nationally (289.3 yards allowed per game) under first-year coordinator Nate Woo-

SEE LATE ON PAGE 55



DUSTIN SATLOFF, ABOVE, AND JIM COWSERT, LEFT / AP



Army senior linebacker Jon Rhattigan, above, leads the Black Knights in tackles and is one of 18 semifinalists nationally for the Bednarik Award, given to the nation's outstanding defensive player. Head coach Jeff Monken, left, says Rhattigan found himself way down on the depth chart his first two years because the Black Knights had a glut of talented players ahead of him the last three years.

No. 2 Baylor cruises in home opener » College basketball, Page 53

