SEALs described Gallagher’s actions as ‘psychopathic’ in statements to investigators

By Andrew Dyer
The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — Navy SEALs who were not called to testify in the war crimes trial of Chief Petty Officer Eddie Gallagher told naval criminal investigators about behavior they witnessed, including the alleged stabbing of an Islamic State fighter that led to murder charges against Gallagher.

The two SEALs were granted immunity to testify in the trial this past summer, but were never called to the stand.

Their interviews with criminal investigators were made available for streaming Friday on Hulu, on “The Weekly” from The New York Times. It will be broadcast on FX on Sunday.

The Naval Criminal Investigative Service conducted the SEAL interviews more than a year before the San Diego court-martial of Gallagher, who was charged and acquitted of war crimes including murder.

One of those SEALs — Petty Officer 2nd Class Ivan Villanueva — told investigators he witnessed the alleged stabbing of a wounded ISIS fighter.

“I saw it happen,” Villanueva says during his interview.

The Navy has never explained why Villanueva was not called to testify at Gallagher’s court-martial and did not respond to inquiries Thursday.

The case created a national firestorm as President Donald Trump intervened again and again on Gallagher’s behalf — and culminated this week with a visit by Gallagher and his wife, Andrea, with Trump and first lady Melania Trump at the president’s Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

See Seals on Page 3
Sheriff blasts Amazon for not helping with probe

Associated Press

DAVENPORT, Fla. — A sheriff’s office in Florida said it caught an Amazon driver stealing a customer’s package but got no help from the company during its investigation.

The Polk County Sheriff’s Office said Thursday in a statement that it had arrested Jose Campos, 27, after detectives tracked down the vehicle he was using from home, according to the statement. Detectives had initially contacted Amazon at its logistics center in person, but they were told they needed a subpoena before the company would help them, according to the sheriff’s office.

The loss prevention manager told detectives Amazon would not cooperate with law enforcement and identify their driver unless the sheriff’s office served a subpoena for their records at their corporate headquarters in Delaware, according to the statement.

“We work regularly and closely with law enforcement across the country and are working to understand what occurred here, to make it right and to reach out to Polk County Sheriff’s Office to apologize,” said Sheriff Grady Judd.

In a statement, Amazon said, “I’m not surprised by much anymore, but this lack of cooperation from Amazon floors me,” said Sheriff Grady Judd. “This is just irresponsible on their part.”

“We blast Amazon for not helping with probe” is from the Sports section of Stars and Stripes, dated Sunday, December 29, 2019.
″Troops honored for ‘everyday badassery’″

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

MOSUL, Iraq — Some soldiers deployed to northern Iraq got more than stocking stuffers this week when senior leaders visited and recognized their contributions to the coalition battling Islamic State.

Col. Matthew W. Brown, commander of the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, visited in Nineveh province holiday parties on Wednesday and Thursday and presented them with awards, handed out coins and gathered feedback.

The brigade has been in Iraq and Syria since August, supporting U.S. special operations units and advising, assisting and enabling Iraqi and Syrian partner forces—counter-ISIS missions.

Brown and his enlisted soldier, Command Sgt. Maj. Matthew E. Ladd, presented achievement or commendation medals to more than a dozen soldiers at Qayara Airfield West, an airbase near Mosul known as Q-West that was retaken from ISIS in 2016, and the Nineveh Operations Command, a small camp on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, inside Iraq’s second-largest city.

Several others received coins for what one official called “everyday badassery.”

“As I walked around and we talked to every single soldier that was recognized here … there were some common themes,” Brown told a formation in Mosul.

“This individual was right out in the thick of things and extending what we do, this individual was taking care of our people. This individual was allowing us to operate.”

The medals, which count toward promotion points, are an important way to recognize soldiers who go beyond what is expected of them, said Maj. Adam Kirschling, executive officer of the 1st Battalion, 25th Infantry Regiment, a part of the brigade deployed mainly to Q-West.

Staff Sgts. Bobby Burbank and Robert Carlson of 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, in Mosul received Army Commendation Medals for helping a team of Marine Raiders secure a Syrian oil field, and assisting a Green Beret and linguist to maintain good relations between U.S. forces and several Iraqi villages.

Lt. Col. Travis Tilman, commander of the 70th Brigade Engineer Battalion within the brigade, used the trip to visit some of the far-flung members of his battalion, such as Lt. Eric Christiansen, who said he has been an “overall badass.”

A former art teacher who became an Army medic before commissioning, Christiansen spent his first three months in Iraq leading operations to clear improvised explosive devices from roads and surveying bridges in need of repair in the area surrounding al-Asad Air Base in western Anbar province.

Some of the roads spanned dozens of culverts, the 32-year-old said, and each one had to be checked.

“It just takes one,” he said of the IED threat.

The brigade command team also gathered the troops for a series of closed-door “sensing sessions,” where some soldiers asked about more opportunities for patrols or to train Iraqi forces, who they think need more help.

U.S. officials have curbed some off-base operations in the country due to increased threats from Iran-backed Shiite militias, who in the past have targeted U.S. troops with IEDs and rockets, an official said.

Ladd assured the soldiers in Mosul that though they may not hear it enough their efforts matter.

“What you’re doing up here is allowing them (the Iraqis) to get after fighting ISIS,” he said.

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SEALS: Witnesses accuse Gallagher of ‘medal chasing’ during deployment

FROM FRONT PAGE

Trump and other supporters say “warfighters” don’t need their actions questioned by bureaucrats in the military.

While the accounts of the witnesses aren’t new—the San Diego Union-Tribune published a summary of their stories on the eve of trial—hearing those accounts from the witnesses themselves is the episode, titled “The Gallaghers Effect,” presents these SEALs’ stories in their own words and voices, framing their actions as courageously going against the traditional brotherhood of the Navy SEALs.

In separate interviews, the SEALs tell NCIS agents that Gallagher behaved like a “pay-chop” during their 2017 deployment to Mosul, Iraq, where the SEALs took on Islamic State.

One by one, his men tell NCIS that their platoon served as Gallagher’s “personal sniper escort” and that the chief was “medal chasing.”

They also describe his actions during the deployment as war crimes.

“I saw Eddie take a shot at probably a 12-year-old kid,” one says.

Three SEALs tell investigators they saw Gallagher stab a wounded Islamic State fighter in the neck.

The interviews led to the murder charges against Gallagher in 2019—charges the SEAL denied. He was found not guilty in July of murder, the wounded fighter and shooting civilians.

Gallagher says his men make up the accusations because they were unhappy with his leadership style.

In a written statement sent via his attorney, Gallagher said: “My first reaction to seeing the videos was injured in an airstrike. Part of the medical treatment involved a breathing tube into the man to treat what witnesses said was “blast lung.”

Scott told NCIS in his interview that he saw Gallagher stab the fighter multiple times and that he remained with the man until he died. At trial, however, Scott told a different version of his story—one in which he says he killed the fighter after Gallagher stabbed him just once.

In court, Scott said that after Gallagher stabbed the fighter, Scott suffocated him by covering his breathing tube.

Audio of Scott’s court-martial testimony — and his startling admission — is included in “The Weekly.”

Parlatore said he knew Scott wasn’t telling the whole story during a preliminary interview when Scott told him the fighter had suffocated.

“He’s lawyer shut me down (during that interview),” Parlatore said. “He wouldn’t let me ask (more questions) until they worked out the immunity issue.”

Also included in the videos are statements by Villanueva and another witness, Petty Officer 1st Class Joe Arrington. Both were granted immunity to testify but prosecutors never called them to the stand.

According to Navy investigation records, Arrington said he saw Gallagher shoot civilians. Villanueva told investigators he saw Gallagher stab the wounded Islamic State fighter.

Arrington, Villanueva and Scott all share the same attorney, Brian Ferguson. After Scott’s testimony, prosecutors appeared to change course in the trial and did not call Villanueva or Arrington to the stand.

A Navy prosecutor at the time declined to answer a question about why Villanueva — who told investigators he saw the stabbing — was never called to testify. Ferguson declined to comment.

The case gained renewed importance in November, when Trump intervened and granted Gallagher clemency, restoring his rank to chief petty officer and undoing a rank reduction ordered by a military jury.

Although the jury acquitted Gallagher of the most serious charges against him, it found him guilty of posing for a photo with the corpse of the fighter he was accused of killing.

After Trump restored Gallagher’s rank, the Navy moved to strip Gallagher of his SEAL Trident and boot him from the elite community. The president pushed back in Gallagher’s favor and, before all was said and done, Navy Secretary Richard Spencer lost his job over his handling of the case.

Gallagher retired from the Navy in November.
KULAO, Iraq — In caves tucked into craggy cliffs and tunnels dug deep beneath the desert, the remnants of a vanquished army are converging for what they hope will be the next chapter in their battle for an Islamic State.

Hundreds and perhaps thousands of ISIS fighters have made their way over recent months into a stretch of sparsely populated territory spanning the disputed border between the Kurdistan region and the rest of Iraq, according to U.S. and Kurdish officials.

Off-limits to Kurdish and Iraqi security forces because of historic disparities over who should control it, this area of twisting river valleys dense with vegetation has attracted the biggest known concentration of ISIS fighters since they lost control of the last village of their once-vast caliphate in eastern Iraq in March.

In recent weeks, they have been stepping up their attacks, focused on an area of northeastern Iraq in the province of Diyala near the border with Iran, carrying out ambushes by night and firing mortars. Grasses taller than men provide cover for snipers who sneak up on checkpoints and outposts. Government neglect and long-standing grievances foster a measure of sympathy among local residents.

“They have good military plans, they attack when you don’t expect them, and theyposing a real threat to people’s lives,” said Maj. Aram Darwani, the commander of Kurdish peshmerga military forces in the area.

Across many parts of the vast territory it once controlled, ISIS is scrambling to reassert its presence in a setting that is no longer as welcoming as it once was. Militant fighters who escaped from the battlefield are assembling in ungoverned spaces such as the no man’s land between areas controlled by Kurdish and Iraqi forces. Others are laying low as so-called sleeping cells in cities such as Raqqa in Syria, waiting for the phone call ordering them to attack.

Recent visits to ISIS’ former capital of Raqqa and the viciously contested frontline town of Kulajo revealed the challenges the militants face as well as the reemergence of local residents.

So far, this is less a resurgence than a struggle to survive in the wake of the massive defeat inflicted on the last vestige of their territorial caliphate, according to U.S. military officials.

ISIS remains a long way from possessing the capacity to retake territory, said Brig. Gen. William Seely, who commands U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq. “These are people who are hiding out. They only come out at night to harass people who are hiding out. They attack when you don’t expect them.”

Over the past two years, tens of thousands of ISIS fighters have been killed, their leadership has been decimated and their proclaimed “ caliph,” Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is dead, blown up after he detonated a suicide belt during a U.S. raid on his hideout in October. As many as 30,000 suspected ISIS fighters are in prison in Iraq and Syria and tens of thousands of their wives and children are detained in dismal camps, according to Kurdish, Iraqi and U.N. officials.

The group has struggled to reassert itself in its former city strongholds such as Raqqa and Mosul, Iraq, where ISIS attacks have become rare. Memories of its brutal rule and the horrors of the airstrikes used to dislodge the militants deter any desire to see them return, according to Raisha al-Aqeedi, the editor of Irfaa Sawtak, an Islamic State accuses of part of an Islamic State sleeper cell are detained in a prison in Tabqa, Syria.

Left: Men accused of being part of an Islamic State sleeper cell are detained in a prison in Tabqa, Syria. Right: Along the 150-mile length of the no man’s land that separates the Iraqi army and the Kurdish peshmerga, militants are living off the land.

A man in Kulajo wanders between a peshmerga position and the no man’s land that separates them from Iraqi security forces. The number of Islamic State fighters in the area is estimated to be about 300.

