WASHINGTON — Three U.S. soldiers received the Medal of Honor on Thursday, including two men who sacrificed their lives to ensure the safety of their fellow service members and a third who fought off suicide bombers at a U.S. base in Afghanistan.

President Joe Biden presented the Medals of Honor, the nation’s highest military award, to Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe, Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Celiz and Master Sgt. Earl Plumlee. Cashe and Celiz died as a result of the actions that led to their awards. Plumlee received the honor in person at the White House.

How former soldiers plotted theft and sale of US Army weaponry

By James LaPorta and Jason Dearen
Associated Press

Packed with rifles and explosives, the SUV hurtled down a Florida interstate beneath bright blue autumn skies, passing other motorists with little notice.

It was November 2018, and the driver, Tyler Sumlin, was uncomfortable. Clammy. The husky, bearded former U.S. Army soldier was getting a cold, and understandably tense: He was transporting a platoon’s worth of stolen rifles, enough C4 to blow up his car and those around him, a live hand grenade.

He would recall thinking, “Is it too late to turn around?”

Riding shotgun was Sumlin’s military blood brother, Sgt. 1st Class Jason Jarvis, a soldier on active-duty from Fort Bragg’s 18th Ordnance Company in North Carolina — Sumlin’s old unit.

The two men, who’d been close since they served in Afghanistan, tried to distract themselves with idle road-trip chatter. Their wives, war stories, favorite movies.

A few months earlier, Jarvis had reached out to ask if Sumlin had any interest in making some money. Jarvis was looking to sell stolen military equipment from an armory at Bragg.

Sumlin said he might be able to find a buyer. Now they were headed to El Paso, Texas, to

SEE ARMS ON PAGE 7

A U.S. Army soldier’s weapon is shown, Jan. 4, 2020, at Fort Bragg, N.C. An Associated Press investigation into lost and stolen military weapons has shown that insider thefts remain a serious concern.

Brothers in arms

By Nikki Wentling
Stars and Stripes

Cashe, 3rd Infantry Division platoon sergeant, was on a nighttime patrol near Samarra, Iraq, on Oct. 17, 2005, when his Bradley Fighting Vehicle struck a roadside bomb, engulfing it in flames. Cashe, 35, extracted himself from the vehicle, and then went back for the driver. Though his fuel-soaked uniform ignited and caused severe burns to his body, Cashe repeatedly entered the fire-engulfed Bradley to pull his fellow soldiers to safety, not stopping until they all had escaped.

Despite being covered in second- and third-degree burns, Cashe ensured the other soldiers received medical care. When

SEE ARMS ON PAGE 7
Many fear inflation hampering as sales drop

The Washington Post
Rising prices on gas and groceries are prompting Americans to pull back in other areas, raising fears that lingering inflation — coupled with a new COVID wave — could be slowing economic growth.

Retail sales edged up 0.3% in November from the month before, the Commerce Department reported Wednesday, well below the 0.8% gain forecast by economists. It’s also a significant slowdown from the 1.7% spike recorded in October, when many Americans began their holiday spending in earnest.

The categories with the largest increases reflected the rising costs of fuel and food, with gas stations notchting a 1.7% jump in sales. Spending at restaurants and bars rose 1%, while grocery store sales climbed 0.9%.

But spending was down considerably in key holiday categories compared with October, when many retailers began rolling out early Black Friday deals. Department store sales slumped 5.4%, while electronics and appliance stores posted a 4.6% decline.

“Stubbornly higher prices — which consumers had shrugged off in recent months — are finally taking a toll on household budgets,” said Matthew Sherwood, global economist at the Economist Intelligence Unit. “While grocery stores still did a booming business, it is telling that furniture and home furnishings sales were stagnant, and electronics and appliance stores saw sales plummet.”

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate 3.25
Interest Rates Discount rate 0.75
Federal funds market rate 0.09
3-month bill 0.36
10-year bond 1.46

EXCHANGE RATES

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The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.
US Navy, Japanese responders perform radiation-leak drill

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes
YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — For two hours Wednesday, teams of Japanese and American first responders rehearsed what they need to do to contain a leak of radioactive coolant from the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan.

Working near the nuclear-powered warship, the responders isolated the simulated leak, notified local and national authorities, and began sampling the surrounding water.

A spokeswoman for the Naval Forces Japan, Cmdr. Katie Cerezo, described the leak scenario as “rare but credible.” This year marked the 14th annual exercise aimed at preparing for what the U.S. officially describes as an unlikely event.

The joint drill included teams from the Navy, the city of Yokosuka, the Japanese government and the Japan Coast Guard.

“In preparation for the drill, the Government of Japan, Yokosuka City, and U.S. Navy have continued to work very closely together to further develop and practice planning and coordination, communications, information sharing, and joint monitoring protocols,” Cerezo told Stars and Stripes in an email Thursday.

When asked whether the drills are meant to address public concerns over the presence of a nuclear-powered U.S. warship in Japan, Cerezo said she couldn’t comment on behalf of the Japanese public, but that the drills demonstrate the Navy’s “commitment to public health, safety and the environment.”

She also said that such vessels have operated for more than six decades “without experiencing any reactor accident or any release of radioactivity that had an adverse effect on human health, marine life or the quality of the environment.”

Nuclear power, whether aboard warships or as a source of domestic power, has the potential to divide the Japanese population.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, once an advocate for restarting Japan’s nuclear power plants idled since the 2011 Fukushima Dai-ichi meltdowns, dialled back his position ahead of elections that brought him into office in October, according to the Reuters news service.

Since the Fukushima disaster, precipitated by a massive earthquake and tsunami, Japan has restarted only a third of its 33 reactors, according to Reuters.

A March 2020 poll by the Japan Atomic Energy Relations Organization found 60.6% of 1,200 people polled want nuclear power generation discontinued either immediately or gradually.

Only 11.3% of respondents expressed a positive view of nuclear-generated power and supported an increase in nuclear power availability or a return to pre-Fukushima levels of generation.

However, public support for nuclear power increased for the third year in a row, from 6.9% in 2017 to 9.5% in 2019.

HUNDREDS OF MUNITIONS FROM WWII DETONATED UNDERWATER OFF OKINAWA

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
and MARI HIGA
Stars and Stripes
CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The first of more than 600 unexploded munitions uncovered on Okinawa this year were detonated underwater this week by the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.

The service blew up 319 items, including bombs and grenades, at 10:15 a.m. Tuesday, about a half-mile offshore from Naha Port’s Shinko Wharf, a Naha city spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday.

The ordnance was recovered during the dredging of Naha Port between March and November. They are believed to be American-made and dropped during the pivotal Battle of Okinawa that lasted from April 1 to June 22, 1945, the city said.

“The disposal was conducted as planned and without any trouble,” he said. It was the largest amount of recovered munitions detonated at one time since 1995.

The remaining 315 items will be disposed of on Jan. 26, the city spokesman said.

Since 1972, when Okinawa was returned to Japanese control, 2,094 tons of unexploded ordnance have been found and detonated in Okinawa prefecture, a spokesman from the prefecture’s Disaster Prevention and Crisis Management Division said Thursday.

“The number of unexploded ordnance found in Okinawa is decreasing,” he said. Last year, only 14.5 tons were uncovered and disposed of.

Hundreds of munitions from WWII detonated underwater off Okinawa
by Chad Garland

Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps will no longer send its amphibious assault vehicles on regular deployments or training in water except in crisis response, the service said Wednesday.

The decision comes nearly 1½ years after eight Marines and a sailor died when an AAV sank off the coast of California during a training drill.

The decision could be reversed if necessary, as the service still believes that with measures implemented after the fatal event, the vehicles are safe for amphibious operations, spokesman Maj. Jim Stenger said in an email to USNI News.

Also known as Amtracs, the amphibious fighting vehicles have been in use since the 1970s. They’ll continue to be used on land, where they perform about three quarters of their tasks, Stenger said.

The Corps halted waterborne use of the AAVs for months after the deadly July 2020 accident but resumed some use in the water earlier this year.

Stenger said the service is committed to fielding the Amphibious Combat Vehicle, the Corps’ second try at replacing the AAVs. The first, called the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle, was canceled in 2010.

The service approved the ACV for full-rate production a year ago but paused its waterborne operations in September because of problems with that platform’s towing mechanism.

“We expect that issue to be resolved so the ACVs can return to the water early in the new year,” Stenger said.

The AAV’s indefinite grounding comes amid the Marine Corps’ ongoing focus on returning to its amphibious roots after 20 years of land-based warfare in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Earlier this year, Gen. David Berger, the Marine Corps commandant, told reporters that the service’s pool of shared knowledge about amphibious operations had shrunk and would need to be expanded.

Investigations into last year’s AAV sinking, the deadliest training accident involving an AAV in the Corps’ history, found that the vehicles the platoon had been assigned were in “terrible conditions.”

Eight of the service members who died had not been trained how to get out of a submerged vehicle, which is notoriously hard to escape. And most of the service’s fleet of AAVs failed an inspection after the accident.

The service fired several officers in the wake of the tragedy, including its inspector general at the time, Gen. Robert Castellvi. He was commander of the 1st Marine Division before the sinking, and investigators found him responsible for some of the failures that led to it.

By Caitlin Doornbos

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The military’s basic allowance for housing rates will increase an average of 5.1% on Jan. 1, the Pentagon announced Wednesday.

Service members can expect to see the increase in their 2022 monthly housing allowances, which are given to troops who live off-base in the United States, the Defense Department said.

The total amount given in the allowance depends on where the service member lives, his or her rank or grade and whether the individual has dependents.

The 5.1% increase reflects an increase in the market rate for rent and average utility costs, which the Defense Department uses to calculate its housing allowance rates, according to the statement.

“The department collects rental housing cost data annually for approximately 300 military housing areas in the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii,” the DOD said in its release. “Local commands provide input, which is used to determine neighborhoods and locations where data is collected.”

The housing allowance is locked in once it’s raised and will not decrease if the market rate does, so long as the service member remains in the same location and doesn’t otherwise become ineligible for the allowance, the Pentagon said.

“This ensures members who have made long-term commitments in the form of a lease or contract are not penalized if the area’s housing costs decrease,” according to the Defense Department statement.

While the housing allowance is a key element of the military’s benefit package, service members have to pay small “cost-sharing” or out-of-pocket amounts to help pay for their housing. Those amounts range from $74 to $168 per month, depending on their pay grade and dependency status, according to the department.

In October, housing allowance rates were temporarily adjusted for 56 military housing areas across the country. Those amounts will be replaced by the new 2022 rates on Jan. 1, according to the statement.

By John Vander

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The United Kingdom is taking a page from the U.S. Army playbook, sending hundreds of tanks and fighting vehicles back to Germany so its forces can maneuver more freely around Europe.

“It provides us a near-permanent presence in Europe in which we won’t have to get across the British channel,” Lt. Col. Julian Smith, a British army spokesman, said Wednesday.

