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COMING NEVER

North Korea blamed after fear
of terrorist attacks scuttles film

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A Carmike Cinemas worker takes down a poster for the movie "The Interview" on Wednesday in Atlanta. Sony Pictures Entertainment took the unprecedented step of canceling the comedy's Dec. 25 release under the threat of terrorist attacks from hackers. DAVID GOLDMAN/AP

Gitmo not part of US-Cuba bargain

By CAROL ROSENBERG
Miami Herald

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration has no intention of withdrawing from the U.S. Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, despite the sudden shift in U.S.-Cuban relations.

"There is no impact to Guantanamo from the changes announced today," the National Security Council spokeswoman, Bernadette Meehan, said Wednesday evening.

Hours earlier, at the U.S. outpost in southeast Cuba, base spokeswoman Kelly Wirfel said amid reports that American prisoner Alan Gross was on his way to freedom that there was no change in security posture at the 45-square-mile outpost of about

6,000 residents that straddles Guantanamo Bay and sits behind a Cuban minefield.

■ Cigar imports legalized, but with restrictions

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■ For MLB, changes will take time to sort out

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From the earliest days of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro sought to get the U.S. out of the base — a prime piece of real estate long before the George W. Bush administration decided to put its iconic war-on-terrorism prison there.

Successive U.S. administrations have said the military has permanent tenancy under a 1934 treaty made public by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The United States cuts an annual check for \$4,085 in rent, even though the Cuban government does not cash it.

Wednesday, a senior Obama official told McClatchy that Cuban diplomats object to the continued U.S. presence on the base "in every discussion ... but there won't be change to that status quo."

SEE GITMO ON PAGE 13

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"It's important to remember that Maryland is not the battlefield and we are not the enemy."

— David Rocah, senior staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, on the U.S. military testing a cruise missile defense system by launching a blimp-like airship at Aberdeen Proving Ground near Baltimore

See story on Page 6

WAR/MILITARY

Police officer is killed in Afghan suicide bombing

BY LYNNE O'DONNELL AND AMIR SHAH
The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — An Afghan police officer was killed and three were wounded Thursday when a suspected suicide bomber they were pursuing detonated his explosives-laden vehicle, an official said.

The Taliban issued a statement claiming responsibility for the attack.

The bomber "was trying to enter Kabul with the intention of detonating explosives in a crowded part of the city," said Hashmat Stanekzai, spokesman for the Kabul provincial police chief. "He was being followed by police."

The explosion occurred after police stopped the car, said Kabul provincial police chief, Abdul Rahman Rahimi.

Afghan authorities regularly claim to have thwarted attacks on

the capital as the insurgents concentrate on government, military and foreign targets.

Five foreigners have been killed in the past month in attacks on soft targets such as a French-run school last week, where a German aid worker was killed.

The U.S.-led international combat mission, which peaked in 2010 with 140,000 American and NATO troops, ends on Dec. 31. Afghan security forces will assume full responsibility on Jan. 1, with a residual international force of around 13,000 to provide training and support.

The head of Afghanistan's intelligence service said the draw-down of foreign troops had made it more difficult to track down militants.

Under pressure to explain the rise in attacks on Kabul, Rahmatullah Nabil, chief of the National Security Directorate, told parliament Wednesday that the removal of manpower and tech-



MASSOUD HOSSAINI/AP

Afghan security forces inspect the site of a suicide attack in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Thursday. An Afghan official says a suicide bomber detonated his vehicle as it was being followed by police on the outskirts of the capital, killing a police officer and wounding others.

nology by withdrawing foreign forces had contributed to the spike in violence.

In Helmand province, he said, 65 surveillance balloons had been removed with the closure of U.S. and British bases last month. "Now I have just six agents working there," he said.

Nabil added there were 107 terrorist cells in the provinces surrounding Kabul while the city's

preparedness is severely lacking and outdated.

Also Thursday, Kabul criminal investigation chief Farid Afzali said arrests had been made connection with the killing last week of a senior Supreme Court official.

Atiqullah Raoufi was shot dead on Saturday as he was walking from his home to his vehicle by assailants on motorcycles.