For now, fewer people are being killed in ISIS attacks than in the anti-government protests in Iraq and the battles unleashed by Turkey’s invasion of northeastern Syria in October.

But these group’s residual presence, analysts and military officials say. ISIS owed its conquest of territory to the collapse of state authority over a big part of Syria and the implosion of the Iraqi army in Iraq. Any further deterioration of security in Iraq or Syria would create a new opportunity for ISIS fighters hiding out or laying low.

The militants have not gone away and could yet rise again, cautioned Maj. Gen. Eric Hill, who commands U.S. Special Forces in Iraq and Syria.

They are making every effort to do so.
Over the eight months that Muawiyah Abdul Khader Akraa operated as part of a secret ISIS cell in Raqqa, he said he participated in 17 attacks. He doesn't know how many people he killed because, he said, he didn't linger to find out whether his victims died.

“I did it to avenge our brothers in the battles,” he said, displaying no remorse during an interview at the prison in the town of Tabqa, where he has been detained by Kurdish security forces since his arrest in August.

Akraa is the former head of the cell, whom he knew as “the doctor.” In April, Baraa disappeared, and Akraa assumed the role of the cell's emir. Then “the doctor” vanished, and was followed by two others.

“We haven't arrested any of the emirs,” said Sharwan, referring to the leaders “so we cannot confirm that Raqa is safe.”

Then Kurdish forces infiltrated the cell, and one day in August, Akraa confirmed by text message that he was unable to find a job and had no money “and because my ideology is jihad.”

The third man said he was recruited after they sought the help of an ISIS smuggler to free a relative in Naim Square to attract security forces, which were then targeted in a larger suicide bombing. At least 10 people were killed.

“I couldn’t lib out of the blue telling me what he did,” the man from the cell said he had no choice to follow the group's orders. “They knew where I lived,” he said.

Then one day in August, Akraa participated in the biggest attack of the year in Raqa, setting off a small bomb in Naim Square to attract security forces, which were then targeted in a larger suicide bombing. At least 10 people were killed.

The two other prisoners interviewed said they had been returned to the cell, and one of them had been sent after sneaking away from ISIS last battle. Ibrahim Hassan Al-Haji said he received a Telegram message out of the blue telling him to report to an emir in a Raqa park, whom informed him he was being activated to be part of a secret cell and offered him a salary of $80 a month. He said he complied because he had been unable to find a job and had no money “and because my ideology is jihad.”

The cell had been infiltrated by Kurdish fighters in March, and one of its emirs had been killed in May, according to rumors inside the city.

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Pentagon cloud dispute focuses on certification

By Aaron Gregg
The Washington Post

An obscure Defense Department IT certification has become the latest flash point in a long-running fight over which West Coast tech company is best suited to safeguard America’s secrets.

A lackluster Defense Department review and a high-profile cloud deal have collided in a way that promises to shed light on the Pentagon's tech modernization initiatives.

The Department of Defense has been working to shift its IT infrastructure to the cloud for years, but the process has been complicated by a series of missteps and misfires. The latest development could be a significant setback.

The Pentagon has awarded a $10 billion contract to Microsoft to provide cloud services for the Defense Department, but the deal has been complicated by a dispute over a certification that Microsoft needs to store classified data.

The certification is known as Impact Level 6, and it is one of the most stringent security measures in the U.S. government. The Pentagon requires the certification to ensure that the company is able to store and process classified data, which is critical for the defense of the nation.

Microsoft has been working on the certification for months, but it has been delayed due to concerns about the company's ability to meet the requirements. The dispute has been exacerbated by a public feud between the Pentagon and Amazon, which was the runner-up in the competition.

The certification has become a political payload in a broader debate about the role of technology companies in the defense establishment. The Pentagon's decision to give Microsoft the contract has been criticized by some as a favor to a company that is seen as too cozy with the government.

Amazon has publicly praised the Pentagon's decision to award the contract to Microsoft, but it has also expressed concerns about the certification. The company has been working to gain the certification for years, but it has been repeatedly delayed.

The certification is critical for companies that want to do business with the government, and it is a key factor in the competition for the Pentagon's massive IT contract. The contract is estimated to be worth $10 billion over the next 10 years.

The Pentagon's decision to give Microsoft the contract has been seen as a victory for the company, but it has also been criticized as a favor to a company that is seen as too cozy with the government.
California jails use kinder approach to curb solitary confinement figures

By Don Thompson
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — An inmate in solitary confinement at a California jail was refusing to leave his cell. The jailers’ usual response: Send an “extraction team” of corrections officers to burst into the cell and drag him out.

But not in Contra Costa County, one of three in the state using a kinder, gentler approach in response to inmate lawsuits, a policy change that experts say could be a national model for reducing the use of isolation cells.

So the inmate was asked: “What if we gave you a couple extra cookies and another sandwich? Would you move?” recalled Don Specter, the nonprofit Prison Law Office director who negotiated the new policies. “He said yes. ... They were like, ‘Wow.’”

More than a quarter of U.S. states and numerous smaller jurisdictions are looking for ways to reduce the use of solitary confinement, according to the Vera Institute of Justice, which encourages alternatives to a practice behavioral experts say is dehumanizing and can worsen mental illness.

The new policies in California came after Specter’s firm sued seven of California’s 58 counties, alleging that conditions had grown inhumane as jails absorbed inmates who previously would have served their sentences in state prisons. The state in 2011 began sending less serious offenders to local jails for years at a time to ease crowding in state penitentiaries.

Some jurisdictions nationwide are banning isolation for young offenders, pregnant women or those with mental health diagnoses. The California counties’ approach of generally limiting it to those who engage in continued violent behavior has dramatically reduced the number of inmates in isolation and the length of time they stay there.

Contra Costa started 2019 with about 100 people in solitary, most for more than a year. It had just three in isolation cells by December after officials began using the new approach.

Sacramento County also is following the policy pioneered by Santa Clara County, while Fresno County is considering it. Among other things, it encourages the use of low-cost incentives to reward good behavior, like the opportunity to listen to the radio, watch a movie or get an extra snack.

Sacramento County has cut its isolated population roughly in half, to about 60 inmates, said Lt. Alex McCamy: “It’s a limited time frame and a limited group, but the initial impression is positive.”

Rick Raemisch, who restricted the use of solitary confinement when he headed Colorado’s prison system, said the violent, tense, dirty conditions in Santa Clara County’s jail improved markedly with the new policy.

“The think of yourself being in a cell the size of a parking space for 23 hours a day,” said Raemisch, who consulted with county officials. “At a minimum, you’re going to get angry, and when you get angry you’re going to fight back.”

The California counties’ new policy of restricting its use to continued violent behavior could be seen as a national pilot program, Sullivan said.

New Jersey’s Middlesex County Adult Correction Center has lowered the number of isolated inmates and the time they spend there, she said, but with a different approach that lets inmates out of their cells more frequently.

The Hampden County Correctional Center in Massachusetts increased its use of alternative sanctions and positive reinforcement. And Cook County, Ill., no longer keeps troublesome inmates in isolation, removing them to regularly spend time with a half-dozen other inmates.

“‘There’s been a decades-long effort to reform solitary, especially in prisons. But what we haven’t seen is a paired reform effort for jails,’” said Amy Fertig, director of the American Civil Liberty Union’s Stop Solitary campaign. “In Santa Clara what we’re seeing is an attempt to reform the whole process.”

Police release 14-year-old suspect in Barnard College student’s killing

By Michael R. Sisak
Associated Press

NEW YORK — A 14-year-old boy suspected of fatally stabbing a Barnard College freshman was released from police custody on Thursday, mere hours after New York City police said he had been located following a two-week manhunt.

Chief of Detectives Rodney Harrison tweeted that finding the suspect “was a significant development in the investigative process,” but that the youth had since been released to the custody of his lawyers. Harrison didn’t say why the boy was released.

A police spokesman declined to provide details, saying “the investigation remains active and ongoing.”

A spokesman for Neighborhood Defender Service confirmed that the organization is providing the boy with legal representation but declined to comment further.

The 14-year-old is one of three youths police believe were involved in the stabbing of Tessa Majors, 18, as she walked through Manhattan’s Morningside Park on Dec. 11.

Police tracked him down after taking the unusual step last Friday of releasing photographs of him but not his name or any other identifying information.

Harrison announced in a tweet Thursday morning that the boy had been found, but a police spokesperson declined to answer questions about where and how he was located.

Of the two other suspects, only one has been charged.

A 13-year-old boy arrested Dec. 13 and charged as a juvenile with felony murder told detectives he was at the park with the other youths but wasn’t the one who stabbed Majors, police said.

Another juvenile suspect was questioned for several hours, also on Dec. 13, but police let him go, Harrison said. He has declined to say why that boy wasn’t charged.

Courts weighing revenge porn vs free speech

By Deanna Paul
The Washington Post

When Bethany Austin learned that her fiancé had been unfaithful in late May 2016, she ended the seven-year relationship and called off their upcoming wedding.

He told the couple’s friends that Austin was “crazy.” To set the record straight, Austin sent their families a four-page letter that contained text messages between her ex and his mistress and nude photos of the woman.

Austin was promptly charged with a felony for violating Illinois’ revenge porn law, known as “nonconsensual dissemination of private sexual images.” In return, she argued that the law was an unconstitutional restriction of her freedom of speech.

Legislation criminalizing nonconsensual pornography has gained traction in much of the country. Forty-six states and Washington, D.C., have passed revenge porn laws over the past decade, and appeals courts across the country are beginning to take up cases involving the constitutionality of “revenge porn” statutes on First Amendment grounds.

The U.S. Supreme Court has yet to hear a case on the issue, but Austin’s could be the first.

The Constitution protects freedom of speech, even when it is “offensive or disagreeable.” But where exceptions exist, the First Amendment does not protect certain speech, such as threats, obscenity, incitement of violence and public disclosure of private information.

When the government imposes a content-based restriction on a specific statement or image, it must satisfy the strictest, and often insurmountable, level of legal scrutiny. The restriction must serve a “compelling government interest” and must be as minimal as possible.

Many revenge porn laws have survived these legal challenges. Appeals courts in Wisconsin and Texas have rejected First Amendment challenges and ruled that sexually explicit images deserve as much privacy as other forms of sensitive information, such as medical records and financial data.

But in Illinois, a 2016 law requiring revenge porn images to have an identifiable victim and the victim to have had a reasonable expectation that the photos would remain private.

The legislation was challenged, and the case is pending in the state’s highest criminal court.

Two years after Austin’s arrest, the Illinois trial court dismissed the charge, but the Illinois Supreme Court, in a 5-to-2 decision handed down in October, reversed its decision and ruled that distributing private sexual images was not constitutionally protected free speech. The state’s revenge porn law, it said, was aimed not at prohibiting certain speech, but at protecting privacy.

In strong contrast to the Illinois decision, a Minnesota court of appeals in early February that the state’s law against revenge porn was unconstitutional and violated First Amendment rights. The court found that distributing private sexual images is not speech, and the state may punish this behavior, the court said, is when the perpetrator intended to harm his or her victim.

Mary Anne Franks, president of the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative who drafted a model that has served as a template in most states, there are many variations of these statutes.

Some laws have different words; others have varying penalties. The most significant difference in the statutes is that some states limit revenge porn to situations in which the perpetrator acts with the intent to harm or harass his or her target.
Officials get new kind of election training

By Christina A. Cassidy
Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Va. — Inside a hotel ballroom near the nation’s capital, a U.S. Army officer with battlefield experience told 120 state and local election officials that they may have more in common with military strategists than they might think.

These government officials are on the front lines of a different kind of battlefield — one in which they are helping to defend American democracy by ensuring free and fair elections.