The plan resembles initiatives that have transformed how the U.S. Army operates in Europe, where new weapons depots have been built so soldiers arriving for training or crisis response have combat gear to pull from.

Some of the equipment has already arrived at a British army post in Sennelager, Germany, and the rest of the geard is expected to be in place by the middle of next year, Smith said.

Moving British combat vehicles back into Germany will support NATO efforts to defend its eastern flank, he said.

The British army’s effort, which comes just one year after it completed a withdrawal of a Cold War-era force based in Germany, is part of a broader push toward a more durable overseas defense posture.

The initiative, called Future Soldier, also calls for the prepositioning of British army gear in Kenya and Oman, giving soldiers regional hubs in Africa and the Middle East.

“Troops will fly in from the U.K. to conduct their training and use the vehicles that are already there,” Smith said. “We will have a persistent presence in those countries.”

Set up as an occupation force after World War II, the British Army of the Rhine numbered more than 50,000 troops in the 1970s and 1980s. It started decreasing in numbers after the end of the Cold War, and the last permanent forces departed Germany in the past decade.

A difference from past British missions in Germany is that soldiers and their family won’t take up permanent residence in the country, as was the case during the Cold War, Smith said. Instead, the emphasis is on longer troop rotations.

The American buildup in Europe has been part of a broader push to rearm after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014.

At that time, all Army battle tanks had been withdrawn from the Continent as part of a long post-Cold War drawdown that sent scores of units back to the U.S.

The new Future Soldier regional hubs also are part of an effort to streamline the force for more rapid deployments, officials said.

“Our future army will be leaner but more productive, prioritizing speed and readiness over mass and mobilization,” Defense Minister Ben Wallace said last month in an announcement of the Future Soldier plan.

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Twitter: @JohnVanderv

By Cameron Hume

Stars and Stripes

A British tank rumbles across Sennelager Training Area in northern Germany. The British army is establishing an equipment hub in Sennelager where tanks and other fighting vehicles will be placed.

A difference from past British
Army: 98% of active duty got vaccine by deadline

BY Lolita C. Baldor
Associated Press
WASHINGTON — Army officials said Thursday that 98% of their active-duty force had gotten at least one dose of the mandatory coronavirus vaccine as of this week’s deadline for the shots, but more than 3,800 soldiers flatly refused and could start being removed from the military next month.

The U.S. military’s largest service, however, reported the lowest number of service members seeking a religious exemption — a bit more than 1,700 soldiers compared with the other three smaller services. In comparison, there are more than 4,700 in the Air Force, 3,000 in the Marine Corps and 2,700 in the Navy who are requesting religious exemptions, according to data released by the services in the past week. None have yet been approved.

The Pentagon announced earlier this year that the COVID-19 vaccine was mandatory for all service members, including the National Guard and Reserve. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has said repeatedly that getting the vaccine is critical to maintaining a healthy, ready force that can be prepared to defend the nation. The Pentagon is also weighing making religious exemptions available to service members.

The Army, which totals more than 478,000 active-duty soldiers, had the last vaccine deadline among the services for their active-duty troops Wednesday. And it scored the second-highest rate for those who have gotten at least one shot at 97.9%. The Navy leads with more than 98%, while the Air Force is at 97.5% and the Marine Corps is at 95%.

The other services had earlier deadlines. The Air Force required vaccines for the active duty by Nov. 2, while members of the Navy and the Marine Corps had until Nov. 28 to get the shots and their Reserve members have until Dec. 28. Air Force Guard and Reserves had until Dec. 2, and the Army Guard and Reserve soldiers have until next June.

According to data released by the Army, more than 2,700 soldiers who refused the vaccine have already been given written reprimands, and six soldiers have been fired from leadership positions. The Army has said that soldiers who refuse the vaccine should not be in leadership jobs.

Procedures to begin discharging those who refuse the vaccine are slated to begin in January, giving soldiers a bit more time to change their minds before being forced out. Students at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point who refuse the vaccine and do not get an approved exemption will not be commissioned as officers.

The Air Force this week said it has already discharged 27 airmen for refusing to obey a lawful order and get the COVID-19 vaccine, making them what officials believe are the first service members to be removed for disobeying the shot mandate.

The airmen were formally discharged for failure to obey an order. It is possible that some had other infractions on their records, but all had the vaccine refusal as one of the elements of their discharge.

Overall, the Army said that more than 6,200 soldiers are seeking some type of temporary or permanent exemption, including 641 medical requests and the 1,746 religious requests. Of those 6,200 requests, nearly 3,900 have received an approved temporary exemption. Four got a permanent medical exemption.

Temporary exemptions can be for a variety of reasons ranging from medical, such as pregnancy, to administrative, such as someone who is retiring or is in a remote location where there are no readily available vaccines.

Across the military, the vaccine reaction has mirrored that of society as a whole, with thousands of members seeking exemptions or refusing the shots. But the overall percentage of troops — particularly active-duty members — who quickly got the shots exceeds the nationwide numbers. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 72% of the U.S. population age 18 or older has gotten at least one shot.

F-35A Lightning II jets arrive in England

BY Jennifer Svan
Stars and Stripes
The first U.S. Air Force F-35A Lightning II jets to be based in Europe arrived at their new home in England on Wednesday, six years after plans to base two squadrons at RAF Lakenheath were announced.

The four planes were part of the much-anticipated delivery to the fighter base in Suffolk, U.S. Air Forces in Europe–Air Forces Africa said.

The planes are fresh off the Lockheed Martin production line in Fort Worth, Texas, a spokeswoman for the 48th Fighter Wing at Lakenheath said Thursday.

RAF Lakenheath, about 70 miles northeast of London, was selected in 2015 to host the first American F-35A squadrons in Europe.

Deliveries were slated to begin in 2020 but were pushed back, in part because of construction delays at the facilities being built to support the fifth-generation fighters.

The aircraft will belong to the 485th Fighter Squadron, nicknamed the Valkyries, after the mythological Norsewomen who chose who would live or die in battle.

“The Valkyries are leading our F-35 integration across Europe,” Gen. Jeff Harrigian, USAFE-AFAFRICA commander, said in a statement.

The squadron will consist of 24 airplanes, which will be delivered to Lakenheath in phases, USAFE-AFAFRICA officials said.

Eventually, the base will host two F-35A squadrons.

The 48th Fighter Wing at Lakenheath reactivated the 495th in October.

The squadron is slated to be fully mission-capable in 2022, Air Force officials said this fall.

The 495th flew the F-111 Aardvark from 1977 until its deactivation in 1991 and was previously known as the Thundervarks.
evacuation helicopters arrived, he refused to board until the other wounded were treated. He asked to last to board the helicopter, and he walked on — refusing to be carried on a stretcher, said Lt. Col. Linear Mathias, who was present that day. Mathias was in charge of the armored vehicle directly behind Cashe’s during that patrol in 2005. After the explosion, he focused on the back of the vehicle, counting the bodies as Cashe pulled them out.

“The last time I saw him, he was walking to the helicopter after all of his guys had been loaded,” Mathias said. “He just refused to be carried out.”

Cashe suffered second- and third-degree burns over 72% of his body. He died about three weeks later on Nov. 8, 2005 at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas.

In total, one Iraqi interpreter and 10 American soldiers, including Cashe, were killed in the Brad- dley. The interpreter, as well as Cashe and three other soldiers — Staff Sgt. George Alexander Jr., 34, Sgt. Michael Robertson, 28, and Spc. Darren Howes, 21 — died from their wounds.

If not for Cashe’s actions, all of the men in that Bradley would likely have been killed, and some of them would’ve had the chance to say goodbye to their families, said Col. Jimmey Hathaway, Cashe’s company commander at the time.

“If you look at the war at that point in time, there’s a lot going on. People who passed away overseas — they did get a chance to say goodbye to their families, and their families didn’t get to say goodbye to them,” Hathaway said. “[Cashe] made that happen. He got the men out. He got them back and made sure every single one of those kids got to say goodbye the right way.”

“I knew and cared about every person in his platoon, according to Hathaway and Lt. Gen. Gary Brito, his battalion commander. He knew their families, their goals and aspirations, and what motivated them. He cared for every service member under his leadership, and while he was hard on them, he always cared with compassion.

Cashe was the last of the men in- jured in the Bradley to die. Brito said he believed that wasn’t by chance.

“I know in my heart and in my soul that it was his leadership… he was ensuring that his boys were taken care of,” Brito said. Brito was a leading proponent for Cashe to receive the Medal of Honor.

Cashe was revered in the military community, and his life-saving ef- forts have long been identified among the most heroic acts of the Iraq War. But bureaucratic mis- steps and a five-year time limit mandated by Congress for Medals of Honor to be recommended kept Cashe from receiving the award.

That changed last December, when then-President Donald Trump signed a new bill into law, waiving that five-year time limit for Cashe and assuring he would finally receive the award.

For his family, the journey to the White House has been an “up- hill battle,” and a “roller-coaster ride” with extreme ups and downs, said his older sister, Kasi- nha Cashle. The most exhilarating moment was Friday at 3:35 p.m., she said, when the White House announced Cashe would receive the honor this week.

Cashe grew up in poverty in Oviedo, Fla., and joined the Army shortly after graduating high school. White said he found his niche, his joy, in the U.S. military.

“It shows that in this country, you can start here and end here,” Cashe White said, spreading her arms apart as far as they would go. “Had I wanted his story to end different? Yes — I would give 10 years of my life to get my brother back. But it shows the world there are no limits to what you can achieve.”

**Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Celiz**

Christopher Celiz, 32, led a spe- cial operations unit on July 12, 2018, to clear an area of enemy forces in the Paktia province of Afgahanistan. The unit comprised members of the 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, as well as members of partner forces.

Once Celiz and his men reached the area of their mission, they came under a large enemy attack.

Celiz exposed himself to enemy fire to retrieve a “heavy weapons system” that allowed his unit to re- gain their position and move to a secure location, according to the Army. One person, a member of the partner forces, was injured in the attack. When a medical evac- uation helicopter arrived to re- retrieve the injured person, “the enemy opened up with all they had,” recalled 2nd Lt. David White, who was under Celiz’s command that day.

“I remember it looking like the ground was boiling from the amount of rounds hitting the dust,” White said.

Celiz willingly put himself be- tween the enemy fire and the team that loaded the injured person into the helicopter, using his body as a physical shield. He guarded the helicopter and its crew as they started to take off.

As Celiz ran for cover, he was hit by enemy fire. Understanding the peril to the aircraft, Celiz moti- oned to the pilots to depart, rath- er than land to pick him up. Ac- cording to the Army, his actions likely saved the life of the injured man, a number of partner forces and prevented other injuries among his unit and the aircrew.

White was the radio telephone operator for Celiz that day and stuck by him throughout much of the mission. He witnessed the mo- ment that Celiz went down.