TOP CLICKS ON STRIPES.COM

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1. Army's blimp-like airships get East Coast test
2. Hundreds of US troops now deployed in Iraq's Anbar province
3. Soldier who deserted, served in French Foreign Legion is sentenced to 4 years in prison
4. Car shipper's dispute over \$3.63 million debt means troops cars stranded in Houston
5. Taliban mount assault on Kunar border district, Afghan officials say

COMING SOON



Shifting Gears

Ferrari looks to cash in on its powerful image with IPO

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Afghan who fled US training sent to Canada

BY CAROLYN THOMPSON
The Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — One of three Afghan military officers detained after fleeing a U.S. training exercise to avoid returning to Afghanistan has been allowed to make a refugee claim in Canada, his attorney said Wednesday.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement turned over Capt. Mohammad Nasir Askarzada to Canadian authorities on Tuesday, spokesman Khaalid Walls confirmed.

Askarzada, along with Maj. Jan Arash and Capt. Noorullah Aminyar, took a cab from Massachusetts to New York in September

and walked into Niagara Falls, Ontario, to seek refugee status.

The three, who had been participating in a joint military training exercise in Cape Cod, said they fear Taliban retribution in Afghanistan because of their work with U.S. soldiers.

Attorney Razmeen Joya said Canadian immigration officials agreed to reconsider Askarzada's request to make a refugee claim after she submitted documents showing he has a close relative in Canada.

"He is staying with relatives here who also were present at the border yesterday to accompany him home," the Toronto attorney said by email Wednesday.

Canada had denied the three men entry and returned them to the United States, which moved to deport them. Arash and Aminyar remain at the Buffalo Federal Detention Facility in Batavia pending removal proceedings. ICE will drop its case against Askarzada, the agency said.

A 2004 agreement between Canada and the United States requires people seeking asylum in the United States to apply at Canada-U.S. land border crossings to apply in whichever country they arrive in first. Exceptions can be made for claimants with relatives in Canada.

If ordered deported, Arash and Aminyar are expected to seek asylum in the United States.

German soldiers get OK for Afghanistan mission

BERLIN — Lawmakers have given the go-ahead for Germany to contribute up to 850 soldiers to the NATO-organized training and advisory mission in Afghanistan that will start work next month.

The lower house of Parliament voted 473-102 on Thursday to support the deployment, with 18 abstentions, the news agency dpa reported. German military missions abroad require parliamentary approval.

Germany has been a major troop contributor in Afghanistan's north over the past decade and will continue to be responsible for that region in the new mission, called Resolute Support.

From The Associated Press



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WAR ON TERRORISM

Hundreds of American troops deployed in Iraq's Anbar province

By JON HARPER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Hundreds of American troops are now in Iraq's volatile Anbar province helping the Iraqi military take on the Islamic State, Joint Chiefs of Staff officials said.

Currently, about 350 U.S. troops are stationed at Al Asad Air Base in Anbar. The force is composed of advisers and support personnel who are assisting the Iraqi army, as well as a security contingent tasked with providing force protection.

The troops on the ground are helping the 7th Iraqi Division with developing security strategies, mission planning, information sharing, and coordinating close air support operations.

Service members in Anbar are not fighting alongside Iraqi forces nor standing near the front lines calling in airstrikes, officials said.

These people "are not accompanying Iraqi forces into combat," said Col. Ed Thomas, the chief spokesman for Joint Chiefs chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey.

President Barack Obama has ruled out sending American ground troops back into combat in Iraq, and has limited the military mission to training and equipping Iraqi troops fighting the Islamic State.

On Tuesday, there were media reports that American troops in Anbar had been in a direct fight

with militants near Al Asad. Multiple U.S. defense officials said those reports were false.

Last month, military officials revealed that about 50 American special operators had deployed to Al Asad, some 110 miles northwest of Baghdad, in order to lay the groundwork for a new training effort.

U.S. troops in Iraq previously had been confined to facilities near Baghdad and Irbil.

The number of advisers in Anbar has increased significantly since then, Thomas said. He did not say how many of the 350 troops now in Anbar are preparing for the training mission, which will take place at four training sites throughout Iraq.

The formal training effort isn't expected to start until early next year, officials said.

"We are still in the process of flowing in additional troops in the overall effort to Build Partner Capacity, which will enable Iraqi forces by providing training and expertise in military capabilities such as mission command, intelligence, maneuver, and sustainment and medical support," Joint Staff spokeswoman Army Capt. Catalina Rosales said in an email to Stars and Stripes.

The force is currently about 1,700 American troops in Iraq. That number is expected to increase to about 3,000 in the coming months.