“Everyone in this room is part of a bigger effort, and it’s only together that we are going to get through this,” the officer said.

That officer and other past and present national security leaders had a message to convey to officials from 24 states gathered for a recent training held by a Harvard-affiliated democracy project. They are the linchpins in efforts to defend U.S. elections from an attack by Russia, China or other foreign threats, and developing a military mindset will help them protect the integrity of the vote.

They need for such training reflects how elections security worries have heightened in the aftermath of the 2016 election, when Russian military agents targeted voting systems across the country as part of a multipronged effort to influence the presidential election. Until then, the job of local election officials could have been described as akin to the job of local election officials to adopt a model of how museums did their public relations. “We changed the model,” said Eric Rosenbach, co-director of the Belfer Center and a former U.S. Army intelligence officer who served as chief of staff to Defense Secretary Ash Carter in the Obama administration, told the group gathered for the training that it “shouldn’t be lost on you that this is a very military-like model.”

Instructors stressed the need for election officials to be on the lookout for efforts to disrupt the vote and ensure that communications are flowing up from counties to the state, down from states to the counties, as well as up and down to the federal government and across states.

“One of the big takeaways was just how the lack of one piece of information moving up from the counties to the state, or moving from the states to counties, if either of those things don’t happen, it can have a significant impact,” said Stephen Trout, elections director for Oregon.

Trout said he would move quickly to acquire, customize and implement the incident tracking system, which would be an upgrade from the paper process currently in use. Dave Tackett, chief information officer for the West Virginia Secretary of State’s Office, said he would recommend some structuring changes at his state operations center, including bringing key personnel into the room and incorporating elements of the incident tracking system like mapping and the ability to assign people to specific incidents.

“Events like today are helping us zero in on how to structure ourselves better, how to really think in a different mindset so that we can carry out all the different tasks that have to be done with elections,” said Karen Bronson Bell, executive director of the North Carolina Board of Elections. “(It’s) the importance of communications, the importance of having standard operating procedures in place so all the items are done when you have time of time and you are prepared for the unknown.”

Newseum closes after 11 years of free press promotion

By Ashraf Khalil
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In 2008, the Newseum — a private museum dedicated to exploring modern history as told through the eyes of journalists — opened on prime Washington real estate. Siting almost equidistant between the White House and the Capitol on Pennsylvania Avenue, the glass-walled building became instantly recognizable for its multi-story exterior rendition of the First Amendment.

Eleven years later that experiment is coming to an end. After years of financial difficulties, the Newseum will close its doors Tuesday.

“We’re proud of how we did our storytelling,” said Sonya Gavankar, the outgoing director of public relations. “We changed the model of how museums did their work.

The building was sold for $372.5 million to Johns Hopkins University, which intends to consolidate its scattered Washington-based graduate studies programs under one roof.

Gavankar attributes the failure to a variety of factors but acknowledged that the Newseum’s status as a for-pay private institution was a harder sell in a city full of free museums. A Newseum ticket costs $25 for adults, and the admission is free for children 12 and younger. A two-year Smithsonian membership costs $75.

Another problem, organizers said, is that the Newseum struggled to attract local residents, instead drawing a crowd of tourists and local school groups. Actual Washington-area residents, who do frequent the Smithsonian and elsewhere, mostly came on school trips and rarely returned as adults.

Claire Myers fits that profile. The D.C. resident recalls coming to the Newseum in high school in a senior-year class trip. She only returned in late December for a final visit because she heard it was closing at the end of the year.

“I do think part of the reason was because it’s a paid museum,” she said. “Why go out of my way to do this when I could just go to any other free museum?”

The $25 price tag, Myers said, creates a pressure to set aside the whole day and take in every exhibit, whereas at one of the free Smithsonian museums, she knows she can come back another time to catch whatever she missed. But Myers said she was deeply impressed by the exhibits, particularly the Newseum’s signature gallery of Pulitzer Prize-winning photographs.

The museum’s focus evolved over the years, showcasing not just journalism and historic events, but all manner of free speech and civil rights issues and some whimsical quirks along the edges. Exhibits during the Newseum’s final days included an exploration of the cultural and political influence of Jon Stewart and “The Daily Show,” a look at the history of the struggle for LGBTQ rights and a display depicting the history of presidential dogs.

Gavankar said the Freedom Forum, which originally maintained the Newseum in northern Virginia for years, would continue its mission in different forms. The educational foundation maintains a pair of exhibits on the Berlin Wall in both Reagan and Dulles airports. Next year, those displays will be joined by an exhibit on the women’s suffrage movement. The current Rise Up! exhibit on LGBTQ rights will move to a new long-term home in the Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle.

Mandy Vigil, of New Mexico, works during an exercise run by national security officials on Monday in Springfield, Va., for state and local election officials to simulate scenarios for the 2020 elections.
Storm drops rain, snow on Southern California

BY STEFANIE DAZIO AND JOHN ANTczak

LOS ANGELES — A cold and blustery winter storm unleashed downpours and extensive snowfall on Southern California, triggering a tornado and snarling post-Christmas travel on major routes Thursday.

Snow shut down vital Interstate 15 through the mountains north of Los Angeles and stopped traffic on Interstate 15 over Cajon Pass in the inland region to the east. I-15 finally reopened in both directions in the afternoon but then authorities later shut down about 45 miles of the freeway from Baker, Calif., to Primm, Nev., on the way to Las Vegas because of snow and ice.

A truck driver was found unresponsive in a rig stopped along I-5 in Tejon Pass. Kern County firefighters pronounced him dead, according to the California Highway Patrol’s online incident log. It was not immediately known if the death was weather-related.

After being stuck for five hours in Cajon Pass, motorist Johnny Lim wasn’t sure he could reach Las Vegas, where he hoped to spend time after Christmas. He worried about driving his car through the pass when it reopens.

“The freeway is full of snow and ice,” he said, adding that his car “is not built for conditions like this.”

I-5 rises to more than 4,100 feet in Tejon Pass between Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley. Cajon Pass rises to more than 3,700 feet between the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains, the major connector between Southern California and Las Vegas.

Snow also stopped or slowed traffic on other California roads, including heavily traveled Interstate 8 in eastern San Diego County, and numerous trees were toppled. 

In San Diego County, a 60-year-old woman died Thursday when a car veered off a snowy road near Warner Springs and crashed into an embankment. The woman passenger wasn’t wearing a seatbelt and the driver was too fast to control the car. California Highway Patrol Officer Jeff Christy told KSWB-TV.

On Wednesday night, a small tornado briefly hopped across Ventura Harbor, the National Weather Service reported. Gusts downed five trees, according to the Ventura County Star. Winds up to 65 to 85 mph also caused minor damage to nearby buildings, forecasters said.

Localized flooding inundated roads and freeway lanes while snow fell to low elevations, leading to numerous traffic accidents.

The town of Wrightwood at the eastern end of the San Gabriel Mountains had received 25 inches of snow by midday.

Famed Palomar Observatory in the San Diego County mountains said it would be closed at least through the weekend because of heavy snowfall.

Mexico releases woman who took gifts to migrants

HOUSTON — A Texas woman who drove to Mexico to deliver Christmas gifts to a sprawling refugee camp housing people waiting for U.S. court dates said Wednesday she was detained by authorities there for two days.

Ananichelle Castellano said she and another volunteer for her nonprofit group were stopped Monday at a bridge crossing from Brownsville, Texas, to Matamoros, Mexico. She said authorities discovered a small box of ammunition inside the car she was driving, which she said was left inside by her husband.

Mexico has strict laws against entering the country with guns or ammunition. Those laws occasionally ensnare Americans crossing the border.

Castellano said she spent Monday night sleeping on a couch with her 9-year-old daughter in a government office. She was told that she may have to return to see a judge in Reynosa, the border town to the south.

She was told conflicting information during the two days about whether she could leave or if she would be imprisoned. She identified officers from at least three different agencies who asked her questions.

Ultimately, she was told that she and the other volunteer could leave if they paid $8,000. The fee was eventually lowered to about $4,000, and her husband paid $3,000.

She was told that she may have to return to see a judge in Reynosa, which she said she would do as soon as a court date was issued.

Boy gets new hands for Christmas

CLARKSVILLE, Tenn. — A Tennessee boy born without functioning hands asked Santa for a new pair last year, and his mom, Kori Sumner, posted a plea for help on Facebook that was ultimately answered by Anthony Economos with Bedstone Creative. The local IT company that specializes in 3D printing and prototypes for businesses decided to fund the entire project. Economos helped fit the hands to Gavin on Monday.

Gavin Sumner opens his new hands after they were fit by Anthony Economos at the Montgomery County Historic Courthouse in Clarksville, Tenn., on Monday.

Gavin’s new hands feature five independent controls to create gripping power. They are among the volunteers trying to help thousands of parents and children waiting in Mexican border towns to seek asylum in American immigration courts.

President Donald Trump’s administration has prevented many asylum seekers from entering the country or removed them from the U.S. while their cases are still pending under a policy known as “Remain in Mexico.”

“The faith is very strong,” said her father, Genaro Lopez, on Wednesday. “God didn't blink. He had a plan.”

Castellano said she and a group of volunteers had worked late into the night to wrap presents for children at the Matamoros camp, which consists of hundreds of tents pitched on the land next to the Rio Grande, the river separating the U.S. and Mexico in Texas.

She said she had car trouble early Monday and ended up driving her husband’s car. Her husband eventually took hers. They split about 300 gifts between the two.

While her husband drove into Matamoros without incident, an official told Castellano her vehicle would require extra screening. When she was told officers would need to return to see a judge in Reynosa, she consented to allow them to examine the vehicle.

That scan uncovered a small box of ammunition, which she described as about the size of the palm of a hand. Castellano said she didn’t know about the box until the scan and had not intended to take it into Mexico.

She was told conflicting information during the two days about whether she could leave or if she would be imprisoned. She identified officers from at least three different agencies who asked her questions.

Ultimately, she was told that she and the other volunteer could leave if they paid $8,000. The fee was eventually lowered to about $4,000, and her husband paid $3,000.

She was told that she may have to return to see a judge in Reynosa, which she said she would do as soon as a court date was issued.
Japan to send troops to Mideast

Plan designed to ensure safety of ships transporting oil in area

BY MARI YAMAGUCHI
Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan on Friday approved a contentious plan to send its naval troops to the Middle East, a move meant to ensure the safety of Japanese ships transporting oil to the energy-poor country that heavily depends on imports from the region.

The Cabinet’s decision reflects tensions that have escalated between Iran and the U.S. since President Donald Trump withdrew from Iran’s 2015 nuclear deal.

"Taking into consideration the escalating tension in the Middle East, it is necessary to strengthen our guard against the risk," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a news conference.

Citing Japan’s heavy dependence on oil imports from the region, Suga added that “it is extremely important for the safe navigation of Japan-affiliated ships.”

Despite being a U.S. ally, Japan’s troop dispatch is not part of a U.S.-led coalition protecting Middle East waterways, apparently an attempt to maintain neutrality in a show of consideration to Iran.

Under the plan, Japan will send about 260 Maritime Self-Defense Force personnel with a destroyer escort and a reconnaissance aircraft, mainly for intelligence-gathering in the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

Netanyahu secures victory in primary

BY JOSEPH KRAUSS
Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday won a Likud party primary that could set elections, with his handily defeating a veteran statesman with close personal ties to President Donald Trump with a large proportion of votes.

The Supreme Court is meaning after takeoff from Almaty, Kazakhstan, killing 12 people, including at least 12 children, officials said. There were 54 people on the plane, which turned violent after last week’s Friday prayers. Mobile internet was blocked in about a week's Friday prayers.

Futuristic post-World War II constitution limits the use of force by the military strictly to self-defense. Abed, however, has gradually expanded Japan’s military role in recent years.