When three rounds go by his back foot as he was running for cover, and he skipped like he had been hit,” White said. “He looked up at the helicopter as he col- lapsed to his hands and knees, and I saw him raise his hand as he was looking up and wave them off, like ‘Don’t come back for me.’”

After that, Celiz collapsed onto his chest and made one last at- tempt to pull himself to cover be- fore going unconscious, White said. He died of his injuries later, while on an evacuation flight.

White remembers Celiz as a calm, patient and focused leader who made his soldiers feel like family. During their downtime in Afghanistan, Celiz would play gui- tar and sing, using the opportunity to bring his service members to- gether.

On the day that Celiz died, as the unit first met enemy fire, he quot- ed a line from the movie “O broth- er, Where Art Thou?”

“He looked at us and said, ‘Damm boys, we’re in a tight spot!’” White said. “That is a test- ament to his character… that in the midst of all that gunfire and the threat to our lives, he was cracking a joke to lighten the mood. That way we stayed fo- cused and didn’t get overcome by fear or anxiety. We were just as calm as he was and feeding off his energy.”

When Celiz’s wife, Katie Celiz, first heard about her husband’s fi- nal act of waving away the heli- copter, she wasn’t surprised, she said.

“She was a remarkable woman. Her presence will be sorely missed. Its whereabouts was a mystery until she saw Christopher Celiz in the parking lot, wearing her jacket as he brought in shop- ping carts.”

The next day, she found her jacket on his hanger, and its pock- ets were full of rose petals. She asked him on a date, and they were together from that day forward.

The couple was in high school during the 9/11 terrorist attack. Celiz decided he wanted to join the military to make a difference, Ka- tie Celiz said. He enlisted in 2006, and he was on his seventh deploy- ment when he died, White said.

“We had a beautiful life togeth- er. We have a daughter that’s now 11 years old,” Katie Celiz said. “I just feel blessed that I got to have the years I had with Chris. He was an amazing man. He brought joy to everybody’s life he touched.”

**Master Sgt. Earl Plumlee**

Earl Plumlee said he’s accept- ing the honor, humbly, on behalf of his Special Forces regiment and the Special Forces "A" Team.

“It’s humbling to be nominated for this award and to be in this company,” Plumlee told reporters Wednesday during a news brief- ing.

“The medal I’ll receive tomorrow will be presented to me, but it’s by no means mine.”

Plumlee was at Forward Operat- ing Base Ghazni in Ghazni prov- ince, Afghanistan, on Aug. 28, 2013, when it was attacked by ene- my forces.

At the time, he was a staff ser- geant assigned to the 1st Special Forces Group.

A massive explosion caused a breach in the base’s perimeter wall, and 10 insurgents in Afghan National Army uniforms and sui- cide vests poured through the breach.

According to the Army, Plum- lee and five other special oper- ations soldiers got into two vehi- cles and sped toward the explo- sion, intent on defending the base.

Plumlee left the vehicle and used his body to shield the driver from enemy fire. He ran toward the open door, armed only with a pis- tol, and killed two insurgents. He killed one by firing into the insurg- ent’s suicide vest, causing it to detonate.

He advanced toward the enemy multiple times, despite being out- manned. He joined a small group of other American and coalition forces who moved to counteratt- ack. He carried one injured sol- dier to safety and rendered first aid.

“Throughout the entire engage- ment, Plumlee repeatedly placed himself in extreme danger to pro- tect his team and the base, and to defend Operation Enduring Freedom,” wrote in its citation for Plumlee.

Retired Sgt. Maj. Tony Bell was also there that day. The goal of the enemy, he said, was to get into the base and detonate their suicide vests.

“If they’ve gotten 20 feet past where Earl and the others stopped them… they would’ve gotten into some of those bunkers and caused hundreds of casual- ties,” Bell said. “We would’ve had a catastrophic event.”

Bell helped with the effort to en- sure Plumlee received the Medal of Honor.

“Earl demonstrates the best virtues of what it means to be an American,” Bell said. “He reacted to a chaotic situation and he did it because he knew it was the right thing to do, not because someone ordered him. He did it because of his char- acter.”

Plumlee remains on active duty as a member of the 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne).
The two young men had become brothers in the military "brotherhood" and the "code of conduct, ethics and language." Sumlin joined a private Facebook group where the soldiers or veterans connected to the scheme. When they returned stateside, the two men had crossed a line by selling weapons.

"It seemed a paltry amount, considered medication," Anderson wrote. "There's other guys who got much more than me. It's a lot of stress, the stress of making a living. It's a lot of stress. It's a lot of stress." Evan texted a Homeland Security official that the two men were indeed carrying weapons. He faced a possible 70 years in prison, but both received a much lighter sentence.

"The Army referred questions to the AP. Jarvis and Anderson did not respond to written questions," an AP reporter wrote, referring to Sumlin. "Sumlin declined to be interviewed for this story, but said in a 2019 interview that he planned to finish his probation and complete a psychology degree. "I want to try and help veterans that have lost their way and try to help them. I want to help others." Sumlin had served in both Iraq and Afghanistan, which he described as "a different kind of war." He had crossed a line by selling weapons.

"I would not sell anything to anyone," Anderson wrote back. "I hope so. They still have to rest messages seeking comment." The two men had crossed a line by selling weapons.

"I heard back from him," Anderson wrote, referring to Sumlin. "They told Sumlin and Jarvis to follow them to a nearby warehouse — and into the trap. There, the agents confirmed that the two men were indeed carrying multiple firearms, military equipment and C4 explosive devices." The agents had taken the weapons.

"The agents confirmed that the two men were indeed carrying multiple firearms, military equipment and C4 explosive devices. A SWAT team pounced, arrested them and secured the cache. Homeland Security agents seized more than 30 firearms, several blocks of C4, a hand grenade, shape charges, body armor, night vision devices, binoculars, ammunition, lasers and magazines. In Mexico, where drug traffickers have fought openly, the equipment could unleash carnage. Yet the weapons recovered did not account for all that was missing from Bragg's army. According to the report by Army criminal investigators, the items stolen between Sumlin, Jarvis and their accomplices between 2014 and 2018 were valued at close to $180,000. But the U.S. government only recovered roughly $26,000 worth. The Army referred questions to Homeland Security Investigations, which initially promised to discuss the case with AP, then canceled the interview and, later, did not respond to written questions. Jarvis and Sumlin were indicted on eight different federal charges, including conspiracy and bureaucratic. "Holy hell they had to be planing this thing for years," Anderson texted a Homeland Security agent.

"Boss is extremely happy ... It was a promise to win," Jarvis told the AP. "Bad guys thought we were narco traffickers from Mexico ... Using their weapons against troops." Sumlin posted bail and returned to his Florida home to pick up the pieces. He faced a possible 70 years in prison, and struggled under the weight of PTSD.

For many in the EOD community, Sumlin's mea culpa and excuses about needing money were not enough. He had crossed a line by selling weapons, and he could have killed one of his own.

Sumlin and Jarvis had faced decades in prison, but both reached deals with federal prosecutors who had considered guilty to attempting to smuggle goods from the United States. Each was sentenced to five years. Jarvis said, and Jarvis was ordered to mental health counseling and required to take prescribed medication. Jarvis and Anderson did not return messages seeking comment. Sumlin declined to be interviewed for this story, but said in a 2019 interview that he planned to finish his probation and complete a psychology degree. "I want to try and help veterans that have lost their way and try to help them. I want to help others." Sumlin had served in both Iraq and Afghanistan, which he described as "a different kind of war." He had crossed a line by selling weapons.

"It seemed a paltry amount, considered medication," Anderson wrote. "There's other guys who got much more than me. It's a lot of stress, the stress of making a living. It's a lot of stress. It's a lot of stress." Evan texted a Homeland Security official that the two men were indeed carrying weapons. He faced a possible 70 years in prison, but both received a much lighter sentence.

"I would not sell anything to anyone," Anderson wrote back. "I hope so. They still have to rest messages seeking comment." The two men had crossed a line by selling weapons.

"I heard back from him," Anderson wrote, referring to Sumlin. "They told Sumlin and Jarvis to follow them to a nearby warehouse — and into the trap. There, the agents confirmed that the two men were indeed carrying multiple firearms, military equipment and C4 explosive devices." The agents had taken the weapons.

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Navy on Okinawa gets new command

By Matthew M. Burke

WHITE BEACH NAVAL FACILITY, Oklahoma — One carrier pilot relieved another Thursday to take command of the Navy’s activities on Okinawa, a unique responsibility that includes naval aviators and ocean-going sailors.

Capt. Patrick Dziekan, an E-2 Hawkeye pilot, took command of Fleet Activities Okinawa from Capt. Scott Hardy during a low-key outdoor ceremony at White Beach’s Port of Call Club. The naval aviators were surrounded by approximately 150 sailors, dignitaries and special guests, in view of docked vessels and picturesque green-blue seas.

“This is a demonstration of the commitment of the United States and Japan to a free and open Indo-Pacific,” Navy Region Japan commander Rear Adm. Carl Lahti said during the ceremony. “Together with our mission and our values, our commitment to our Okinawan hosts and partners and our joint leadership between civilian employees. And more than 8,000 sailors and civilian employees.

Its primary tenant is Task Force 76, a command that embraces several missions, including expeditionary and amphibious warfare, and humanitarian relief efforts.

Dziekan arrived from Navy Region Mid-Atlantic in Virginia, where he served as executive assistant and acting chief of staff to the commander, his Navy biographical states. A native of Ellision Bay, Wis., he enlisted as a yeoman in 1980 and was commissioned nine years later.

Often referred to by his call sign “Donk,” Dziekan served aboard the aircraft carrier USS Constellation, USS Abraham Lincoln and USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, according to his biography. He recorded over 3,500 flight hours and 500 carrier landings. He also deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and received the Air Medal and Navy Commendation Medal with Combat “V.”

“Together with our mission and community partners, we play a vital role in maintaining peace, prosperity and stability throughout this region,” Dziekan said during Thursday’s ceremony. “I am reassured that I am now part of a strong and diverse alliance, with both our Okinawan hosts and partners and our joint leadership team.”

Hardy, a former enlisted Marine, turned Navy electronic-warfare pilot, heads to Cornell University where he will teach and command the school’s Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps. Navy spokesman Rob Helton told Stars and Stripes after the ceremony.

Hardy, who arrived on Okinawa in February 2019, was heralded Thursday for steadfast leadership through the COVID-19 pandemic and for forging lasting partnerships with members of the local community.

“Okinawa is the only U.S. Naval facility in Japan with both airfield and port operations, and you met every mission safely and effectively,” Lahti told Hardy.

From the podium, Hardy thanked many, including officers of the Japan Self-Defense Forces and sailors of the Okinawa command.