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Iraqi Kurdish troops open corridor to Sinjar

By DALTON BENNETT
The Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq — Iraqi Kurdish forces battling Islamic State militants managed on Thursday to open up a corridor to Sinjar Mountain so that thousands of people from the country's Yazidi minority who have been trapped there can flee, said a senior Kurdish official.

The development was an incremental step in the battle to retake the town of Sinjar, at the foothills of the mountain by the same name, which fell to the Islamic State group in early August. . . Iraqi Kurdish

The Kurdish peshmarga troops, backed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes, launched the operation to retake the Islamic State-held Sinjar on Wednesday.

Masrur Barzani, chancellor of Kurdistan Region Security Council, said the Kurdish forces advanced in battle, establishing the passageway to the mountain on Thursday.

Tens of thousands of Yazidis became trapped in the mountain

in early August, when the Islamic State extremists captured the towns of Sinjar and Zumarr, prompting the exodus.

Many were eventually airlifted off the mountain or escorted by a passageway through Syria back into Iraq, to find refuge in the Iraqi Kurdish semi-autonomous region in northern Iraq, but thousands more came later and remained stuck on the mountain.

"Our hope is that all those people will eventually be able to go back to their own homes and villages and towns but those that are in need of evacuation now, a corridor will eventually be opened to evacuate those people," Barzani told The Associated Press in Irbil, the Kurdish regional capital.

Yazidis follow an ancient religion with ties to Zoroastrianism. The Kurdish forces, known also as peshmarga, said in September that they would focus on Sinjar after liberating the nearby towns of Rabia, Mahmoudiya and Zumarr.



Army Lt. Gen. James L. Terry, commander of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, speaks to reporters Thursday in the Pentagon.

US wary about ramping up airstrikes on Islamic State

By JON HARPER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Pentagon officials are expressing caution about intensifying the air war against Islamic State militants despite calls by Iraqi leaders to step up the pace of airstrikes.

Since the bombing campaign against the Islamic State began in August, the international coalition has conducted more than 1,300 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, the bulk by American forces.

During a visit to Iraq earlier this month by Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, Iraqi leaders called for more bombing, according to Pentagon press secretary Rear Adm. John Kirby. But U.S. military officials have indicated that they're not inclined to ramp up operations — at least not in the near term.

One major concern for the Pentagon is the risk of civilian or friendly-fire casualties, which could create operational and political problems for the coalition. "The coalition is really very deliberate about how it conducts strikes out there," Army Lt. Gen. James Terry, the commander of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, told reporters at the Pentagon on Thursday.

"We have some great capability in terms of precision. [But] what's in the balance here is, if you're not careful ... you can strike [Sunni] tribes, you could strike Iraqi security forces, and you could create a very bad situation ... We're very conscious of any collateral damage."

Terry said that up to this point, he's seen no reports of civilian casualties resulting from coalition airstrikes.

Another issue that makes call-

“We have some great capability in terms of precision. [But] what's in the balance here is, if you're not careful ... you can strike [Sunni] tribes, and you could create a very bad situation ... We're very conscious of any collateral damage.”

Army Lt. Gen. James Terry, commander of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve

ing in strikes more challenging is the fact that the U.S. has no forward air controllers near the front lines spotting targets. The Obama administration "doesn't want American ground forces directly involved in combat operations, and U.S. troops therefore are required to stay away from the fight."

According to Terry, the process in place now requires U.S. advisers and Iraqi personnel at the division headquarters level report back to joint operations centers in Baghdad and Irbil about the locations of Iraqi forces and Islamic State fighters. American intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft flying overhead also feed information to the JOCs. Officials at the JOCs then use that information to tell coalition aircrews where to strike.

Some Iraqi leaders are reportedly keen to go on the offensive in places like Mosul, an Islamic State stronghold. But American military officials feel like the ISF needs more training and preparation before launching such operations.

"It takes some patience as we continue to build the Iraqi security forces out there," Terry said.

He said it will take "a minimum of three years" before the ISF and Kurdish peshmarga are capable of defeating the Islamic State group.

A large contingent of American trainers will begin deploying to Iraq in the coming weeks, according to Terry.

When it comes to airstrikes, "We've been very effective in delivering those fires" and "I think we've got it just about right," Terry said.

A U.S. military official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Stars and Stripes that the Iraqis' desire for more American assistance was understandable, but acceding to those demands at the present time wouldn't be in America's interest.