In June, Japan’s U.S.-led coalition was attacked in the Gulf of Oman. Washington said Iran was responsible and urged Japan to join the U.S.-led military initiative.

Airliner crashes on takeoff near Kazakhstan’s capital

Associated Press

ALMATY, Kazakhstan — A plane with 98 people aboard crashed shortly after takeoff early Friday in Kazakhstan, killing at least 12 people, Kazakh officials said. There were 54 people hospitalized with injuries, at least 10 of them in critical condition.

The cause of the crash in the Central Asian nation was unclear, but authorities were looking at whether pre-existing technical failures were factors, Kazakhstani Prime Minister Roman Sklyar said.

The Bek Air aircraft hit a concrete fence and a two-story building after takeoff from Almaty, Kazakhstan’s largest city and former capital.

Sklyar said the plane’s tail hit the runway twice during takeoff, indicating that it struggled to take off.

One survivor said that the plane started shaking less than two minutes after takeoff.

“At first the left wing jolted really hard, then the right. The plane continued to gain altitude, shaking quite severely, and then we went down,” Aslan Nazaraliev, one of the passengers who survived, told a local news agency.

Government officials said the plane underwent deicing before the flight, but Nazaraliev recalled that the wings of the plane were covered in ice, and passengers who used emergency exits over the wings were slipping and falling down.

From Associated Press

Indian protests prompt internet shut down

NEW DELHI — Paramilitary police and forces were deployed and the internet shut down Friday before large, major demonstrations by Muslims in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, where more than a dozen people have been killed and more than 1,000 people arrested in protests that have erupted nationwide against a new citizenship law that excludes Muslims.

Security drones buzzed over western Uttar Pradesh as authorities sought to head off protests, which turned violent after last week’s Friday prayers. Mobile internet was blocked in about a third of the state, including in parts of the capital, Lucknow, where one person was killed in a protest.

Twenty-three people have been killed nationwide since the citizenship law was passed in Parliament earlier this month in protests that represent the first major roadblock for Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Hindu nationalist government, which has carried out a Hindu nationalism reeducation earlier this year. India’s Supreme Court is set to continue arguments challenging the law’s constitutionality late next month.
10 BEST FILMS
Associated Press movie critic Jake Coyle picks 2019’s top flicks

1. ‘Portrait of a Lady on Fire’
In a year defined by mammoth masterworks, nothing took my breath away like Celine Sciamma’s exquisite, soul-shattering romance. A female painter (Noemie Merlant) in 18th century France is sent to paint, on the sly, the portrait of a spirited noble woman (Adele Haenel) before her arranged marriage. The movie assembles itself as a series of stolen glances, as art and love mingle for a blissful but tragically unsustainable moment. The parting shot, a kind of portrait itself, is a devastation I won’t soon recover from.

2. ‘Rolling Thunder Revue’
& ‘The Irishman’
A simply astonishing double feature from Martin Scorsese, one consumed with life, the other with death. Scorsese spoke urgently and eloquently about how movies should be more than they often are: a corporate-made product with little of the humanity that makes films worth debating, worth loving. But as well and as passionately as Scorsese argued for cinema, nothing made his case better than these two remarkable, colossal films.

3. ‘Honeyland’
Directors Tamara Kotevska and Ljubomir Stefanov were initially commissioned just to make a video about nature conservation in Macedonia, about one of Europe’s last wild-beekeepers. Instead, they spent three years and collected more than 400 hours of footage with Hatidze, a heroically indefatigable middle-aged woman who lives in an abandoned rural village in North Macedonia where she ekes out a meager living for herself and her bedridden mother by sustainably harvesting honey. The film-makers whittled their footage down to a 85-minute fable of startling intimacy (the candle-lit scenes of Hatidze and her mother are among the most stirring you’ll ever see) that reverberates with larger ecological allegory.

4. ‘Parasite’
There’s not a misplaced moment in Bong Joon Ho’s social satire, a so perfectly and intricately engineered genre contraption that it’s downright frightening.

5. ‘Marriage Story’
Noah Baumbach, too, is working at the very top of his game, telling a delicately, even profoundly constructed tale of divorce — a subject not so easy to be clear-eyed about — with a miraculous steadiness and compassion. For a horror story — and with lawyers breathing fire and brimstone to go with it — it’s remarkably funny, tender and true. A deeply humane masterpiece.

6. ‘Pain and Glory’
A master filmmaker looks back, rewarding us with one of his richest and most luminous films. Pedro Almodovar’s warm spirit vibrates throughout this time-skipping drama of self-reflection. Almodovar has never felt so close at hand, and the film’s final image is one of poetic summation.

7. ‘Little Women’
Greta Gerwig’s Louisa May Alcott adaptation is a feast of a movie. Every frame is alive. By remixing the book’s timelines and expanding Jo’s arc to encompass Alcott’s too, Gerwig hasn’t just made “Little Women” contemporary, she’s made it sing.

8. ‘Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood’
Quentin Tarantino has said he aims to retire after making 10 films; he’s disinterested in becoming an old filmmaker or doing anything to dull the vibrancy of his earlier films. He should rethink that. His radiant and poignant 1960s Hollywood fable suggests that Tarantino, when he slows down and soaks up the California sun, can be even better as he grows older.

9. ‘The Last Black Man in San Francisco’
An almost-too-beautiful fable of displacement and gentrification that ultimately wins you over with the sincerity of its anguish and the soulful performances of Jimmie Fails, Jonathan Majors and Rob Morgan.

10. ‘Atlantics’
Writer-director Mati Diop’s feature debut is preternaturally assured. It’s a ghost story, set in Senegal among grieving women after a boat of emigrating young men has disappeared into the sea. The film’s mythic power is heightened by Diop’s already fully-formed cinematic language.

Honorable mentions
As the gaming industry revs up for the next console cycle — set to begin late next year when Sony and Microsoft kick off the ninth console generation — economic tallies show the industry to be in good shape. According to an industry report published by Newzoo, consumers will spend more than $152 billion on games this year, an increase of more than 9% over last year.

Although this year didn’t see the emergence of any industry-shaking trends, there were plenty of games released in 2019 to cater to a wide variety of tastes, from all-ages titles such as “Luigi’s Mansion 3” to games such as “Sekiro: Shadows: Die Twice,” targeted at challenge-hungry players. In assembling this year’s Top 10 list, I leaned toward the titles that surprised me with their forward-thinking aesthetics, challenges to convention or sheer ability to dazzle.

‘Death Stranding’ (PlayStation 4)
The word “divisive” probably popped into the head of every reviewer who played “Death Stranding” before it launched. It was (and is) easy to wonder who will get behind a AAA game about a delivery man who plies his trade across an arduous landscape overrun with ghostly entities. If the idea of making deliveries back and forth sounds a bit grindy, well, it is. But “Death Stranding” rewards commitment. Here is a game with an aggressively imaginative storyline, memorable characters (O’Mama!), an innovative take on co-op and a raft of interesting gameplay systems. Don’t be surprised if, in the years to come, the merits of this game are debated vigorously.

‘Telling Lies’ (iOS, PC)
Pushing the boundaries of what video games can be, Sam Barlow’s latest live-action game turns players into voyeurs and asks them to comb through a trove of video messages related to an undercover law enforcement operation that went sideways. This unusually intimate game offers a snapshot of our era, where the boundaries between work and home life have grown increasingly tenuous and privacy is an illusion. (If you play this and read Edward Snowden’s biography, “Permanent Record,” you will be chilled.) Excellent performances by Alexandra Shipp, Logan Marshall-Green and Kerry Bishe show why awards for best acting in a video game deserve increasing visibility.

‘Disco Elysium’ (PC)
You’re a wreck, but what kind of wreck are you? That’s one of the things you’ll have to decide if you step into the shoes of the bloated, disheveled, amnesiac cop at the center of this peculiar RPG. In “Disco Elysium,” the demands of your body for comfort and stimulation are pronounced — literally. As you progress through the game, you’ll have an ongoing conversation with various aspects of your body, including various centers of cognition (e.g. logic, perception, empathy). As you plumb your character’s psychology and physiology, you’ll investigate a knotty murder mystery that thrusts you into a world of clashing political ideologies. “Disco Elysium” proves that you don’t need spells, swords or bullets to anchor a compelling 40+ hour RPG.

‘Neo Cab’ (Mac, PC, Nintendo Switch)
This socially-conscious visual novel imagines what the future of the gig economy might look like in a world where tech firms hold more sway over how we live and work. “Neo Cab” tells the story of Lina, a woman struggling to make ends meet as one of the last human cabdrivers in a city dominated by driverless cars. Though Lina has deep misgivings about the tech industry, she wears a Feelgrid bracelet, which monitors the fluctuations in her body and displays her emotional state to the world via different colors. Because certain conversational options are linked to Lina’s emotional state, “Neo Cab” encourages artful manipulation. This one’s for anyone revolted by the exploitative nature of hustle culture.

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There are a number of video games that revolve around space station disaster plotlines, but “Observation” brings something different to the table. Rather than casting players in the familiar role of a distressed astronaut, this sci-fi game with an analog look asks players to assume the responsibilities of a ship’s A.I. computer to help said astronaut. This setup undercuts the usual identification with an avatar, which is such an important component of so much video game design. Instead, it emphasizes difference — how dissimilar a player is to a machine. Moving through and outside the spaceship in the Connection Sphere, a small floating extension of the ship’s A.I., may remind movie buffs of those mesmerizing shots in films like “2001: A Space Odyssey” and “Gravity.”

When Microsoft purchased the rights to the “Gears of War” franchise from Epic Games in 2016, many wondered if the series, which popularized cover-based shooters, would stagnate. “Gears 5” should lay to rest those concerns for the time being. A well-paced campaign, which varies the tempo from firefight to firefight, coupled with some best-in-class visuals on the Xbox One X, make this a perfect treat for itchy trigger fingers.

Set during the time of the Black Death in a southern French province, “A Plague Tale: Innocence” tells the story of a brokenhearted girl who becomes drafted to set things right in another universe. Backed by an amazing soundtrack, this dreamy, stylish, bite-sized game is meant to be played over and over.

All too often, sci-fi games hew to overly familiar templates, making feelings of genuine wonder hard to come by. The space exploration game “Outer Wilds” eludes this fate by cultivating an aura of mystery. Embark on a mission to discover the fate of a vanished civilization whose remaining traces seem genuinely strange. “Outer Wilds” is very much a game of the Internet era. Some of its puzzles might seem too opaque if there weren’t guides a click away.

If you relish the cadence of a well-turned sentence and delight in the trappings of steampunk genre, then this text-heavy RPG about the ill-fated travels of space-faring adventures should be just the ticket. “Sunless Skies” projects a world where the British used locomotives to travel the stars and establish trading outposts. The game offers a wealth of fantastical tales that will take players to an artist colony built on a gigantic orchard and beyond. Expect the worst. You will be tricked. You will be cheated. You will be treated to abominable sights. You will die many times. No matter — “Sunless Skies” is hard to let go.

Over the past year, developers have crafted a host of games that push the boundaries of what we expect from video games. These are some of the best this year.

“Gears 5” (Xbox One, PC)

“Sayonara Wild Hearts” (iOS, Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4)

“Outer Wilds” (Mac, PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One)

“Sunless Skies” (Mac, PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One)

“A Plague Tale: Innocence” (PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One)

“Observation” (PC, PlayStation 4)

“Sayonara Wild Hearts” tells the story of a brokenhearted girl who becomes drafted to set things right in another universe. Backed by an amazing soundtrack, this dreamy, stylish, bite-sized game is meant to be played over and over.

“Gears 5” is the rare action game that you won’t tire of playing.

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Wheelchair-accessible vans were damaged

**CT** — Police in Connecticut are looking for a heartless vandal or vandals who damaged seven wheelchair-accessible vans a nonprofit uses to transport people with disabilities.