“As I ready to leave Japan for the last time as a member of the Navy, I want to say a final thank you to the sailors of CFAQ,” Hardy said. “You are an irreplaceable, integral part of our efforts to ensure an open and free Indo-Pacific, a peaceful region and a global stage free of coercion and that’s adherent to a rules-based order.”

Capt. Patrick Dziekan, the new leader of Fleet Activities Okinawa, speaks during his change-of-command ceremony at White Beach Naval Facility, on Thursday.
A tornado approaches Interstate 80 near Atlantic, Iowa, as a semi truck rolls eastward Wednesday.

At least 1 dead as unusual Midwest storm brings hurricane-force winds

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — One person has died as a powerful storm system swept across the Great Plains and Midwest amid unseasonably warm temperatures, bringing hurricane-force wind gusts and spawning reported tornadoes in Nebraska, Iowa and Minnesota in a weather outbreak experts described as extremely unusual for December.

A semitrailer struck by high winds rolled onto its side on southbound U.S. Highway 151 in eastern Iowa on Wednesday evening as severe weather moved through the area, killing the driver, the Iowa State Patrol said.

The storm was shifting north of the Great Lakes into Canada on Thursday, with high winds, snow and hazardous conditions continuing in the upper Great Lakes region, the National Weather Service said. More than 400,000 homes and businesses were without electricity Thursday morning in Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa and Kansas, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks utility reports.

A tornado was reported in southern Minnesota on Wednesday and, if confirmed, would be the state’s first ever in December. The small community of Hartland, Minn., might have been the hardest hit, with a reported 35 to 40 homes sustaining minor damage while a few businesses were severely damaged, said county Emergency Management Director Rich Hall. Several barns were down and roofs were blown off some sheds, he added.

The winds knocked down trees, tree limbs and nearly 150 power lines in northern and western Michigan’s Lower Peninsula. In the western Michigan village of Fruitport, high winds peeled back a portion of Edgewood Elementary School’s roof, leading officials to close all district schools Thursday.

There were more than 20 tornado reports Wednesday in the Plains states, scattered through eastern Nebraska and Iowa, based on preliminary reports to the Storm Prediction Center. The day also saw the most reports of hurricane-force wind gusts — 75 mph or higher — of any day since 2004, the center said.

“To have this number of damaging wind storms at one time would be unusual any time of year,” said Brian Barjenbruch, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Valley, Nebraska. “But to have this happen in December is really abnormal.”

Fla. district to pay $26M to shooting victims

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — The Broward County, Fla., school district will pay more than $26 million to the families of 17 people killed in a high school shooting in Parkland, the district said Thursday.

The shooting, two family members of those killed have been elected to the school board: Debbi Hixon, whose husband Chris Hixon was the athletic director, and Lori Alhadeff, the mother of 14-year-old Alyssa Alhadeff. Neither took part in the negotiations or vote.

The families also reached a settlement with the FBI last month that will pay them over $127 million for its failure to possibly prevent the attack.

The district will also pay $1.25 million to Anthony Borges, who suffered some of the most severe injuries. His lawyer split off from the larger case, saying Borges will have a lifetime of expensive medical needs, according to the South Florida Sun Sentinel.

The Florida Supreme Court ruled in 2020 that state law capped the district’s total liability at $300,000, but the district agreed to go beyond that limit. Since the shooting, two family members of those killed have been elected to the school board: Debbi Hixon, whose husband Chris Hixon was the athletic director, and Lori Alhadeff, the mother of 14-year-old Alyssa Alhadeff. Neither took part in the negotiations or vote.

“We recognize no amount of money can make these families whole, it is the school board’s hope that this settlement will show our heartfelt commitment to the MSD families, students, staff, faculty and to the entire Broward County community,” said Marylin Batista, the board’s interim general counsel.

US sets sanctions against China over abuse of Uyghurs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration said Thursday that it is imposing new sanctions on several Chinese biotech and surveillance companies and government entities for actions in Xinjiang province, the latest step against Beijing over human rights abuses of Uighur Muslims in the country’s western region.

The Commerce Department is targeting China’s Academy of Military Medical Sciences and its 11 research institutes that focus on using biotechnology to support the Chinese military.

The move will bar American companies from selling components to the entities without a license.

“All the scientific pursuit of biotechnology and medical innovation can save lives. Unfortunately, the PRC (People’s Republic of China) is choosing to use these technologies to pursue control over its people and its repression of members of ethnic and religious minority groups,” Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said in a statement. “We cannot allow U.S. commodities, technologies and software that support medical science and biotechnological innovation to be diverted toward uses contrary to U.S. national security.”

The Treasury Department is also imposing new sanctions against several Chinese entities, according to a senior administration official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the soon-to-be-announced moves.

The official, explaining the Commerce Department actions, noted that U.S. intelligence has established that Beijing has set up a high tech surveillance system across Xinjiang that uses biometric facial recognition and has collected DNA samples from all residents, ages 12 to 65, in Xinjiang part of a systematic effort to suppress Uyghurs.

The White House announced last week that it would stage a diplomatic boycott of the upcoming Winter Olympics in Beijing, citing China’s “egregious human rights abuses and atrocities in Xinjiang.” U.S. athletes will continue to compete, but Biden will not send the usual contingent of dignitaries.

The administration also said this week that it supported bipartisan legislation which bans imports into the United States from Xinjiang unless companies can demonstrate the goods were not produced by forced labor.

China has denied any abuses and said the steps it has taken are necessary to combat terrorism and a separatist movement.

All US missionary group hostages freed in Haiti

Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — The remaining members of a U.S. missionary group who were kidnapped two months ago in Haiti have been freed, Haitian police and the group said Thursday.

The spokesman for Haiti’s National Police, Gary Desrosiers, confirmed to The Associated Press that the hostages had been released, but did not immediately provide additional details.

“While we recognize no amount of money can make these families whole, it is the school board’s hope that this settlement will show our heartfelt commitment to the MSD families, students, staff, faculty and to the entire Broward County community,” said Marylin Batista, the board’s interim general counsel.

“Without our community’s support, we wouldn’t be where we are today,” she said.

The missionaries were kidnapped by the 400 Mawon gang on Oct. 16. There were five children in the group of 16 U.S. citizens and one Canadian, including an 8-month-old. Their Haitian driver was also abducted, according to a local human rights official.

It remained unclear Thursday whether any ransom was paid or what efforts led to the hostages’ freedom.

Carleton Horst, a member of the Haiti congregation, said church members received a text message Thursday morning from “someone connected to the situation” that all of the hostages had been released.

A mother and four of her children who belong to the church were among the hostages. Horst, who is friends with the family, said the church is rejoicing and he’s “relieved that none of the situations is finally over, just praise the Lord for that.”

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UN watchdog: Iran will allow cameras set at nuclear site

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — The United Nations’ nuclear watchdog and Iran reached a deal Wednesday to reinstall cameras damaged at an Iranian site that manufactures centrifuge parts, though inspectors remain limited on what footage they can access.

The agreement will see cameras put back at Karaj, which came under what Iran describes as a sabotage attack in June. Iran had since refused the International Atomic Energy Agency access to replace cameras damaged in the incident, part of an ongoing hard-line tack taken by Tehran at negotiations underway in Vienna over its tattered 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Iranian media first reported the deal without citing a source. IAEA Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi later tweeted out a statement detailing the arrangement.

“This is important for verification under the Iran nuclear deal, and work will continue to address other outstanding safeguards issues,” Grossi wrote.

The IAEA said the cameras would be reinstalled at Karaj in the “coming days.”

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian reportedly said Wednesday’s agreement had “reached a good agreement” with the IAEA.

Tehran blamed the Karaj assault on Israel and accused neighboring regional shadow war since former President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from Iran landmark nuclear accord with world powers.

In an interview Tuesday with The Associated Press, Grossi warned that limited access to Karaj hurt international efforts to monitor Iran’s program.

“If the international community

Rescuers fight strong typhoon lashing southern Philippines

By JIM GOMEZ

MANILA, Philippines — A powerful typhoon slammed into the southeastern Philippines on Thursday, toppling trees, ripping tin roofs and knocking down power as it blew across island provinces where nearly 100,000 people have been evacuated.

Coast guard personnel were rescuing residents stranded by chest-deep waters in a southern province, where pounding rains spawned villages in brownish water. In southern Cagayan de Oro city, footage showed two rescuers struggling to keep a month-old baby inside a laundry basin above the water and shielded from the wind and rain with an umbrella.

Forecasters said Typhoon Rai further strengthened with sustained winds of 122 miles per hour and gusts of up to 168 mph as it blew from the Pacific Ocean into the southeastern Philippines on Thursday as a precaution.”

Nations renew talks on ‘killer robots’ as deal hopes narrow

Associated Press

GENEVA — The United Nations has reached a deal to begin work on guidelines for the development of autonomous weapons systems, one of the last major areas of land mines and the autonomous weapons systems.

The countries behind the United Nations agreement on autonomous systems have been meeting this week on the thorny issue of lethal autonomous weapons systems, colloquially known as “killer robots,” which advocacy groups warn to strictly limit or ban.

The latest round of countries behind a Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons is tackling an array of issues from in-canyedium weapons, explosive remnants of war, a specific category of land mines and the autonomous weapons systems.

Nations have argued there’s a fine line between autonomous weapons systems and computer-aided targeting and weapons systems that exist already.

But opponents of such systems fear a dystopian day when tanks, submarines, robots or fleets of drones with facial-recognition software could roam without human oversight and strike against human targets.

“It’s essentially a really critical opportunity for states to take steps to regulate and prohibit autonomy in weapons systems, which in essence means killer robots or weapons systems that are going to operate without meaningful human control,” said Clare Conboy, spokesperson for the advocacy group Stop Killer Robots.

The various countries have met repeatedly on the issue since 2013. They face what Human Rights Watch called a pivotal decision this week in Geneva on whether to open specific talks on the use of autonomous weapons systems or leave it up to regular meetings of the countries to work out.

A group of governmental experts that took up the issue failed to reach a consensus last week, and advocacy groups have said nations including the United States, Russia, Israel, India and Britain have impeded progress.

The International Committee of the Red Cross cautioned in a report last week that the “loss of human control and judgment in the use of force and weapons raises serious concerns from humanitarian, legal and ethical perspectives.”

Some world powers have opposed any binding or nonvoluntary constraints on the development of such systems, in part out of concern that if the countries can’t develop or research such weapons, their enemies or non-state groups might.

The convention has argued there’s a fine line between autonomous weapons systems and computer-aided targeting and weapons systems that exist already.
Zebras on the run for months are captured

MD  UPPER MARLBORO — Two zebras running loose since escaping a Maryland farm about four months ago have been caught.

Prince George’s County Animal Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture weren’t involved in the capture but were told Monday that the animals returned to their herd last week, The Washington Post reported.

In late August, the two zebras fled an Upper Marlboro farm where officials have said about 40 zebras live. Residents in the region shared sightings of the free-roaming pair on social media.