"A government dealing with an adversary like [the Islamic State] is always going to want the most military capability possible," the official said, but "our pace needs to be such that we ... [aren't] getting too far out in front of the ISF and making this our fight" instead of an Iraqi fight.

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PACIFIC



GRACE LEE/Courtesy of the U.S. Air Force

Airmen of the 61st Aircraft Maintenance Unit at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., work on an F-35 on Dec. 5.

Japan, Australia to provide maintenance for US F-35s

By Wyatt Olson and Matthew M. Burke
Stars and Stripes

Japan and Australia will provide maintenance and upgrades for U.S.-made F-35 fighter jets in the Pacific, the Pentagon announced Wednesday.

The countries will split the duties, with Australia servicing aircraft in the South Pacific and Japan handling the north region, a division of labor that is expected to save time and money.

"If you're having airplanes in the northern Pacific that need a rapid upgrade to respond to a new threat, having to move them 7,000 miles to do that [modification] in Australia, or vice versa, has an operational impact," Air Force Lt. Gen. Christopher C. Bogdan told reporters in Washington, D.C., Wednesday.

Australia is expected to have the facility operational no later than early 2018. Japan will have its operation up and running three to five years later, or as late as 2023.

The Pentagon did not specify where the maintenance facilities would be located. Inquiries to U.S. Forces Japan about locations were referred to U.S. Pacific Command. A spokesman

at PACOM said Wednesday he did not know the locations.

However, Bryan Bullerick, president of defense contractor BGSE Group, said in an email that his firm had completed an F-35 repair hangar at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni on the Japanese mainland and that "more would be coming in Iwakuni."

Bullerick said his firm had also been contacted by a design firm in charge of constructing an F-35 hangar at Kadzeta Air Base on Okinawa. That firm asked to use BGSE equipment as a basis for its design.

Australian Defense Minister David Johnston said in a news release Wednesday that the facilities in his country would likely be based at one of two east coast sites: Royal Australian Air Force Base Amberley or RAAF Base Williamtown.

Amberley, near Brisbane in Queensland, is the RAAF's largest base. Williamtown base is to the south in New South Wales and is headquarters to Australia's Air Combat Group.

The Pentagon announced last week that heavy maintenance for F-35s in Europe would be done in Italy and Turkey.

Bogdan said that after the full

fleet of F-35s are in the Pacific and Japan has completed its facilities, the Pentagon will "see if these decisions are still appropriate and if we have to make any kind of adjustments in terms of the assignment capabilities moving forward."

The F-35 maintenance depot in the U.S. is located in Fort Worth, Texas, Bogdan said, but Japan's will likely be configured differently than it and the one in Italy. "Both the plant at Fort Worth and the plant in Italy are expansive in terms of distance on the ground," he said, as compared with Japan's vertical design.

Work will take place on a number of floors, moving through the process on elevators, Bogdan told reporters.

He said Japan is responsible for the funding and construction of its facility, which will be operated by a Japanese company. Reuters reported Wednesday that Mitsubishi Heavy Industries would handle the work in Japan initially.

Bogdan said Lockheed Martin would have oversight in Italy and Japan, with security maintained by the U.S.

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Sex workers who served US troops get day in court

By Ashley Rowland and Yoo Kyong Chang
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Former sex workers who have sued the South Korean government, claiming it encouraged them to prostitute themselves to U.S. troops after the Korean War, have their first court hearing Friday.

The 122 elderly women are asking for more than \$1.2 million, an official apology from the government and an investigation into South Korea's oversight of their work. The South Korean government and Justice Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn were named in the suit, which alleges that Seoul began encouraging the women to work as prostitutes for U.S. servicemembers in the 1950s, a practice that continued into the 1970s. A ministry litigation officer declined to comment on the case.

"They were victims of history," said Kim Milkyong, one of the attorneys for the women. She was one of several people who confirmed the contents of the lawsuit, filed June 25. The Seoul Central District Court would not provide a copy to Stars and Stripes, citing rules that bar the general release of such documents.

Until recent years, the former prostitutes' history has been relatively unknown. But experts have said that the South Korean government, fearing that the U.S. would withdraw its troops from the peninsula, encouraged the women to prostitute themselves to U.S. servicemembers to keep them happy and to bring American dollars into a struggling economy.

Many of the now elderly women still live outside the bases they once served. In Anjeong-ri, a neighborhood within sight of Camp Humphreys, many of the women have lived in squalid housing, unable to afford better in an area where rent has skyrocketed as the base has expanded.