The vans had their catalytic converters removed last weekend while they were parked at Ability Beyond's Bethel office, making them undrivable, The News-Times of Danbury reported Tuesday.

The vans are used to transport the nonprofit’s clients to and from day and work programs, Ability Beyond’s Alisa Picerno said. The damage to the vans is estimated at around $10,000 and repairs will not be completed until the end of the month, she said.

**CO**

**COLORADO SPRINGS** — A 65-year-old Colorado man is in jail after witnesses said he robbed a bank in Colorado Springs, walked outside and threw money out of the bag and then said “Merry Christmas.”

The man walked to the coffee shop next door, “sat down and waited for the cops,” witness Dion Pascale told KRTV.

Bystanders picked up the money and gave it back to the bank teller, Pascale said.

**Catch snowflakes**

Raya Ramchand, 5, of McKinney, Texas, catches snowflakes on her tongue on a snowy Christmas Day in Vail, Colo., on Wednesday. The town is busting with holiday tourists, and activities continue through the New Year.

**Neighborhood plagued by 3 sewer main breaks**

**FL** — A South Florida neighborhood has been plagued with a toxic and smelly odor for almost two weeks due to three back-to-back sewer main breaks.

Seawage flowed for nine days in the Rio Vista neighborhood of Fort Lauderdale during the first break earlier this month. Two days after a repair, the 54-inch pipe ruptured in another spot blockading the street.

The South Florida Sun-Sentinel reported the break sent sewage into the Tarpon River, the Loxahatchee River and a neighborhood park. A third break occurred in the same sewer line the next day.

Crews were working around the clock to make repairs needed to funnel the toxic sludge back into the system, but the smell has infiltrated several homes.

**Teen shot and killed in argument over shoes**

**MO** — Authorities said a man has been shot and killed in an apparent fight over shoes in suburban Kansas City.

Grandview police said an officer responded Sunday night to a shooting call and found Jaylen Blackmon, 20, of Kansas City, dead on a sidewalk. Witnesses told police the shooting appeared to have stemmed from an altercation over a transaction for shoes.

Blackmon’s family described his death as “senseless” in a statement to KSHB-TV. The family said Blackmon and his girlfriend went to meet a teenage boy outside the house to buy some shoes. They said Blackmon realized the shoes might be fakes, but when he tried to get his money back the boy shot and killed him.

**Big Apple’s top ‘18 baby names:** Liam, Emma

**NY** — The most popular baby names in New York City last year were Liam and Emma, according to data released by city health officials Monday.

Of the babies born in New York City in 2018, 779 Liams and 501 Emmas, according to the city’s Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s birth certificate records.

The number of births in the city decreased from 117,013 in 2017 to 114,296 in 2018, according to the city’s data.

Liam has been the top name for boys since 2016, and Emma has been the top name for girls since 2017.

**Man accused in theft of school band instruments**

**LA** — A Louisiana man is accused of stealing two saxophones and a trombone from a high school in a New Orleans suburb.

Waylin Leon, 40, of Mandeville was arrested Monday on charges of burglary, theft, criminal damage to property and criminal trespassing, the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff’s Office said.

The theft was discovered Dec. 13, when administrators at a Mandeville-area high school found that the glass door to the band room had been shattered and the three instruments had been taken, said Capt. Scott Lee, a police spokesman.

**Diner offers free Christmas dinners**

**DE** — Two weekend events recently brought a group of Satanists and hundreds of Christian worshippers together in the middle of a Delaware town.

Hundreds of people attended a live nativity Saturday night in Georgetown, while a group of Satanists held a quiet vigil nearby, The News Journal reported.

The Satanist organizers said their vigil marked the winter solstice and celebrated religious diversity and equal rights during the holiday season. The group describes itself as a “non-theistic Delaware-based modern Satanic group.”

“Everybody has the right to celebrate whatever they celebrate,” Georgetown resident Katie Rohlfing said.

From wire reports

**Semitrailer plows into closed historic inn**

**FL** — A semitrailer plowed into a historic inn south of Orlando early Sunday, causing major damage but no apparent injuries.

Photos show that the truck ran through the wall of the Desert Inn and a portion of the building collapsed around it. The inn closed last year and the Florida Highway Patrol said no one was seriously hurt.

Lt. Kim Montes said Mareo Cawley, 50, of Chicago, was hauling orange juice when he didn’t realize he had left the road before he smashed into the building.

According to a 2013 article in the Orlando Sentinel, the Desert Inn dates to 1889 when it was a barroom and brothel for cowboys and lumberjacks.
Biden is winning the electorate primary

BY DOYLE McMANUS
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON

I
n their search for a presidential nomi
nee, Democrats have argued about all manner of things.

They’ve debated “Medicare for All” and a “Green New Deal.” They’ve weighed the possible damage to college tu
tion. They’ve clashed over campaign do
ations from millionaires.

But their most important dispute isn’t about policy. It’s about a more ex
clusive quality: electability. Who is most likely to defeat President Donald Trump in November?

Many Democrats’ opponents say that’s their top priority — not whether they agree with a candidate’s positions.

So far, no one looking at the 2020 Democratic primary has a clear winner: former Vice President Joe Biden.

Biden’s campaign hasn’t been inspiring or error-free — far from it. He’s chung to first place in national polls, with support from Our Cow. His Eisenhower’s victory was ip
he’s running behind other candidates in Iowa and New Hampshire, where the first votes will be cast. Nevertheless, when vot
ers are asked who they think is most electable against Trump, Biden wins. Even some voters who prefer other candidates say they will back Biden if he wins the nomination.

In a CNN Poll released last week, 40% of Democrats nationwide said they believe Biden is the best chance of winning a general election, well ahead of his rivals. Other surveys have shown similar results.

Polls like that help explain why Biden, who launched his campaign with a soaring promise to “save the soul of America,” shows up on a blunter, more practical message.

“We all have big plans progressive,” he said at the Democrats’ debate in Los Ange
les. “But with the best chance, the most likely chance, of defeating Donald Trump?”

He’s hoping to persuade voters desper
ate to win in 2020 to back him in the pri
mary, whether they like his moderate positions or not.

That pitch appears to have helped stabi
lize Biden’s campaign after a series of gaffes and uninspiring debate performances that sent voters shopping for alternatives.

First, Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., rose in Iowa only to have Democratics turn and withdraw from the race. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., also soared, only to lose momentum, and dropped out in February al
for government-run health insurance.

“Warren has fallen because Democrats, especially liberal Democrats, think she has an electability problem,” Stanford political scientists David Brady and Brett Parker reported last week.

They suggested that Warren’s proposal for a single, government-run health insur
ance plan cost her some support. Other surveys have found that many voters, in
cluding women, fear that female candi
dates are less electable than men.

Biden turned in his best debate perfor
mance of the year in Los Angeles — crisp, combatative and gaffe-free. For once, he sounded like Fighting Joe Biden, not Be
fuddled Joe Biden.

Asked about his earlier promise that Re
publicans wouldn’t win millions of votes, he was defeated.

“We have to agree that the Republicans and not want to cooperate, the way the way they’ve attacked me, my son and my family,” he said. “But the fact is, we have to be able to get things done.

“We have to be able to get things done and beat them, like we did in the 2018 election.”

The real-world test of electability starts with the Iowa caucuses on Feb. 3. Polls suggest a tight race among Biden, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, Warren and Pete Buttigiege, mayor of South Bend, Ind.

“I don’t think he will be so close in the way that the primaries, the nominee, predicts David Axelrod, the former strategist for Presi
dent Barack Obama. “The danger for him is if he drops to fourth or fifth.”

Biden may get help once the Senate starts Trump’s impeachment trial, probably in early March. He can point to House Democrats who’ve narrowed the field and removed senators in the race, including Warren and Sanders, for weeks.

They’ve pitched themselves for trying to muscle into Ukraine investigating Biden and his son, Hunter Biden, who took a lucrative position with a Ukrainian energy company. House Republicans argued that as vice president, Biden intervened inappropriately in Ukraine to protect his son. Democrats have largely ignored the allegation, which is not supported by evidence.

Biden argues that Trump’s attacks on him prove that he’s the candidate the president fears most. In other words: electability.

Electability is an odd burden for voters to assume. “I think 100% of Americans will be

I’m watching Trump’s campaign. I think that he will be held to the same standard.

None of this means Biden is on his way to the nomination. But if his campaign remains strong, the outcome becomes increasingly uncertain. He’s still an imperfect candidate.

But for the Democrats, there is a chance to be perfect, especially against Trump. Under this year’s rules, he just needs to appear electable.

Doyle McManus is a Washington columnist for the Los Angeles Times and director of the journalism program at Georgetown University.

Christmas 1944 saw immense, world-altering heroism

BY ARTHUR I. CYR
Special to Stars and Stripes

Christmas season this year falls on the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge, the l
seventh battle in the history of the United States. On Dec. 16, 1944, Nazi Germany launched an offensive aimed at breaking through the quiet, thinly defended Ardennes Forest in Belgium. Adolf Hitler and planners in Berlin, aware of the great threat of the Ardennes, planned to achieve total surprise; German forces rapidly gained ground.

For Europeans among the Allies, the at
ack was reminiscent of the stunning 1940 German drive that overran France and secured Nazi domination of the continent. Americans on D-D Day were astonished to see Supreme Allied Headquarters, fear was visible along with alarm.

The attack was an enormous risk for Germany but conceivably could have suc
ceeded. Had a major breakthrough oc
ced, the crucial port of Antwerp and nearby fuel and supply reserves could have been captured. The Western allies would have suffered a major setback. Ger
man hopes that their Allied unity were unrealistic, but the war could have ended with the Red Army in control of nearly all of Germany.

The tide of the battle did not clearly turn until Gen. George S. Patton’s Third Army broke through to the 101st Airborne Divi

d, surrounded by the Wehrmacht in the crossroads town of Bastogne, on the day after Christmas.

Brutal fighting continued through Janu
ary. Nazi hopes of breaking the Western Front, and the Anglo-American alliance, were defeated.

American soldiers, generally promised a “Christmas in Paris,” got the Red Ball Express, a gigantic truck con
vey system that supplied the front. During the enormous pressures generated by the Bulge, American soldiers had the opportunity to serve in combat units but had to sacrifi
ced earned military seniority.

Thousands volunteered on these terms, and were vital to Allied victory.

At the tactical level, Cpl. Henry F. War
ner near Dom Bogenbach, Belgium, knocked out two German tanks, and then his 57 mm. anti-tank gun jammed. He was firing a pistol at a third approaching tank when a German driver backed up and withdrew.

One of Warner’s shots had killed the commander, and the crew was unable to proceed. This was a deciding moment of German troops. American, British and other Al
lied soldiers were much more likely to im
prove. In contrast, American soldier-officers were hit. Warner, killed later in combat, received the Medal of Honor.

When the Nazi Reich surrendered, Eisenhower, who had won the war, had not yet been won. True victory would require Germany to embrace democracy and the rule of law.

Admirable and effective German Chan
cellor Angela Merkel was selected 2015 “Person of the Year” by Time magazine. The Allies have won the war, unchallenged. Honor Merkel. Also honor Ike, who always got the job done.

Arthur I. Cyr is Clausen Distinguished Professor at George Washington University and author of “A Time of the Cold War.”