The duo was originally a trio, but one got caught in an illegal snare trap on a neighboring property and died soon after the breakout. The county filed misdemeanor charges against owner Jerry Holly in October after another zebra was found dead inside the farm’s enclosure.

Lawyer Steven B. Vinick emailed The Post on Tuesday saying his client “has been and is a respected businessman in Prince George’s County, and he looks forward to being able to show in court that there is no merit whatsoever to any of the charges pending against him.”

USDA inspectors wrote that the zebras escaped “during the unloading process” as the herd was moved to Maryland from Florida, Animal Services Chief Rodney Taylor said.

1 arrested in vandalism of police station steps

NM  ALBUQUERQUE — Albuquerque police officers went to a familiar location, the police department’s own headquarters, to respond to a vandalism call early Wednesday.

Officers found “extensive graffiti” covering the southern steps of the Bernalillo County Sheriff’s Department, a police spokesperson said.

Officer Chase Jewell said the graffiti that included racial slurs and “inappropriate language” was written in red spray paint along the stairs, walls, benches and planters.

Officers arrested one person who was jailed on felony criminal damage charges, Jewell said.

Amtrak service returns to historic station

IA  FORT MADISON — Passenger trains began stopping Wednesday at Fort Madison’s historic station for the first time in more than 50 years.

David Handera, an Amtrak vice president, announced Friday night during an event in Fort Madison that eastbound and westbound Southwestern trains would begin stopping at the old station on Wednesdays.

The station was built in the Mississippi River town by the Santa Fe railroad in 1910, but passenger service was moved to a building in a nearby rail yard in 1968.

Getting a tuneup

Workers with Snyder Signs disassemble the Bristol Chamber of Commerce guitar on Monday, in Bristol, Tenn. The 20-foot-tall guitar sign is being temporarily removed for repairs and will be reinstalled once the repairs are complete.

For years, Fort Madison residents have worked to raise money and make improvements to the old brick structure in the heart of downtown so it could again be used for train passengers.

Police: Delivery driver ran over couple’s groceries

MN  BLAINE — Charges are expected soon for a Minnesota grocery delivery worker accused of driving over sacks of food meant for an elderly couple because she was angry about their sign supporting law enforcement, police said Tuesday.

The incident happened Dec. 6 after the couple ordered $80 worth of groceries from Cub Foods to be delivered by Instacart to their home in the north Twin Cities suburb of Blaine. Police said the couple stepped out to meet the driver, who first told them to check the wreath hanging on their front door and then drove back and forth over the groceries.

The driver allegedly scribbled a note on the receipt that complained about the delivery service pay and called police “racist pigs.” Investigators said the pro-police sign was in the front yard of the home but did not describe it.

Blaine police have identified the driver as a 36-year-old woman from a nearby suburb, the Star Tribune reported.

The couple received a full refund from Instacart, which said it fired the delivery driver.

Man dies after jump off highway bridge in panic

MT  SUPERIOR — A Baltimore man who got into a crash on Interstate 90 in western Montana died after jumping off a bridge, apparently in fear that an oncoming semi-trailer truck was going to strike the crashed vehicles, Mineral County officials said.

The initial crash happened before sunset Monday on a snow-packed bridge in the westbound lanes of I-90 near Superior, Undersheriff Wayne Cashman said Tuesday.

The man got out of his car to check on the other driver, who was uninjured.

He saw a semi approaching and tried to wave down the driver, witnesses said, then apparently feared the semi was going to hit him.

The man jumped off the bridge and fell 60 to 80 feet, landing on the edge of the Clark Fork River, where he died, Cashman said.

Investigators believe the man didn’t know the height of the bridge because he was unfamiliar with the area, Cashman said.

The semi did collide with the crashed vehicles, but by then it was too late to save him.

Dock issue suspends USS Arizona Memorial tours

HI  HILO — A 19-year-old man died when his pickup truck careened over a bridge in the harbor near Pearl Harbor, authorities said.

The body of the man, who is believed to be a Hawaiian National Memorial Center employee, was found in the parking lot of the center on Sunday.

The cause of death was determined to be asphyxiation, police said.

The dock is only open to visitors on a first-come, first-served basis.

Man dies after being run over by truck mid-fight

NE  SPRINGFIELD — A 19-year-old man died when he was run over by his pickup truck as he wrestled with another man in the road, authorities said Tuesday.

Gage Nech, 19, of Greta, was killed early Sunday in Springfield, the Sarpy County Sheriff’s Office said in a news release.

Nech was driving his truck with two 18-year-old passengers when he stopped in downtown Springfield and he and one of the passengers began wrestling on the road, the statement said. At some point, the other passenger jumped on Nech’s hood and police say Nech flipped over and one of the tires ran over Nech, according to the statement.

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Stars and Stripes is helping to send your wish list to Santa!

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Write your letter
Don’t forget to decorate it!

Step 2
Address it to
Santa Claus
c/o Stars and Stripes
North Pole

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Letterstosanta.stripes.com

*Postmark by Dec. 20, 2021 and Santa may have time to send a note in return!
Olivia Colman, Jessie Buckley talk about what it was like to play the same character in ‘Lost Daughter’

BY JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

It’s not often that two actors inhabit the same role seamlessly in a movie. But in Maggie Gyllenhaal’s “The Lost Daughter,” Olivia Colman and Jessie Buckley play a woman in vastly different chapters in her life with a rare harmony.

“The Lost Daughter,” Gyllenhaal’s remarkably accomplished directorial debut, is adapted from Elena Ferrante’s 2006 novel. Colman stars as Leda, a 48-year-old British academic on vacation in Greece, where a large and boorish family interrupts the tranquility of her holiday. Yet Leda is intrigued by a young, struggling mother, played by Dakota Johnson. Their interactions fuel Leda’s memories of her early years as a parent, a time when her career is also taking hold. In interspersed flashbacks, Buckley plays the younger Leda.

Colman and Buckley don’t look particularly alike, but their interpretations of Leda are compellingly synergetic. Each performance deepens the other, creating a bisected mirror for the character. “Leda” was 69.

“I quickly learned, don’t try to compete with Jessie,” Colman said. “It’s funny because it’s true. Olivia, you suggested Jessie for this role. What made you think of her?”

Colman: When I first met Maggie, I said, “And who else have you got?” She went, “I haven’t anybody. Do you have any thoughts?” I went, “Do you know Jessie Buckley?” She didn’t but she went and saw “Wild Rose,” which had just come out. I always think “Jessie Buckley.” I feel thrilled with myself. I find Jessie is the most incredible actress. I love watching her. I think she’s exquisite in her choices and has impeccable taste.

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“Did you discuss your approach together at all?”

Buckley: We did karaoke together. That was basically all of our research.

Colman: I quickly learned, don’t try to compete with Jessie’s singing.

What were your songs?

Buckley: “Bohemian Rhapsody.”

Colman: A bit of Adele. It was a challenge.

Buckley: Thank god she’s released a new album. That’s all I can say.

Colman: It’s funny because it’s true.

Olivia, you suggested Jessie for this role. What made you think of her?

Colman: When I first met Maggie, I said, “And who else have you got?” She went, “I haven’t anybody. Do you have any thoughts?” I went, “Do you know Jessie Buckley?” She didn’t but she went and saw “Wild Rose,” which had just come out. I always think “Jessie Buckley.” I feel thrilled with myself. I find Jessie is the most incredible actress. I love watching her. I think she’s exquisite in her choices and has impeccable taste.

Did you discuss your approach together at all?

Buckley: We had a phone call where we said, “What accent should we do?” “OK.”

That was it?

Colman: Well, Maggie doesn’t want to patronize an audience. It’s clear that it’s Jessie and Olivia. We’re different people and we’re playing the same woman. But it’s a woman in different stages of her life. You do change a bit. When I saw it I thought we had the same response to the script. And Jessie didn’t throw me off by doing a secret limp.

“The Lost Daughter” shows a complicated, uncertain side of motherhood rarely seen in movies. Leda has ambitions and desires that don’t fit into the conventional portraits.

Buckley: That’s what I loved about it. Why hasn’t this been on screen before? To me, that’s what I loved most about my own mother and my sisters and all the amazing women in my life. It’s like the potential of all of them outside of the thing that we project on top of them. Reading the script was like taking a big sigh of relief. My own mum came to see it at the London Film Festival and she took a big sigh. She felt like she was part of a community for the first time, like “Oh, thank god, you too.” She was holding herself differently that night.

Colman: I loved that it was an honest depiction of being (expletive) at it. My mates, who all happen to also be mums, could see them going, “That was quite shocking and I’m really grateful it was there.” Some of the days, I still go over and when I was really bad at being a mum and I can share that with everybody. I can forgive myself because it’s really normal.

Olivia, you’ve talked about how your own experience of motherhood differs.

Colman: I had a different situation to Leda. I was seen and I was supported. I was co-parents with my husband. A lot of those frustrations didn’t exist. I need to be me, too, because I was being an actor. So that’s a huge difference. Also, you don’t have to always draw on something. We’re in the business of imagination. Jessie doesn’t have children, but Jessie plays that part beautifully. Dakota doesn’t have children. I recently played a murderer (in the HBO miniseries “Landscapers”). I haven’t murdered anyone.

Did either of you watch the other’s scenes to gauge your own performance?

Olivia: When we first got to Greece, I thought maybe I could watch a couple scenes with Jessie’s permission. I was about to press play and I went, “Oh that’s wrong.”

Jessie: That’s just because my bottom was the first shot that you saw.

Olivia: It felt fair to do that. I just felt: Why don’t we just trust each other? The first time I saw it was at Venice and it was your performance that made me go “Oh.” Watching you, that was amazing.

Jessie, what did you think when you saw Olivia’s performance?

Buckley: I think Olivia Colman has huge potential. I think she’s got a really great career ahead of her. I would watch Olivia paint a wall, really.

Influential feminist writer and culture critic bell hooks dies at 69

BY NARDINE SAAD
Los Angeles Times

Bell hooks, the influential writer, feminist, poet and cultural critic who popularized intersectionality with works such as “ Ain’t I a Woman,” “All About Love,” “Bone Black,” “Feminist Theory” and “Communion: The Female Search for Love,” died Wednesday. She was 69.

Gloria Jean Watkins, known professionally by her lowercase pen name, died at home in Berea, Ky., after an extended illness, according to a family statement from William Morrow Publishers and Berek College in Kentucky, which houses the bell hooks Institute.

Hooks’ oeuvre included 40 books published in 15 languages, and the author consistently challenged conventional ways of thinking while writing about the everyday lives of women.

She published her first book, “ And There We Wept,” in 1978, using her pen name to honor her great-grandmother, Blair Blue Hoffs, and to allow readers to focus on the substance of her work rather than who she was. (She was told often as a child that her quick thinking and outspokenness was like that of “Granny Bell.”)