Experts say most of the women have had difficult lives, many unable to find husbands and some giving birth to children fathered by U.S. troops. Some of the women gave their children up for adoption or raised them in relative isolation because of the dual stigmas of being an unwed mother and having interracial children.

The government insisted the women register at clinics for regular health checks. A story in Stars and Stripes from Nov. 2, 1971, described how U.S. and Korean officials monitored the health of U.S. servicemembers and the prostitutes.

Soldiers with venereal disease were treated and asked to identify the prostitutes they had been involved with from books of photos of every prostitute treated at a Korean government health clinic. A U.S. military vice control team would then help South Korean police locate the women and take them to an "isolation ward" for mandatory treatment, usually consisting of three-daily penicillin shots for four days.

A bill calling for financial support for the women's living expenses and additional research into the government's involvement and its alleged oversight of the women is pending in the National Assembly.

An aide to Kim Kwangjin, one of 10 lawmakers who sponsored the bill, filed this summer, said police and health centers told the women they were conducting "patriotic acts" with U.S. troops.

"This bill is to let people know that the women are victims and the state needs to take responsibility for them," he said.

Lee Na-young, a sociology professor at Chung-Ang University in Seoul, said Seoul is unlikely to concede that it encouraged prostitution. "South Korea achieved its national security by using women's bodies and sex," she said.

The women have had little money or backing to sue the government, she said. But increased attention on another group known in South Korea as "comfort women," who were forced into sexual slavery during the Japanese occupation, has benefited the former prostitutes. Both groups support each other, with the former prostitutes attending weekly rallies that the comfort women hold outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.

The U.S. military has said it is aware of the case but declined to comment on the women's claims or the lawsuit. A statement after the suit was filed said U.S. Forces Korea has zero tolerance for prostitution.

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MILITARY

Company ordered to release vehicles

By ADAM L. MATHIS
Stars and Stripes

A Defense Department subcontractor was ordered on Wednesday to release dozens of servicemembers' and civilians' vehicles seized in a financial dispute between the subcontractor and its partner company.

A U.S. District Court judge ordered Liberty Global Logistics, based in Lake Success, N.Y., to release 66 vehicles held as a lien against more than \$3.6 million the company claimed it was owed

by International Auto Logistics, the Defense Department's contractor responsible for shipping Defense Department employees' vehicles.

Liberty is also enjoined from seizing any more vehicles unless given permission by the court.

Liberty seized the vehicles on Dec. 11 after it claimed International stopped making payments on "undisputed ocean freight," according to court documents. The company also claimed — in a document opposing International's motion — that International

owed almost \$20 million in other fees

International argued the two companies had been in negotiations and the seizure was nothing more than "self-help larceny."

International and Liberty have had disputes about money reaching back to at least September, with Liberty citing a lack of payment and International arguing it was not receiving adequate shipping information to pay bills. Wednesday's order requires International to pay ocean freight bills "that the parties have agreed

are due and owing through Friday" to Liberty. International must also stay current on all future charges on a weekly basis and Liberty must provide "appropriate and adequate billing support."

The judge ordered both sides to settle any outstanding issues by arbitration.

International has faced heavy criticism for the late delivery of vehicles and failure to provide accurate tracking information.

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ROTC sergeant is acquitted of rape

SPEARFISH, S.D. — An ROTC sergeant at Black Hills State University has been found not guilty of raping a cadet in the program, but guilty of furnishing alcohol to an underage woman last spring.

The Rapid City Journal reports that 39-year-old Cesar Olaso was recently sentenced to serve three days in jail and spend a year on probation.

Olaso would have faced up to 25 years in prison had he been convicted on the rape charge.

Army Col. Lynna Speier says Olaso remains suspended from his ROTC duties pending a military review.

From The Associated Press

Security firm gets contract after protest is dismissed

By MATT MILLHAM
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — An Army contract for security at its bases in Germany is moving ahead after the U.S. Government Accountability Office dismissed a protest against the award.

The decision essentially upholds the four-year, \$334 million contract the Army awarded to Pond Security Service in October.

"Naturally we're pleased to hear the good news," said Chad Geier, Pond's chief of staff. "But we more or less expected it to go this way."

Earlier in the year, Pond — which has been providing security to U.S. Army posts since the 1980s — lost a bid to continue the job to German rival Sicherheit Nord. That award was canceled two months later after protests to the GAO by Pond and U.S.-based security company Triple Canopy.