Stars and Stripes (USPS 041790) is published week
days except Dec. 25 and Jan. 1. For 50 cents Monday through Thursday and $1.00 Friday for Stars and Stripes, Unit 45002, APO AP 96301-5002. Periodicals postage paid at Panama City, FL. Postmaster: Send address changes to Stars and Stripes, Bldg. 45002, APO AP 96301-5002. This publication is for military members of the military overseas. However, the contents of Stars and Stripes are unofficial, and are not be considered for official use or, endorsed by the U.S. government. As a DOD newspaper, Stars and Stripes may be distributed through military chann
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Basketball

National Basketball Association

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

WESTERN CONFERENCE

- San Antonio Spurs
- Denver Nuggets
- LA Clippers
- Phoenix Suns
- Portland Trail Blazers
- San Francisco Warriors

EASTERN CONFERENCE

- Atlanta Hawks
- Boston Celtics
- Charlotte Hornets
- Milwaukee Bucks
- Philadelphia 76ers
- Toronto Raptors

Pacific Division

- Portland Trail Blazers
- Sacramento Kings
- Seattle SuperSonics

Northwest Division

- Denver Nuggets
- Minnesota Timberwolves

Central Division

- Chicago Bulls
- Milwaukee Bucks
- Indiana Pacers

Midwest Division

- Detroit Pistons
- Cleveland Cavaliers
- Indiana Pacers

Southeast Division

- Charlotte Hornets
- Miami Heat
- Orlando Magic

Atlantic Division

- Boston Celtics
- Brooklyn Nets
- Toronto Raptors

NBA Results

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<th>Team A</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Team B</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miami Heat</td>
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<td>Boston Celtics</td>
<td>107</td>
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<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Lakers</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Phoenix Suns</td>
<td>113</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chicago Bulls</td>
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NBA Standings

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<th>Team</th>
<th>Wins</th>
<th>Losses</th>
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<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA Clippers</td>
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<td>27</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto Raptors</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NBA Schedule

- Thursday’s games
  - Boston Celtics vs. Miami Heat
  - Los Angeles Lakers vs. Phoenix Suns
  - Chicago Bulls vs. Indiana Pacers
  - Portland Trail Blazers vs. Minnesota Timberwolves

- Friday’s games
  - Denver Nuggets vs. Oklahoma City Thunder
  - Utah Jazz vs. San Antonio Spurs
  - Houston Rockets vs. Los Angeles Clippers
  - Chicago Bulls vs. Philadelphia 76ers

NBA All-Star Game

- The 2024 NBA All-Star Game will be held in Los Angeles, California.
- The All-Star Game will feature the best players from the Eastern Conference and the Western Conference.
- The game will take place on February 22, 2024.
Miami fires offensive coordinator Dan Enos
CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Miami fired offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Dan Enos on Friday, one day after the Hurricanes were shut out by Louisiana Tech in the Independence Bowl and finished with a 6-7 record.

Enos was with Miami for only one season, and to say it didn’t go to plan would be an understatement. The Hurricanes finished the year on a three-game losing streak, enduring wildly inconsistent quarterback play and ranked 129th — out of 130 teams — in third-down conversion percentage.

Only Akron, which finished the season winless, was worse than Miami in that department. Miami converted 27.2% of its third downs, Akron converted 26.4%.

The Hurricanes announced the decision with a one-sentence statement: “The University of Miami football program announced Friday that Dan Enos has been relieved of his duties as offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach.”

Quinn, Dimitroff to remain with Falcons
ATLANTA — The Atlanta Falcons are keeping coach Dan Quinn for another season despite a second straight losing record.

The team also announced Friday that general manager Thomas Dimitroff will remain in his current role.

Owner Arthur Blank made the decision two days before the Falcons (6-9) close the season with a game at Tampa Bay.

The Falcons will go through an organizational restructuring, restructuring team president and CEO Rich McKay to a bigger role in the football operation. In addition, former Tampa Bay coach Raheem Morris will take over from Quinn as defensive coordinator.

In other NFL news:
• Atlanta Falcons rookie cornerbacks Jordan Miller and Olamide Zaccheaus are suspended for four games without pay Thursday for violating the NFL’s policy on performance-enhancing substances.

Miller, a fifth-round draft pick out of Washington, will miss Sunday’s season finale at Tampa Bay and the first three games of 2020.

Canada tops US in world junior hockey opener
OSTRAVA, Czech Republic — Canada’s three-man lead with 31.1 left, just 7 seconds after Shane Pinto tied it for the U.S. Connor McMichael, Nolan Foote and Ty Deeney each scored for Canada, and Nico Daws made 28 saves. Lafreniere, the projected No. 1 pick in the June NHL Draft, added three assists.

Pinto scored twice, and Nick Robertson and Arthur Kaliyev added goals for the Americans. Spencer Knight made 26 saves.

— Associated Press

On the fringe

Major champions talk significant shots
Fans’ most memorable moments don’t always align with the pros

BY DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

Brooks Koepka and Shane Lowry have a clear memory of one shot from the final round of the majors they won that not many would remember, and for good reason.

“Tiger Woods was two holes away from becoming a Masters champion again, and all he could think about was chip-in on the 16th 14 years ago. The most memorable shot for Gary Woodland at Pebble Beach? One of them won him the U.S. Open. The other is what fans will remember more.

The four major champions shared what they consider the most memorable shot from their victory and the one that was significant to them even if it wasn’t shown on TV.

Masters
Woods took the lead for the first time with a two-putt birdie on the par-5 15th at Augusta National, but it was the next hole where he effectively delivered the game winner. He hit 8-iron with just the right distance to the right spot on the green, and he watched the 6-foot birdie putt toward the hole to 3 feet below the cup for birdie and a two-shot lead.

“I almost hooped it,” he said.

Game over, right?

Think back to that chip-in before the 16th in 2005 that went up the slope, down the slope and paused at the edge before it tumbled in for birdie and a two-shot lead. Woods remembered it well. He followed with a couple of wild tee shots, made two bogeys and was forced into a playoff.

All of that because of the reasons why I was so focused and I didn’t celebrate after I made that birdie on 16,” Woods said. “Because I’ve yet to win a tournament in that situation before.”

And that’s why his drive on the 17th this year was so special, even if it didn’t look that way.

“That was the best shot I hit all year,” Woods said.

“Considering the moment, I needed to pipe that ball. I did. I gave it a little more than normal and hit a flat fade. And I think that was what allowed me to go on to win.”

PGA Championship
Koepka said that when he gets to the end of his career, he will look back on the openning two days at Bethpage Black as “the best two rounds of my career.”

Trouble is, the strongest memories are the last ones. And at times on Sunday, it was hard to look.

Six shots clear with eight holes to play, Koepka nearly lost the lead. And not even a bogey on the 18th was safe when he pulled his drive into the native rough. He wasn’t in the clear until he managed to hack that out into the fairway. That shot is what Koepka considers as memorable as any he hit on the back nine.

“The one thing I don’t think anyone realizes is that second shot on 18 out of the mess was an awkward lie,” Koepka said, adding that caddie Ricky Elliott was “super worried” about it. “It was either going in the bunker or through the fairway into the rough. Me and Ricky talked about it and thought it was better to leave it in the bunker. I thought it was a good shot to get it in the fairway.”

He made par from there to win by two.

It was a bogey he kept from being worse that was most meaningful to him.

Right after his final birdie on No. 10 for a six-shot lead, Koepka began his run of four straight bogeys starting at No. 11. He drove left into a bunker, blasted out and then hit a poor wedge that came off the green 50 feet away. He knocked that 8 feet by the hole and had that left for bogey.

“You drop two shots and everyone goes, ‘Ooh.’ A bogey, you wouldn’t think it,” he said. “That was a big putt there.”

U.S. Open
Woodland still doesn’t know what the public will consider his signature shot at Pebble Beach — the 3-wood from 283 yards on the par-5 14th that set up birdie for a two-shot lead, or the lob wedge across the 17th green to save par.

“People on the outside will talk about the 17th,” he said. “The shot on 14 won me the golf tournament.”

He had the same shot on the 17th in the opening round and made a 10-foot save to par, but that wasn’t on TV and it was only Thursday. It felt like the whole world was watching on Sunday.

“I’ve hit a lot of chip shots off greens, I just never hit one that far,” Woodland said. “My whole idea was don’t chunk it or blade. If you chunk it, you’re screwed. Blade it, I could blade it in the ocean. That chip shot will go down as the best chip I’ve ever hit. And the swing on 14 will go down as the best swing I’ve ever made.”

Woodland, though, goes back to early Saturday for what he feels was a shot equally important. He drove left into a fairway bunker on No. 2, leaving him an awkward lie with the ball above his feet.

“That best swing I made all week,” he said of his 8-iron into 10 feet. “So much could have happened there. If I made bogey or double bogey there, I lose my lead early, who knows what happens the rest of the week? That shot gave me confidence that I could hit any shot under pressure.”

British Open
It only seems as though Lowry won the Open at Royal Portrush on Saturday when he shot 63 to build a four-shot lead. He knew better.

In his mind, Lowry believes the clinching shot that most people will remember was on the 15th hole Sunday, right after Tommy Fleetwood had made double bogey. Turning to caddie Ro Martin, he told him: “Let’s shot level par on the last four holes. Shot level par, we’re grand.”

“I hit 2-iron off the tee about 320 yards, flushed it straight down the middle,” Lowry said. “I had 100 yards to the flag, hit lob wedge to 8 feet and holed it. That was it, then, the nail in the coffin. You can see how much it means at the time. I crouched down and gave it a big fist pump. I knew that was it.”

But there were nerves early, and one shot Sunday that stands out to Lowry to make him believe he could get the job done.

He drove into the rough on the right on the par-4 eighth. The wind was howling out of the right. The rain was lashing.

“I hit the green with a 5-iron, and that was the best shot I hit all day,” he said. “I three-putted from 60 feet, but that had potential to be a bit of a disaster. It was a dodgy enough lie. The ball was way above my feet, the wind was howling. Miss left, that could be dead. There was a bush on the right if I didn’t carry it.”

The idea that Lowry picked a shot that led to boggey made him smile.

“I hit some lovely shots that day,” he said. “But it was a key shot in the final round.”
Doncic nets 24, Mavs top Spurs

Associated Press

DALLAS — Luka Doncic returned to the Dallas lineup after missing four games due to injury and scored 24 points, helping the Mavericks beat the San Antonio Spurs 102-98 on Thursday night.

Doncic finished with 10 rebounds and eight assists and barely missed adding to his NBA-leading total of eight triple-doubles. He last played on Dec. 14 against Miami, when he sprained his right ankle.

San Antonio rallied from a 102-85 deficit by scoring the game’s final 13 points after Doncic missed two free throws, barely missed adding to his NBA-leading total of eight triple-doubles. Doncic finished with 10 rebounds and eight assists and barely missed adding to his NBA-leading total of eight triple-doubles. He last played on Dec. 14 against Miami, when he sprained his right ankle.

The Mavericks (20-10) pulled even with Oklahoma City for third place in the Southwest Division.

Blake Griffin had 14 points and 15 rebounds, and Delon Wright added 12 points all came in the first half.

Spurs 102-98 on Thursday night. New York Knicks center Mitchell Robinson, third from left, defends as Brooklyn Nets forward Wilson Chandler tries to pass around him during the second half of Thursday’s game in New York.

Knicks hold Nets to 26.9% shooting

Spencer Dinwiddie scored 25 points but was only 5-for-15 for the Nets, who were held to their lowest point total of the season.

“Four players and 10 men. We also shot 27 baskets in the paint, is just really, really high,” Randle said. “We grinded to get the game this season when it hit 2000. We also shot 27 baskets in the paint, is just really, really high.”

Randle scored 33 points and eight rebounds, and New York forced Brooklyn into the worst shooting performance in the NBA this season in a 94-82 victory.

Brooklyn finished 21-for-78 (27.0%) from the field. Chicago had the previous worst shooting performance in the NBA this season in a 94-82 victory.

Brooklyn’s Dinwiddie scored 25 points but was only 5-for-15 for the Nets, who were held to their lowest point total of the season.