The writer regularly tackled difficult subjects, including the differences in feminist thought and practice between white women and women of color, as well as her own tumultuous childhood and the convergence of race, class and gender in the movies.

“ No Black woman writer in this culture can write ‘too much.’” Indeed, no woman writer can write “too much.”... No woman has ever written enough,” she said in her 1999 book of essays, “Remembered Rapture.”

Her other notable titles include “And There We Wept,” “Salvation,” “The Will to Change,” “Feminism Is for Everybody,” “Where We Stand: Class Matters,” “Killing Rage” and “Teaching to Transgress.”
# Eugene Sheffer Crossword

**ACROSS**

1. Coffee flavor
6. Smidgen
9. Trendy
12. James — Garfield
13. Storefront sign abbr.
14. Chemical suffix
15. "Fences" actress Davis
16. Auto safety feature
18. Chinese dumpling
20. Sty cry
21. Cleric's garment
23. Football's Parseghian
24. Author Joyce Carol —
25. Piglet's pop
27. One-eighty
29. Steve of "The Office"
31. Appeared to be
35. Intimidate, with "out"
37. Kentucky Derby winner — Ridge
38. Encrusted
41. Devilish laugh
43. Collar
44. Met melody
45. Moolah
47. Icon lineup
49. Temple leader
52. Pinafore letters
53. Cravat
54. Where the elated walked
55. Talk and talk
56. Snake's warning
57. "Phooey!"

**DOWN**

1. Dallas hoopster, briefly
2. Japanese sash
3. Prying aid
4. Angelic ring
5. Range brand
6. — lozenge
7. "East of Eden" twin
8. Broadband letters
9. Custom
10. Foolish
11. Job benefits
17. Temporary car
19. Without question
21. Alphabet starter
22. Mauna —
23. Sty cry
24. Mined-over matter
26. Undo, as a law
28. Theater worker
30. "Acid"
32. Hotel amenity
33. Actress Longoria
34. Wee dollop
36. Hotel amenity
38. "Butter"
39. Bakery lure
40. Newsstand
42. Egret's cousin
45. Banquet platform
46. Lion's pride?
48. "Butter"
49. Temple leader
50. K-pop band
51. Apr. addressee

**Answer to Previous Puzzle**

```
S T A G
S E W
P S A T
O H M Y
N E O
O N N O
M A I
M O N O T O N E
A N D R E W
F L A W E D
A R S
E T C
L U S T
H I S T O R I C
I N N
H O W N
T A K A
T O O D L E
O O
C E R
R E
W O E
H O E
H E D W I G
J I G G L Y
O G R E
R O O
E L I A
P O O L
U R B
N E C K
I S P S
B O S
T E E S
```

## 12-17 CRYPTOQUIP

**HOZHT GPXK HKEL ZVKNU Z**

**LNW MTK ZVHKYNUCYW YKACH**

**MZDO , XTCCHC - XKACDCG**

**UKDUPYYZH: “EZXTK OZE.”**

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN PLAYWRIGHT TOM PLUGS UP A BOTTLE TO SEAL IT, ONE MIGHT SAY IT'S STOPPERED BY STOPPARD. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: O equals M
A new year rings in a surge in housing prices

By Conor Sen
Bloomberg Opinion

There’s been a discouraging development for any renter buying a house earlier this year because of dwindling inventory and rising prices, thinking they’d wait until things cooled off. The housing market is surging again. But why is it upsizing during what should be the slowest time of the year? One answer is rising prices in the rental market.

Leases that are coming up for renewal now were signed at the end of 2020, before rents exploded higher. That’s renewing interest in home buying, essentially pushing the new-home market even further forward by several months. If there’s a silver lining for renters, it’s that the cycle might relieve some of the upward pressure on rents we’ve seen for most of the year.

From May until September, we had a lot of evidence that the housing market was normalizing somewhat after a pandemic-fueled year of buying. The price of lumber fell over 70% after setting an all-time high in early May. In July, mortgage applications hit their lowest level since the spring of 2020. In August, the National Association of Home Builders reported that activity was negative for the first time in a year. By the end of September, it was reasonable to think that the pandemic had pulled forward a lot of housing demand, but that high prices, supply chain constraints and a gradual return to pre-pandemic behavioral patterns were slowing bringing normality back to the housing market.

Now think about what’s happened in the rental market for renters looking pressure based on what we’ve seen since then. Mortgage purchase applications have picked up again; on a seasonally-adjusted basis, the end of November was the strongest we’ve seen since February. Home-buying sentiment bounced back sharply since the dip in August, and is back at levels seen in April and May. Seemingly out of nowhere, lumber prices are surging again, doubling since the middle of November. Homebuilder stock prices are setting all-time highs. And inventory levels of homes for sale are plunging again.

Now think about what’s happened in the rental market over the past 18 months. At the onset of the pandemic, vacancy rates rose and rents fell due to a combination of people buying houses and, perhaps, moving in with family during the height of uncertainty before vaccines were available. Around the beginning of this year, apartment vacancy rates rose to their highest levels ever in August, as families flocked back to cities, with their incomes and balance sheets boosted by multiple rounds of fiscal stimulus and witharing COVID-19 cases. Renters with the best timing signed their one-year leases toward the end of 2020 when rents were at their lowest point, locking in low rates for the next 12 months. But as those leases come up for renewal, some tenants are getting shocked by rent increases as much as 50% higher. It’s no wonder some renters are looking to try to buy a house than pay that much more in rent.

This should shift our thinking about the interplay between the home-buying and rental markets. A way to increase housing production in a significant way — this might just be the new normal if housing producers want to keep rents from rising much more.

Conor Sen is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist and the founder of Peachtree Creek Investments. He’s been a contributor to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and the Atlanta Business Chronicle. This column does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.
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New England Patriots vs. Buffalo Bills

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Miami Dolphins vs. Las Vegas Raiders

Indianapolis Colts vs. Tennessee Titans

Minnesota Vikings vs. Green Bay Packers

New Orleans Saints vs. Tampa Bay Buccaneers

New York Jets vs. Houston Texans

Philadelphia Eagles vs. Washington Commanders

Pittsburgh Steelers vs. Carolina Panthers

San Francisco 49ers vs. Los Angeles Chargers

Seattle Seahawks vs. Arizona Cardinals

New England Patriots: 39, Buffalo Bills: 17

Arizona Cardinals: 28, New York Giants: 21

Denver Broncos: 12, Los Angeles Rams: 9

Miami Dolphins: 26, Las Vegas Raiders: 17

Indianapolis Colts: 31, Tennessee Titans: 19

Minnesota Vikings: 29, Green Bay Packers: 29

New Orleans Saints: 21, Tampa Bay Buccaneers: 16

New York Jets: 28, Houston Texans: 0

Philadelphia Eagles: 24, Washington Commanders: 7

Pittsburgh Steelers: 28, Carolina Panthers: 24

San Francisco 49ers: 23, Los Angeles Chargers: 20

Seattle Seahawks: 30, Arizona Cardinals: 4

Thursday, Dec. 9

DEALS

Wednesday's transactions

OFFENSIVE LINES

Denver Broncos—Activated C Austin Deuwalt from the COVID-19 list.

Green Bay Packers—Placed DT Tyrone Crawford on the COVID-19 list.

Los Angeles Rams—Placed OT Andrew Whitworth on the COVID-19 list.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers—Placed G Alex Bass on the COVID-19 list.

WILLIAMSBURG: 7 AM - 10 PM

TAMPA BAY BUCANEERS — Placed LB Devin White (knee) on injured reserve.

WASHINGTON COMMANDERS -Sent RB Jordan Stewart to the practice squad.

LOS ANGELES DODGERS - Re-signed P Sam Hentges from the 60-day IL.

NEW YORK JETS - Placed LB Avery Williamson (ankle) on injured reserve.

Denver Broncos - Placed DT Albert Hines (chest) on the COVID-19 list.

Green Bay Packers - Placed WR Allen Lazard (ankle) on injured reserve.

Los Angeles Rams - Placed LB motorcycce (ankle) on injured reserve.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers - Placed LB Devin White (knee) on injured reserve.

WASHINGTON COMMANDERS - Sent RB Brian Johnson to the practice squad.

NY JETS - Placed LT Andrew Finney (ankle) on injured reserve.

San Francisco 49ers - Placed LB Dre Green (abdomen) on the COVID-19 list.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers - Placed LB Devin White (knee) on injured reserve.

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Source: NHL reinstating enhanced virus protocols

By John Wawrow

With the number of coronavirus cases and game postponements climbing, the NHL is reinstating enhanced virus protocols that include daily testing and restrictions in a bid to limit a growing outbreak among players and staff.

The enhanced protocols will be put into effect immediately and last through at least Jan. 7, a person with direct knowledge of discussions between the NHL and NHL Players’ Association told The Associated Press on Wednesday on the condition of anonymity because the talks were private.

The person said the NHL had little choice but to increase its protocols to ensure a full, 82-game season while still taking an extended Olympic break in February.

“The virus is changing and we have to react accordingly,” the person said.

The move came within hours of an ominous step: Ontario health officials unveiled rules that will reduce capacity at the home arenas of the Toronto Maple Leafs and the NBA’s Toronto Senators plus the Ottawa Senators to 50% starting Saturday.

The NHLPA scheduled a conference call with each of its 32 team representatives to go over the enhanced rules, with road teams being blocked from the hotel — not expected to be popular among players.

Daily testing will also return for players and coaches as part of the decision, which was reached after two days of meetings amid worsening conditions across the league, leaving the number of March players to ensure a full, 82-game season while still taking an extended Olympic break in February.

“Return to game play is being delayed at least through Saturday” following discussions among medical experts. Calgary’s training facilities were closed to players until further notice.

Four teams — the Flames, Carolina, Ottawa and the New York Islanders — have had outbreaks force game postponements, a total of 10 in all. But alongside that is a growing number of affected players, who under typical COVID-19 guidelines would be tested at least every 72 hours if vaccinated.

The person told AP the omicron variant is responsible for the uptick in cases, and is expected to become the dominant strain if the outbreak continues.

More than 140 NHL players have been on the protocol list this season — including more than two dozen in the last two days — in a league that has proudly noted all but one of its approximately 700 players are considered fully vaccinated even if booster shots are not mandated.

Blackhawks oust Ovechkin, Capitals in OT

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Caleb Jones scored his first goal of the season and overtime winner, as the Chicago Blackhawks beat Alex Ovechkin and the Washington Capitals 3-1 on Wednesday night.

Washington tied it on Conor Sheary’s sixth of the season 1:21 into overtime, and the Blackhawks knocked home a rebound to give Chicago a wild victory.

Ovechkin scored his 274th career power-play goal in the second period, marking his fifth season he has scored 34 goals. After Lars Eller tied it for the Capitals in the third, Alex DeBrincat beat Ilya Samsonov for his second power-play goal with 5 minutes left.