GAO dismissed those complaints after the Army agreed to undertake "remedial action," which included reopening the competition and allowing companies that had originally bid on the contract to provide additional information about their offers.

The Army is now moving forward with Pond, said a spokeswoman for the Army's 49th Contracting Support Brigade.

The decision was the second bit of good news Pond received this week. On Monday, the company announced it had won a contract to guard American school buses.

A spokesman for the Department of Defense Dependents Schools-Europe said Pond was awarded the contract to provide security attendants on its buses in the central European sector, which covers the Bavaria and Kaiserslautern districts in Germany. That contract, valued at \$21 million, includes a six-month base period with four one-year options, said DODDS-Europe spokesman Bob Purttman.

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MILITARY

Military airships getting a test near Baltimore

By DAVID DISHNEAU
The Associated Press

The U.S. military is testing a new cruise-missile defense system by launching a blimp-like airship at Aberdeen Proving Ground near Baltimore.

Reporters in the region got their first look Wednesday at JLENS, short for Joint Land Attack Cruise Missile Defense Elevated Netted Sensor System.

When fully deployed this winter, the system will feature two unmanned, helium-filled aerostats, tethered to concrete pads four miles apart.

They'll float at an altitude of 10,000 feet in a planned, three-year test. One will use radar to continuously scan in a 340-mile radius, roughly from Norfolk, Va., to upstate New York. The other will carry precision radar, enabling controllers on the ground to pinpoint targets.

The aerostats don't carry weapons, military officials say. Enemy missiles would be destroyed by ground- or ship-based weapons.

"The point of this exercise is to test how well it would integrate with existing systems to do cruise missile defense around the national capital region," said Air Force Maj. Beth Smith of the North American Aerospace Defense Command.

JLENS, built by Raytheon Co.,

'The point of this exercise is to test how well it would integrate with existing systems to do cruise missile defense around the national capital region.'

Air Force Maj. Beth Smith
North American Aerospace Defense Command.

has cost the government about \$2.8 billion so far. Congress approved another \$43.3 million last week for the first year of the test.

Proponents say JLENS will save money in the long run by reducing the need for surveillance by conventional aircraft.

"The analysis we've done says it's about five to seven times less than operating a fleet of aircraft to cover the same area over the same time period," said Douglas Burgess, Raytheon's JLENS program director.

The fat, white balloons, each 80 yards long, are part of a new wave of lighter-than-air surveillance vehicles. The government also has deployed tethered air-



PATRICK SEMANSKY/AP

U.S. Air Force Col. William Pitts walks in front of an unmanned aerostat that is part of a new U.S. military cruise-missile defense system during a media preview Wednesday in Middle River, Md.

ships near the Mexican border, in Iraq and Afghanistan and in the Caribbean Ocean to combat drug smuggling.

JLENS pairs two aerostats in a single "orbit." A second orbit is being held in reserve at the Utah Test and Training Range near Salt Lake City.

The airships at Aberdeen will

be the first of their type near major East Coast cities, visible to large numbers of people in the Interstate 95 corridor.

The military says the balloons won't carry cameras, but privacy advocates are leery of their ability to constantly monitor moving objects, including cars on the ground.

"It's that persistent surveillance that raises all the privacy concerns," said David Rochac, senior staff attorney with the Maryland branch of the American Civil Liberties Union.

"It's important to remember that Maryland is not the battlefield and we are not the enemy."

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MILITARY

Air Force Cross awarded to pararescueman for bravery

By JON HARPER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A pararescueman was awarded the Air Force Cross for his bravery in Afghanistan.

Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James presented the medal Wednesday to Master Sgt. Ivan Ruiz during a ceremony at Hurlburt Field, Fla., the home of Air Force Special Operations Command.

Only five other servicemembers have received the Air Force Cross since 9/11. It ranks second to the Medal of Honor among awards for valor that airmen can earn.

A member of 56th Rescue Squadron at Royal Air Force, Lakenheath, England, Ruiz was deployed to Afghanistan last year as part of the 22nd Expeditionary Special Tactics Squadron.

On Dec. 10, 2013, he was working with U.S. Army Special Forces in Kandahar province when he and two battle buddies were cut off from their teammates while moving through enemy compounds.

“I didn't really think, I reacted. Anytime something bad happens in my career, I just fall back on my training.”