“They just outplayed us. Plain and simple,” Nets coach Kenny Atkinson said. “You could sit there and write and talk about missed shots — we did miss lots of open shots — but give them the credit. They simply were the better team tonight.”

Marcus Morris added 22 points and eight rebounds for the Knicks, who snapped a three-game losing streak. Elfrid Payton scored 13 points as New York won for the first time in three meetings with Brooklyn this season.

“We were just sharp. To hold that team to 82 points, 14 points in the paint, is truly, really sharp,” Randle said. “We grinded the whole way, played a complete basketball game and we got the win.”

The Nets’ eight two-point field goals were the fewest in an NBA game since 1950, when the Lakers and Pistons each made four shots from the field in a game with a final score of 19-18, according to Elias Sports.

Associated Press

BY BRIAN MAHONEY

NEW YORK — A local rivalry was supposed to go national Thursday, with the Knicks and Nets scheduled to play on TNT before the game was recently replaced.

That turned out to be a wise decision because it was anything but must-see TV.

Julius Randle had 33 points and eight rebounds, and New York forced Brooklyn into the worst shooting performance in the NBA this season in a 94-82 victory.

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The Nets’ eight two-point field goals were the fewest in an NBA game since 1950, when the Lakers and Pistons each made four shots from the field in a game with a final score of 19-18, according to Elias Sports.

Associated Press

“Four players and 10 men. We also shot 27 baskets in the paint, is just really, really high.”

Randle scored 33 points and eight rebounds, and New York forced Brooklyn into the worst shooting performance in the NBA this season in a 94-82 victory.

Brooklyn finished 21-for-78 (27.0%) from the field. Chicago had the previous worst shooting performance in the NBA this season in a 94-82 victory.

Brooklyn’s Dinwiddie scored 25 points but was only 5-for-15 for the Nets, who were held to their lowest point total of the season.

“They just outplayed us. Plain and simple,” Nets coach Kenny Atkinson said. “You could sit there and write and talk about missed shots — we did miss lots of open shots — but give them the credit. They simply were the better team tonight.”

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Independence Bowl

Louisiana Tech shuts out Miami

Associated Press

SHREVEPORT, La. — J'Mar Smith threw a touchdown pass and had a late scoring run to help Louisiana Tech beat Miami 14-0 on Thursday night in the only shutout in the Independence Bowl’s 44-game history.

Louisiana Tech (10-3) reached double-digit victories for the first time since 1984 and ran its postseason winning streak to six — the longest current streak in the country.

“To have the 10-win season and to beat a Power 5 team in a bowl game, I can’t put into words my feelings and my emotions for what these players have accomplished,” coach Skip Holtz said.

Miami entered the game with no chance to win this football game, but was contrite on Twitter.

“Honestly, I’m not an excuse maker. However, there’s absolutely no excuse for any of that,” Miami coach Manny Diaz said.

The Bulldogs won 70 miles west of their campus in Ruston.

Smith connected with Israel Henderson for 100 yards. The Hurricanes allowed Henderson to gain 91 yards on four receptions.

“Manny Diaz said the ‘plan’ wasn’t to play three quarterbacks,” said former coach Paul Chryst.

Pat Narduzzi.

The Eagles (6-7) came up just short in a closely contested game just as they did in three previous bowls with coach Chris Creighton and the usually disciplined team unraveled at times.

Eastern Michigan quarterback Mike Glass was 28-for-50 for 311 yards with two touchdowns and an interception. The senior also ran for 183 yards with one interception.

The Eagles (6-7) came up just short in a closely contested game just as they did in three previous bowls with coach Chris Creighton and the usually disciplined team unraveled at times.

Eastern Michigan quarterback Mike Glass III completed 28 of 50 passes for 311 yards and two touchdowns before being ejected.

The takeaway

Louisiana Tech: The season will forever be tainted by “what if” for the Bulldogs. Following a season-opening loss at Texas, Louisiana Tech rattled off eight straight wins before Smith was suspended two games for violating an undisclosed program policy.

The Bulldogs lost those two games and won the regular-season finale when Smith returned. What if Louisiana Tech would have run the table? Could it have challenged Memphis for the Group of 5 slot in the College Football Playoff?

Miami: During bowl week, Hurricanes coach Manny Diaz said the “plan” wasn’t to play three quarterbacks. Sure enough, Miami played three quarterbacks — Jarren Williams, Tate Martell and N’Kosi Perry — and found no success. Perry, who didn’t play until the fourth quarter, showed the most promise through the air, although none of the three threw for 100 yards. The Hurricanes combined to go 15-for-34 for 153 yards and two interceptions.

Quick Lane Bowl

Pitt rallies in final minute to beat Eastern Michigan

By LARRY LAGE

Associated Press

DETROIT — Pittsburgh players took punches, and one was hit with spit, and the Panthers still kept their cool in critical moments to win a bowl game for the first time in five appearances under coach Pat Narduzzi.

Kenny Pickett threw a 25-yard touchdown pass to Tajyr Mack with 47 seconds left and the Panthers held on to beat Eastern Michigan 34-30 in the Quick Lane Bowl on Thursday night.

“Our kids held their composure,” Narduzzi said.

After taking its first lead of the game in the final minute, Pittsburgh (8-5) forced Eastern Michigan to turn it over on downs from its 40 to seal its first bowl victory since winning in Detroit six years ago with former coach Paul Chryst.

The Eagles (6-7) came up just short in a closely contested game just as they did in three previous bowls with coach Chris Creighton and the usually disciplined team unraveled at times.

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The takeaway

Pitt: Coaching continuity with offensive coordinator Mark Whipple returning for a second season should help the program. The offense showed some signs of life in the bowl game after scoring 20 or fewer points in eight games this season.

Eastern Michigan: The program is on solid footing, earning consecutive bowl bids for the first time and three in four years after previously doing it only once as a Division I team. The Eagles will just have to hope they can keep Creighton away from Power Five conference schools.

Record books

Frenche had 96 receptions this season, breaking Larry Fitzgerald’s school record of 92 set in 2003.

“That’s with missing a couple games,” Narduzzi said. “He fought back with that broken jaw.”

Glass surpassed Charlie Batch’s single-season records of 3,390 yards of total offense and 23 touchdowns passes set in 1997.

Pittsburgh wide receiver Tayssir Mack, right, catches the game-winning touchdown over Eastern Michigan defensive back Vince Calhoun in the final minute of Thursday’s Quick Lane Bowl. Pitt won 34-30.

Eastern Michigan quarterback Mike Glass III completed 28 of 50 passes for 311 yards and two touchdowns before being ejected.

Pittsburgh wide receiver Tayssir Mack, right, catches the game-winning touchdown over Eastern Michigan defensive back Vince Calhoun in the final minute of Thursday’s Quick Lane Bowl. Pitt won 34-30.
The powerful senior ran for 1,255 yards and ran for 1,829 and 20 touchdowns. He is the catalyst,” Cincinnati coach Luke Fickell said of Dobbins. Dobbins is tough inside and out and ran for 1,829 and 20 touchdowns. He is also effective as a receiver with 17 catches for 200 yards and two scores. Dobbins will be attacking a Clemson defense that has been overhauled by coordinator Brent Venables this year. The Tigers don’t dominate with their front four as they did last year. The back end of the defense is where the stars are, especially versatile All-American Isaiah Simmons. He is listed as a linebacker but shows up all over the field.

“They’ve evolved to kind of a three-safety defense,” Wake Forest coach Dave Clawson said. “They blitz a lot more. They pressure a lot more.”

And they rely on cornerbacks A.J. Terrell and Denon Kendrick to win on the outside against receivers . The Buckeyes will be the first team this season that can really challenge Clemson up front behind All-American guard Wyatt Davis and third-team All-American guard Jonhal Jackson.

Venables is not afraid to commit extra defenders to stop the run. That’s where Fields’ running ability can come in. A sore knee kept the 6-3, 225-pound Fields out of the line and Travis Etienne (1,500 yards rushing and 8.24 per carry),” Fickell said.

“Trevor Lawrence. Heisman finalist Chase Young tested by college football’s best pass rusher. Heisman finalist Chase Young will be the first team this season that can really challenge Clemson up front behind All-American guard Wyatt Davis and third-team All-American guard Jonhal Jackson. Venables is not afraid to commit extra defenders to stop the run. That’s where Fields’ running ability can come in. A sore knee kept the 6-3, 225-pound Fields out of the line and Travis Etienne (1,500 yards rushing and 8.24 per carry),” Fickell said.

“When Clemson has the ball: The Tigers are making their fifth straight playoff appearance and have won two national titles in the last three years. Still, this is the best offense Clemson has had entering the playoff. The Tigers have gone from solid to elite along the line, led by second-team All-America guard John Simpson and sophomore left tackle Jackson Carman.

“If you ever try to lighten the box, now you’re dealing with a great offensive line and Travis Etienne (1,500 yards rushing and 8.24 per carry),” Clawson said.

That line, especially Carman, will be tested by college football’s best pass rusher. Heisman finalist Chase Young had 16.5 sacks this season in only 11 games.

Extra attention on Young means defensive lineman Davon Hamilton and Jashon Cornell have to be handled one-on-one. The Buckeyes’ challenge will be to get enough pressure to fluster Trevor Lawrence.

Lawrence has pinpoint accuracy and big targets in Tee Higgins and Justyn Ross, both 6-4. A sore knee kept the 6-3, 225-pound Fields out of the line and Travis Etienne (1,500 yards rushing and 8.24 per carry),” Fickell said.

“When LSU has the ball: Coaches like to talk about being aggressive offensively. That’s how Heisman Trophy winner Joe Burrow and the Tigers play.

“Whether it’s by tempo or by play design, they maintain their aggressiveness from play one until the last play of the game,” Mississippi State coach Joe Moorhead said.

The key to their defense is really to get pressure with their front, the line movement and the twists and all the things they do,” Baylor coach Matt Rhule said of the Sooners. “I think the loss (of Perkins) is really a big deal.”

“When Oklahoma has the ball: If fans expect a fast-paced Big 12 offense, the Sooners might surprise them.

“They are not a high-flying tempo offense. They are pro-style, substitute personnel groupings, call two plays, getting into the right play at the line. As a result they can limit possessions,” Rhule said.

Oklahoma’s offenses under coach Lincoln Riley have always been balanced and among the best in the country on the ground. With Heisman runner-up Jalen Hurts, the quarterback is now the Sooners’ primary ball carrier. The powerful senior ran for 1,255 yards behind a huge offensive line. Kennedy Brooks is the top tailback. Injuries and suspensions have depleted the depth behind him. Expect a lot of Hurts and Brooks, setting up play-action passes to All-America receiver CeeDee Lamb.

The Sooners don’t have much chance of holding down LSU’s offense without getting a bunch of turnovers. Slowing the game might be OU’s best bet.

But LSU’s defense is healthier than it’s been all season and their big bodies up front (Glen Logan, Tyler Shelvin and Rashad Lawrence all weigh over 300 pounds) are hard to move.

“They play the odd stack (three-down linemen), really kind of stuff up your interior gaps,” Moorhead said.


— Ralph Russo, Associated Press
Clemson linebacker Isaiah Simmons is the Butkus Award winner and State's first of two wins over Wisconsin from Maryland was a key cog for the nation's two Fiesta Bowl when No. 3 Clemson for a trip to the national championship game. The only debate for some is which sideline he's on. Buckeyes defensive end Chase Young and Clemson linebacker Isaiah Simmons have won plenty of awards and shown the skills that will make them high NFL Draft choices, perhaps as soon as this spring. The two juniors are key cogs for the nation's top two overall defenses, with Clemson leading the way.

Young led Ohio State (13-0, No. 2 CFP) and the nation with 16.5 sacks this season on the way to winning the Hendricks and Bednarik awards. The 6-5, 265-pounder from Maryland was a finalist for the Heisman Trophy.