MacKenzie Entwistle and Philipp Kurashev also scored for the Blackhawks, who had dropped two straight and three of four. Chris Kreider had three assists — matching a career high — after entering the game with four all season.

Kakko had an extending power-play goal in the first period, which was called off after a pass from Kreider after Zibanejad scored with help from Kreider’s screen at 14:14 of the third period to tie it 2-2.

Ducks, Kraken 1: Troy Terry got his 18th goal and Derek Grant scored short-handed as host Anaheim beat Seattle for its fourth victory in five games.

Trevor Zegras and Sam Carrick also scored for the Pacific Division-leading Ducks, who spoiled the expansion Kraken’s first appearance in Southern California with a one-sided win. Anthony Stolarz made 19 saves for Anaheim, which has scored 11 goals on Seattle in two meetings this season.

Ryan Donato scored a power-play goal in the Kraken’s fourth loss in five games.

NHL ROUNDUP

UCLA has to call off game late

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — UCLA’s game against No. 15 Ohio State was called off Wednesday night because of COVID-19 protocols.

The decision was announced an hour before the fourth-ranked Bruins were set to take the court. Seven players from both teams were on the court when they were informed.

Earlier in the day, UCLA said coach Mick Cronin would miss the game because of COVID-19 protocols.

He was set to be replaced by associate head coach Darren Savino.

Fans streaming toward Pauley Pavilion were taken by surprise as word of mouth spread.

The arena had yet to be opened to the public.

The Associated Press

Cronin told AP the suspension was made in consultation with UCLA, the Pac-12 and the state of California health departments.

Los Angeles area since last game because of COVID-19 coach Mick Cronin would miss game late.

Wednesday night was called off game against Alabama State on Cronin an hour before the fourth-ment.

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Action: Jones has Patriots in playoff chase

FROM PAGE 24

15.

And he has outplayed all the others.

A 25-year-old who won a national championship at Alabama, Jones leads all rookies with 270 completions for 2,869 yards and 16 touchdowns, making him the overwhelming favorite to win the NFL's offensive rookie of the year award. He is third among all quarterbacks with 70.3 percent passes completed and 10th in completions.

With two away games left, Jones has already tied the NFL record held by Dak Prescott and Ben Roethlisberger for most wins by a rookie quarterback, with six. Most importantly, the Patriots have the No. 1 seed in the AFC af- ter beating division rival Buffalo two weeks ago Monday night.

"It comes down to winning games," Jones said. "When you do that, it's a lot more fun."

Jones attempted only three pass- es in a gutty and gusty 14-10 win over Buffalo, and if there is any- thing he has lacked so far it's the ability to throw long. He was 24th over Buffalo, and if there is any-

Meyer's tumultuous tenure ended after just 13 games — and two victories — when the Jackson- ville Jaguars fired him early Thursday because of an accumu- lation of miscues.

Owner Shad Khan made the move hours after former Jaguars player Josh Lambo told a Florida newspaper Meyer kicked him during practice in August. It was the latest black eye — adding to an already lengthy list of embarrass- ments — for the three-time national- championship-winning college coach who failed miserably to make the transition to the NFL.

"After deliberation over many weeks and a thorough analysis of the entirety of Urban's tenure with our team, I am bitterly disap- pointed to arrive at the conclusion that an immediate change is im- perative for everyone," Khan said in a statement. "I informed Urban of the change this evening. As I stated in October, regaining our trust and respect was essential. Regrettably, it did not happen." Meyer joins former Atlanta Fal- cons coach Bobby Petrino as col- lege coaches whose NFL careers flamed out in memorably swift fashion. Petrino resigned in De- cember 2007 to take over at Arkan- sas. He was 3-10 at the time. Meyer went 2-11 in his partial season, and the Jaguars really started to unravel in the offensive side of the ball following the team's bye week. They averaged a measly 9.1 points in Meyer's final seven games, which ended with a five-game skid.

Offensive coordinator Darrell Bevell will serve as Jacksonville's interim head coach for the final four games, beginning Sunday against Houston (2-11). Lambo's claim seemingly proved too much for Khan, who two days earlier said he didn't want to make an impulsive deci- sion on the coach's future.

"What's different about this thing is you have losses and you have drama," Khan said then. The Jags had way more drama than victories.

Lambo's allega- tion on the backs of an NFL Network report which said Meyer created tension with multiple run-ins with players as well as assistants he allegedly called "losers."

Source: League making changes to virus protocols

Associated Press

IRVING, Texas — The NFL is planning “sig- nificant changes” to its COVID-19 protocols amid the worst three-day stretch for the league during the pandemic, a person familiar with the plans told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The person, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because details haven’t been final- ized, said the league and the NFL Players Asso- ciation are discussing three main areas: testing protocols; return to play guidelines to allow asymptomatic players who’ve tested positive to return sooner; and encouraging booster shots. On Monday, the league informed coaches, front-office staff and other team personnel to receive a COVID-19 booster by Dec. 27. Play- ers weren’t included in the mandate because the league hasn’t mandated the vaccine.

The new coronavirus variant has been found among the dramatic increase in COVID-19 cases in the NFL in what the league’s chief medical officer is calling a new phase of the pandemic. Dr. Allen Sills said NFL owners were told in meetings Wednesday that booster shots are the focus of efforts to minimize spread, with Sills saying the omicron variant is expected to be- come the dominant strain in the U.S. The league said the number of positive cases Monday and Tuesday ended up at 88, but with players coming and going on the list, about 100 is more accurate. Still, Commissioner Roger Goodell said there were no plans to cancel or postpone Clevel- land’s home against the Las Vegas Raiders on Saturday. The Browns have 18 players, in- cluding half their 22 starters, on the COVID-19 reserve list.

“Listen, we’ve raised this the last two years: It’s a challenge,” Goodell said. “It’s clear even in the last couple of weeks that the changes are pretty significant and different than they were before, and I think it calls to modifications to our protocols in general, and we’re working with the players association on that.”

In other news, league owners approved Las Vegas as the site of the Super Bowl to cap the 2023 season, a first for the gambling mecca in the Nevada desert. The NFL's biggest event will follow the Pro Bowl this season and the NFL draft next year, all within five years of the Raiders' move to Las Vegas.

"It’s a big day for the Raiders," club owner Mark Davis said. "It’s a big day for the city of Las Vegas. I think it’s a marriage made in heav- en, I’ll say. Some others may use a different word."

The league is expanding the Rooney Rule re- quirement of at least two interviews with ex- ternal minority candidates to general manag- er-level jobs along with the coordinators for of- fense, defense and special teams. The two-candidate rule already applies to openings for head coaches. The window for virtual interviews will now open after Week 16 for clubs that have either fired their coach or informed him that he won’t return. While the longer access for interviews isn’t limited to minority coaches, the NFL hopes it will allow more minority candidates to inter- view rather than wait for their current team’s playoff run to end.
No. 1 prospect surprises in a prime-time move

Receiver switches his commitment from FSU to Sanders’ Jackson State

By RALPH D. RUSSO
Associated Press

The No. 1 high school football recruit in the country pulled a signing day shocker Wednesday, deciding to attend Jackson State and play for coach Deion Sanders after being verbally committed to Florida State for months.

Travis Hunter, a cornerback from Suwanee, Ga., made the unprecedented announcement during a ceremony at Collins Hill High School. Hunter was the top prospect in the country in 247 Sports’ composite rankings, which take into account its own ratings plus those of other major recruiting websites.

Sanders is a former Florida State star and Pro Football Hall of Famer who is in his second year coaching Jackson State, a historically black college in Jackson, Miss.

At his signing ceremony, Hunter had three baseball caps on the table in front of him as he prepared to make his announcement: Florida State, Auburn and Georgia.

He tossed them off the stage one-by-one and unzipped his sweatshirt to reveal a T-shirt that read Believe. He then caught a Jackson State cap — with a dark blue J on a white background — that was tossed to him from the crowd and put that on.

“I got a one-in-lifetime chance to play for one of the greats,” Hunter said of the upcoming move to the Big Ten.

Jackson State competes at a level several rungs below those conferences in the second tier of NCAA Division I football, the Championship Subdivision. Schools like Jackson State rarely ever sign three-star players. Hunter is one of several dozen five-star prospects in the 2022 recruiting class.

A longtime member of the Southwestern Athletic Conference, Jackson State won its first SWAC title since 2007/last month.

“We’re going to shock the country,” Sanders said Tuesday, the eve of the opening of the early signing period, on Barstool Sports’ “Unnecessary Roughness” podcast.

By ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

Through all the changes to the college sports landscape with money-making opportunities for athletes and open transfers, one thing remains the same.

A bunch of Southeastern Conference schools along with venerable programs like Ohio State and Texas are at or near the top of the national recruiting rankings.

The three-day December signing period opened Wednesday, with Texas A&M finishing the day with the lead according to the 247Sports Composite rankings.

Aggies coach Jimbo Fisher put together his fourth straight top-10 class. Alabama, which won nine of the previous 11 recruiting titles, was No. 2. Georgia was No. 3, marking the fifth straight year the Bulldogs have been in the top five.

The team rankings could change with the next letter-of-intent period beginning Feb. 2.

Coaches said the recruiting process now has players taking into consideration where they could make the most money through endorsement work. The NCAA in July began allowing athletes to monetize use of their name, image and likeness. Some schools are better positioned than others in this new frontier and millions of dollars are swirling around the biggest programs.

“NIL has been going on for a long time. It just hasn’t been above board,” Fisher said.

The rapid increase in number of players entering the transfer portal and moving to another school with immediate eligibility has also changed the way coaches build their recruiting classes.

Instead of trying to sign a high school player and develop him, a coach might instead pursue experienced players in the portal. And players interested in transferring also might be looking at NIL potential.

All things considered, signing day isn’t what it used to be, Mississippi coach Lane Kiffin said.

“That’s basically your draft class,” he said, “but then you’re going to have your free-agent class. I don’t think people really say it this way, but let’s not make a mistake. I mean, we have free agency in college football. The kids a lot of times go to where they’re going to get paid the most.

“No one else is saying that maybe, but the kid says, ‘This is what I’m getting here for NIL.’ It is what it is,” Kiffin added. “Free agency has been created in college football — except you can’t lock people into a contract. They can go anywhere. It’s a new world that we’re in.”

Top of the heap

Texas A&M signed 12 players ranked in the top 100 nationally. Two of its three five-star prospects are defensive linemen: Walter No- kenn of Powell, Tenn., and Gabriel Brownlow-Dindy of Lakeland, Fla.

The other is quarterback Conner Weigman of Cypress, Texas. The Aggies have 17 four-stars.

Alabama brought in three five-star players and 16 four-stars, with edge rusher Jeremiah Alexander of Alabaster, Ala., the highest rated of the 21 signed by coach Nick Saban. Five-star Ty Simpson of Martin, Tenn., joins a deep quarterback room led by Heisman Trophy winner Bryce Young.

Georgia signed 21 players, including four five-stars and 12 four-stars. Coach Kirby Smart downplayed the importance of those rankings.

“I care a whole lot more about how they play,” he said. “We’ve seen evidence of the guys who have played a big role on our team. Some of those guys were not the guys we talked about on this day during their career.”

Completing the 247Sports Composite rankings were Ohio State, Texas, Penn State, Notre Dame, North Carolina, Michigan and Oklahoma.

Bearcats bounty

Cincinnati’s run to the College Football Playoff isn’t all that helped Luke Fickell sign what’s shaping up to be the Bearcats’ highest-ranked class at No. 38. Other factors, he said, are the coming move to the Big 12 and the development of QB Desmond Ridder and CB Ahmad Gardner into NFL Draft prospects.

Two four-stars, DE Mario Eugenio (Tampa, Fla.) and DB Jonquis “JQ” Hardaway (Phenix City, Ala.), head a class of 20.

“Were there some doors that could possibly open and some hurdles taken down? No doubt,” Fickell said of the upcoming move from the American Athletic Conference to the Big 12.

Kelly keeps 5-star QB

Five-star QB Walker Howard (Lafayette, La.) made good on his pledge and signed with LSU and new coach Brian Kelly.

Howard was expected to follow through on his verbal commitment after appearing in a promotional video with Kelly on social media that led some to poke fun at the coach’s dancing.
Full lineup a good reason to watch every bowl game

By RALPH D. RUSSO

To be frank, last year’s bowl season felt a little sad. A bunch of bowls were canceled by the pandemic even before the matchups were set. More had to be called off on relatively short notice. Teams decided to pass on playing in a bowl altogether after rocky seasons. Fans were grateful for the 25 bowls they got, but it just wasn’t the same.

The full bowl lineup is back this season. There will be 43 games, 42 involving FBS teams, before the College Football Playoff championship game Jan. 10 in Indianapolis. And there is a reason to watch every single one, even before we get to the main attractions that begin on New Year’s Eve.

Note: Not every game will be live on AFN networks.

Army quarterback Christian Anderson reacting to scoring a touchdown against Navy on Dec. 11. The Black Knights’ triple option goes up against Missouri’s SEC-worst run defense in the Armed Forces Bowl on Dec. 22.

By ADAM HUMBER/CIT

Army quarterback Christian Anderson reacting to scoring a touchdown against Navy on Dec. 11. The Black Knights’ triple option goes up against Missouri's SEC-worst run defense in the Armed Forces Bowl on Dec. 22.
Graham's 61-footer at buzzer lifts Pelicans

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Devonte’ Graham’s 60-foot heave at the buzzer lifted the New Orleans Pelicans to a 113-110 win Wednesday over the Oklahoma City Thunder.

Oklahoma City’s Shai Gilgeous-Alexander hit an off-balance 30-footer to tie the score with 2.3 seconds remaining. New Orleans inbounded to Graham, who launched the ball from near the three-point arc on the other end of the floor.

“I just wanted to get one up, honestly,” Graham said. “I didn’t want to take the ball out. I waited. Then J-Hart (Josh Hart) passed it to me and I just let it fly.”

Brandon Ingram scored 34 points and Jonas Valanciunas added 19 points and 16 rebounds for the Pelicans. Graham finished with 15 points and eight assists. Gilgeous-Alexander led the Thunder with 33 points.

Lakers 107, Mavs 104 (OT): Rookie Austin Reaves hit a three-pointer at the buzzer in overtime to give Los Angeles a win at Dallas. Reaves’ basket, his fifth from behind the arc, was the only Lakers basket in overtime scored by someone other than the team’s Big Three.

LeBron James scored 24 points, Russell Westbrook added 23 and Anthony Davis had 20 points and 12 rebounds after missing two games with a sore left knee.

Jalen Brunson scored 25 points, and Kristaps Porzingis had 23 points and 12 rebounds for the Mavericks. They played their third straight game without guard Luka Doncic.

Heat 101, 76ers 96: Gabe Vincent hit a key three-pointer in the fourth quarter and scored 26 points, Duncan Robinson had 21 points and short-handed Miami built a 23-point lead and held on to win at Philadelphia.

Jazz 124, Clippers 103: Donovan Mitchell scored 19 of his 27 points in the second half, Bojan Bogdanovic made six three-pointers and host Utah beat Los Angeles for its eighth straight victory.

Mobile apps with constantly updating news, featuring breaking news and stories from reporters at overseas bases. Unique galleries of images available nowhere else presented in an uncluttered interface and a responsive, intuitive design. One iOS app serves both phone and tablet devices.

Grizzlies 113, Trail Blazers 103: Desmond Bane scored 23 points and Memphis won at Portland for its fourth victory in a row.

Kings 119, Wizards 105: De’Aaron Fox scored 28 points and short-handed Sacramento beat visiting Washington.

Hornets 131, Spurs 115: Gordon Hayward scored a season-high 41 points and Charlotte never trailed in its victory at San Antonio.

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Stars and Stripes

Unbiased News Whatever Way You Want It.
League adapting to more virus-related disruptions

By Pat Graham
Associated Press

DENVER — There was no game in Chicago on Tuesday, no trip for the Bulls to Toronto for another on Thursday.

Just like that, the coronavirus has disrupted the day-to-day operations of the NBA.

The Bulls are shut down for what will be at least a few days with 10 players in health and safety protocols. But the impact is not limited to Chicago.

In Canada on Wednesday, the country’s largest province, Ontario — home to the NBA’s Toronto Raptors — set a cap of 50% of capacity for large gatherings such as professional sports events.

The NBA also has several stars in COVID-19 protocols right now, including the Milwaukee Bucks’ Giannis Antetokounmpo and the Brooklyn Nets’ James Harden. As of Wednesday afternoon, 33 players — about 6.5% of the league — were in the protocols, with 17 of those playing for either Chicago or Brooklyn.

The Nets were missing seven players for their home game Tuesday against Toronto because of the protocols; Antetokounmpo didn’t play Wednesday, also because of the protocols; and the Los Angeles Lakers canceled practice Tuesday with Dwight Howard and Malik Monk in the protocols.

In recent days, Indiana coach Rick Carlisle has missed games, and Raptors President Masai Ujiri tested positive after hosting an event that NBA Commissioner Adam Silver and Deputy Commissioner Mark Tatum attended, which forced them to undergo daily testing since. It’s not just players and executives, either, but officials and broadcast teams, too.

This all underscores what NBA officials have been saying for weeks: The pandemic is still very much a problem and that’s why Friday is Booster Day, when the league’s most important percentage won’t be of the three-point variety.

The NBA says 97% of players are vaccinated and just over 60% have received booster shots. Under the latest league guidelines will be implemented.

Lately, there have been plenty of stark reminders this pandemic is far from over and won’t be going away anytime soon.

The Pacers and Warriors had only two officials for Monday night’s game, with the third in health and safety protocols. The Raptors announced their broadcast team will self-isolate out of precaution after contact with someone who tested positive.

Harden was among the seven Nets who couldn’t play Tuesday night. Brooklyn only had enough players to avoid the game being postponed because Kevin Durant was upgraded from questionable.

Pacers assistant coach Lloyd Pierce succinctly summed up the current state of the pandemic while filling in for Carlisle last Friday when he said it is “always joyful when you just get to the court. ... With the state of COVID, there’s always something going on.”

The NHL already postponed some games this season and on Monday, with the announcement that two Bulls games were off, the NBA joined hockey in the postponed club. The league always anticipated that postponements were possible again this season. About 30 games were moved around last season but all eventually got played.

One provision of the new league booster guidelines states that a team staffer who doesn’t have their booster shot by Friday — with limited exceptions — will no longer have the ability to have in-person access with players, coaches and referees. Plus, the staffer will be banned from joining the club’s road trips.

As for the players who haven’t received their booster, they will be subject to game-day testing again, and the league will reserve the right to impose additional testing on their respective teams as needed going forward.

Ujiri announced he was among those who tested positive for the virus after he recently went to his charity event. In a statement from the team, Ujiri said: “We don’t want to live in fear of this virus, but COVID-19 is a persistent enemy. Together, we’ll defeat it.”

The Bulls’ list of players out: Zach LaVine, Troy Brown Jr., DeMar DeRozan, Matt Thomas, Coby White, Javonte Green, Derrick Jones Jr., Ayo Dosunmu, Stanley Johnson and now Alize Johnson.

Players in the health and safety protocols must be sidelined at least 10 days or record two negative COVID-19 tests in a 24-hour period before they can resume basketball activities.

“I guess it’s part of the world we live in right now,” Bulls center Nikola Vucevic recently said. “This whole situation with COVID, a lot of it doesn’t make much sense right now. Obviously, the scientists and everybody around the world don’t have the answers, so I definitely don’t.”

AP basketball writer Tim Reynolds and AP sports writer Andrew Seligman contributed to this report.
Mac in action
Rookie QB Jones’ emergence ending talk of extended rebuild in New England

BY JIMMY GOLEN
Associated Press

It’s not exactly the 199th overall pick, but drafting Mac Jones in the middle of the first round is turning out to be quite a steal for New England.

The heir to Tom Brady in the Patriots (9-4) huddle has emerged as the top quarterback from his draft class — and so far the best rookie overall — despite being the No. 15 pick and the fifth QB selected in the NFL Draft last spring.

Jones’ accelerated development has ended talk of an extended rebuilding period without Brady, returning the Patriots to the top of the AFC and sending them into their off week on a seven-game winning streak.

“The last part of the season is the most important part. Nothing that you did before that matters,” Jones said last week as he prepared for his first free weekend as a pro. “The bye week’s important just as a self-evaluation for what you can do as a player, as an offense, and obviously taking coaching and figuring out ways to improve. That’s all you can ask for.”

Brady was the greatest pick in NFL history when he was selected in the sixth round — No. 199 overall — of the 2000 draft. With him as quarterback for two decades, the Patriots won six Super Bowls and reached the title game three other times.

Coach Bill Belichick has been working on a succession plan at least since 2014, when he drafted Jimmy Garoppolo; since then, Jacoby Brissett, Danny Etling and Jarrett Stidham had all been brought in for a try.

But when Brady signed with the Buccaneers as a free agent in 2020, things became more urgent. The Patriots signed 2015 MVP Cam Newton to run the offense, but that failure — a 7-9 record that left them out of the playoff for the first time since Brady was injured in 2008 — forced Belichick to do something he’d never done before: draft a quarterback in the first round.

While the rest of the league jockeyed for a chance to pick Trevor Lawrence, Zach Wilson or Trey Lance, who went Nos. 1-2-3, or even 11th overall pick Justin Fields, the Patriots stood pat and grabbed Jones at No. 15.

SEE ACTION ON PAGE 19