Young had four sacks in Ohio State's first of two wins over Wisconsin, then had three in a critical victory against Penn State after missing the previous two games due to suspension.

Young has done all this despite opponents using extra bodies to get in his way.

"Teams put a lot more focus on chipping Chase, putting a guard on Chase, doubling Chase," said Buckeyes freshman defensive end Zach Harrison.

It hasn't really worked, as Young had 21 tackles for loss and six forced fumbles despite missing those two November games.

"When a play has to be made, we make it, get off the field for the offense," Young said. "I think that's the best thing we can do." Clemson's Simmons has a similar style for the Tigers (13-0, No. 3 CFP), although no offense is ever sure if he will line up in the secondary or closer to the line of scrimmage.

"What he brings to the table is unmatched," Tigers safety K'Von Wallace said. "I feel like he's changing the style of sports today." Simmons, the 6-foot-4, 230-pounder from Kansas, describes himself as a Swiss Army knife, able to fit and excel wherever Tigers defensive coordinator Brent Venables needs him.

He leads Clemson with 93 tackles, but his versatility and coverage skills show up elsewhere on the stat sheet: He also tops the team with seven sacks and seven passes broken up this season.

His play won him the Butkus Award along with the Atlantic Coast Conference defensive player of the year.

Venables said Simmons was a skinny prospect who never stopped moving and developed himself through hard work and studying the game.

"I've said it once, I've said it 100 times, he plays so hard," Venables said. "His endurance is like nothing I've ever been around. That's his best attribute.

He has a knack, Venables added, for knowing the right gap to go through when he's called on to rush the passer. And he is lightning fast.

Simmons got his first taste of starting last season in the Tigers' undefeated run to the national title.

With the front four of last year's defense off to the NFL, Simmons was called to take a larger leadership role this year. He considered the NFL last winter before deciding he had more to learn before leaving Clemson.

Simmons and Young are found in many mock drafts for the upcoming NFL Draft. First, though, Saturday's showdown in the play-off semifinals.

Simmons said he does not see the game as his chance to prove he's every bit the star as Young, just the next opportunity for the Tigers to keep their landmark run going.

Young "is a great player, a very dominant player who affects the game," Simmons said. "But I just go out there and play my game. I don't really worry about things like that."

**Simmons, Young lead defenses in Fiesta clash**

"What he brings to the table is unmatched. I feel like he's changing the style of sports today."

K'Von Wallace
Clemson safety on linebacker Isaiah Simmons

No. 1 LSU could be missing top rusher against Oklahoma

LSU running back Tyrion Davis-Price, right, celebrates his touchdown run against Texas A&M on Nov. 30. Davis-Price might be called on more often in the Peach Bowl if Tigers leading rusher Clyde Edwards-Helaire cannot play.

By Charles Odum
Associated Press

**By Pete Iacobelli**
Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. — There is little doubt the nation's best defensive player will take the field at the Fiesta Bowl when No 2 Ohio State faces No. 3 Clemson for a trip to the national championship game.

"I feel like he's changing the style of sports today."

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AP Sports Writer Mitch Stacy contributed to this report.

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K'Von Wallace
Clemson safety on linebacker Isaiah Simmons

No. 1 LSU could be missing top rusher against Oklahoma

By Charles Odum
Associated Press

**By Pete Iacobelli**
Associated Press

ATLANTA — Top-ranked LSU's leading rusher Clyde Edwards-Helaire is off crutches but still might miss Saturday's Peach Bowl playoff semifinal against No. 4 Oklahoma.

The Sooners, meanwhile, will be missing starting defensive end Ronnie Perkins and two backups due to suspensions.

Edwards-Helaire suffered a hamstring injury in practice last week. He was only an observer for LSU's first practice in Atlanta on Monday, and he was a no-show at media day on Thursday.

He leads the undefeated Tigers (13-0) with 1,290 yards rushing and 16 touchdowns.

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He leads the undefeated Tigers (13-0) with 1,290 yards rushing and 16 touchdowns.

LSU coach Ed Orgeron says Edwards-Helaire is "a little bit better" and he described the running back's status as day to day. Orgeron said Edwards-Helaire missed Thursday's event because he was receiving treatment. Edwards-Helaire was also a no-show for Thursday's practice.

Based on Orgeron's comments, it would be a surprise if Edwards-Helaire plays. The coach spoke of the junior first-team All-SEC player in the past tense when comparing his running backs, including freshman backups Tyrion Davis-Price and John Emery.

"I think all three of those guys do different things," Orgeron said. "With Clyde, he did everything well. He blocked well. He ran inside, he ran outside and caught the football. We'll have to adjust if Clyde doesn't play to rotate those guys and do what they do best."

Quarterback Joe Burrow was second on the team with 289 yards rushing. Davis-Price ran for 270 yards with six touchdowns and could be the leader of a running back committee if Edwards-Helaire can't play.

Center Lloyd Cushenberry III said he's confident LSU's coaches will "get those guys right. I know Clyde is going to be in their ear, trying to get them prepared, and whoever gets carries, it's on us up front to do our job so they can make plays. ... We've got to take care of those guys and get the job done."

The Sooners (12-1) will also be limited. Coach Lincoln Riley confirmed three Oklahoma players, including Perkins, will be suspended for the game. Perkins leads the team with six sacks.

"We're not a one-man show up front," Riley said. "I'm confident in the guys that we have and the pressure we've been able to force this year, and hopefully we can do it again."

Running back Rhamondre Stevenson and wide receiver Trejan Bridges, who are backups, also will miss the game.

Stevenson had a touchdown run in Oklahoma's 30-23 overtime win over Baylor in the Big 12 championship game.

Riley said he wouldn't detail "dirty laundry" about the cause of the suspensions. He said the three players traveled with the team and will join practices in Atlanta.

"I wanted those guys here," Riley said. "They're able to practice and able to help this team win in a different way right now. ... They give us great preparation on both sides of the ball."
No. 1 LSU favored by whopping 13 ½ points

BY PAUL NEWBERRY
Associated Press

ATLANTA — No team in the College Football Playoff has claimed more national titles than Oklahoma.

History, though, doesn’t carry much weight in this year’s field. The Sooners are the clear outsider.

No. 1 LSU, No. 2 Ohio State and No. 3 Clemson have established themselves as the nation’s best teams over the course of the long season. All three have 13-0 records. All three have sampled the way to a 45-34 triumph in the Orange Bowl.

Those postseason flops are another reason to dismiss the Sooners as nothing more than an outsider.

“They kind of just forget us,” Motley said. “It’s going to inspire us. We’re going to sit in this corner over here and just work on ourselves and do our job. Y’all don’t need to worry about us.”

Oklahoma’s season was on the brink after that 48-41 loss at Kansas State in late October.

The Sooners bounced back to win their last five games, though it was tenuous all the way. They held off a furious comeback to edge Iowa State 42-41. They pulled off the biggest comeback in school history, overcoming a 25-point deficit to stun Baylor 34-31. They barely got by TCU, 26-23. They beat Baylor again in the Big 12 championship game, surviving a 30-23 overtime thriller.

Even then, Oklahoma still needed some help to get into the playoff. But everything fell into place when Alabama lost at Auburn on a missed field goal in the closing minutes, Utah fell to Oregon in the Pac-12 championship game and Georgia was blown out by LSU for the SEC title.

Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence passes prior to the ACC championship game earlier this month.

Future: Clemson, Ohio State have elite QBs

FROM BACK PAGE
Fields, who went to Harrison High School in Kent, Ohio, and Lawrence, who attended Cartersville High School, are more friendly than close friends.

“IT’s funny we have to come across the country to play each other,” Lawrence said Thursday at Fiesta Bowl media day.

The first connection between Fields and Lawrence is Ron Veal, who played quarterback at Arizona in the late 1980s and now lives in the Atlanta area.

Veal started working with young quarterbacks in 2002. He is now part of a group of trainers called the Lawrence Collective and he trains up-and-coming passers of all kinds as a side gig to firefighting.

Veal began working with Fields when he was in sixth grade and Lawrence when he was in seventh. Mostly, their sessions were one-on-one with Veal, but at least once Lawrence came to Fields’ high school for a joint session before both went off to college.

“Work hard like nobody’s business,” Veal said.

“Know, you when they came to a session there was really no talking between me and the kid. It was self-correction and correction. They put the work to get where they are and then the natural ability and a natural talent surfaced. But they just work at it.”

“They wanted to be different,” Veal added.

Lawrence was the more advanced of the two heading into high school. Veal attributed that to Fields spending a lot of time playing youth baseball.

“Lawrence started at Cartersville, a 3A high school. Clemson quarterback coach Brandon Streeter got his first look at Lawrence after the quarterback’s freshman season and could hardly believe what he saw.

“No flaws that I could see,” Streeter said. “You knew at that moment that this kid had something special.”

While Lawrence was drawing interest from Clemson, Fields’ first offers came from North Carolina, Duke and Wake Forest. Fields said going to camps with players like Lawrence motivated him to want more.

“He has an offer. How come I don’t have an offer? I think we’re the same in talent,” Fields said. “I kind of always had a chip on my shoulder.”

Fields broke out his junior season at Harrison, a 6A high school in Georgia’s second-largest classification.

By the summer heading into their senior seasons, Lawrence and Fields had become the top two quarterback recruits in the country. They were selected for Elite 11, a camp where top prospects train and compete on the field, spend time in the film room, and are taught how to become a leader.

Lawrence and Fields weren’t just the top two players in their Elite 11 class but two of the most impressive in the 22-year history of the competition game.

“When they showed up, they had a factor we hadn’t seen very often,” said Yogi Roth, an analyst with the Pac-12 Network who has been working with Elite 11 for 12 years. “They were meticulous in their commitment to the craft.”

Fields left Elite 11 with the MVP award.

Lawrence committed to Clemson before his junior season and never wavered. Fields committed first to Penn State, then changed his mind and landed at Georgia.

The 6-foot-6, 220-pound Lawrence immediately lived up to his billing, leading Clemson to the national championship as a freshman last year. Meanwhile, the 6-3, 225-pound Fields spent last season backing up Jake Fromm at Georgia.

“Facing that adversity and just going through that I think it just helped me a lot as a person and also as a football player,” Fields said.

Fields transferred to Ohio State and this season he, too, has proved worthy of all the hype, throwing 40 touchdown passes and only one interception.

Fields and Lawrence each have at least one more season of college football left, but it’s not hard to see where this could lead.

They will head into next season as Heisman Trophy front-runners and then — if they both skip their senior seasons for the NFL — into draft season competing to be the first quarterback and maybe even first player selected.

It is not far-fetched to envision Lawrence and Fields leading NFL teams for more than a decade as two of the league’s biggest stars.

“I don’t think that’s an oversell,” Roth said. “I think that’s real.”
COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Leading the way

‘Future of the NFL’ on display when QBs Lawrence, Fields meet in Playoff semifinal

By Ralph D. Russo
Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz.

Justin Fields and Trevor Lawrence went to high school about 20 miles from each other in the suburbs northwest of Atlanta.

They have worked out since middle school with the same quarterback trainer, a former Pac-12 QB and full-time firefighter who is more well-respected than well-known in the business.

Lawrence and Fields were the Nos. 1 and 1a recruits in the class of 2018, competed at the same Elite 11 camp and have been linked for most of their young lives despite never playing in the same football game.

The rivalry becomes real Saturday when Fields and No. 2 Ohio State take on Lawrence and No. 3 Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal at the Fiesta Bowl. It could be the start of something big.

“This is the future of the NFL playing in this game,” said Ohio State defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley, who spent seven years as an NFL assistant. “For the next 10 years you have, God willing they both stay healthy, you have these two guys leading the way.”

SEE FUTURE ON PAGE 23