Master Sgt. Ivan Ruiz
on actions that earned him
the Air Force Cross

After killing several insurgents at point-blank range, the three were pinned down in a courtyard by enemy gunfire and grenades. The two soldiers with Ruiz were seriously wounded and left immobile and exposed. Ruiz sprinted through gunfire to engage the enemy and defend his teammates, according to an AFSOC description of the battle.

With grenades exploding 15 feet from him, he kept firing at multiple enemy positions to prevent insurgents from overrunning his wounded battle buddies. Ruiz fought off the Taliban until reinforcements arrived.

After receiving fire support,

with bullets still flying around him, Ruiz dragged the wounded soldiers out of harm's way and administered life-saving first aid.

“I just wanted to make sure my guys didn't get hurt any more than they already were,” Ruiz said at Hurlburt, according to an AFSOC news release. “I just wanted to do my job.”

James praised Ruiz for his actions.

“We reserve the Air Force Cross for those special few who exhibit unequalled courage and bravery despite overwhelming odds, and that's exactly what [Ruiz] did,” she said during the ceremony, according to the news release.

Ruiz credits his training for enabling him to respond.

“I didn't really think, I reacted,” Ruiz said, according to the news release. “Anytime something bad happens in my career, I just fall back on my training. It prepares us for what we can encounter when we are doing our work.”

Also attending the ceremony were two Special Forces sol-



CHRISTOPHER CALLAWAY/Courtesy of the U.S. Air Force

Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James pins the Air Force Cross on Master Sgt. Ivan Ruiz at Hurlburt Field, Fla., on Wednesday.

diers whom Ruiz saved in the courtyard.

“I have a great deal of respect for what [Ruiz] and guys like him bring to the fight,” said one soldier, who was not identified in the news release. “It's always good to know you have guys like that out there with you.”

Ruiz received a Bronze Star with “V” device for his bravery during another battle in Afghanistan just three months before the fight that earned him the Air

Force Cross. Over the course of a 13-hour engagement with insurgents in September 2013, Ruiz climbed a hillside and repeatedly exposed himself to hostile fire as he took on eight enemy fighting positions. He helped repel multiple attacks and contributed to more than 100 insurgent deaths, according to an Air Force description of the engagement.

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NATION

Data show many abused kids die after file opened

By HOLBROOK MOHR
AND GARANCE BURKE
The Associated Press

BUTTE, Mont. — At least 786 children died of abuse or neglect in the U.S. in a six-year span in plain view of child protection authorities — many of them beaten, starved or left alone to rot while agencies had good reason to know they were in danger, The Associated Press has found.

To determine that number, the AP canvassed the 50 states, the District of Columbia and branches of the military — circumventing a system that does a terrible job of accounting for child deaths. Many states struggled to provide numbers. Secrecy often prevailed.

Most of the 786 children whose cases were compiled by the AP were under the age of 4. They lost their lives even as authorities were investigating their families or providing some form of protective services because of previous instances of neglect or violence or other troubles in the home.

Take Mattisyn Blaz, a 2-month-old Montana girl who died when her father spiked her "like a football," in the words of a prosecutor.

Matthew Blaz was well-known

to child services personnel and police. Just two weeks after Mattisyn was born on June 25, 2013, he came home drunk, grabbed his wife by her hair and threw her to the kitchen floor while she clung to the newborn.

Jennifer Blaz said a child protective services worker visited the day after her husband's attack, spoke with her briefly and left. Her husband pleaded guilty to assault and was ordered by a judge to take anger management classes and stay away from his wife. Convinced he had changed, his wife allowed him to return to the home.

She said the next official contact between the family and Montana child services came more than six weeks later — the day of Mattisyn's funeral.

Many factors can contribute to the abuse dilemma nationwide: The child protective services system is plagued with worker shortages and a serious overload of cases. Budgets are tight, and nearly 40 percent of the 3 million child abuse and neglect complaints made annually to child protective services hotlines are "screened out" and never investigated.

Also, insufficient training for those who answer child abuse ho-

ttlines leads to reports being misclassified, sometimes with deadly consequences; a lack of a comprehensive national child welfare database allows some abusers to avoid detection by moving to different states; and a policy that promotes keeping families intact can play a major role in the number of deaths.

Because no single, complete set of data exists for the deaths of children who already were being overseen by child welfare caseworkers, the information compiled over the course of AP's eight-month investigation represents the most comprehensive statistics publicly available.

But the number of abuse and neglect fatalities where a prior open case existed at the time of death is undoubtedly much higher than the tally of 760.

States submit information on child abuse deaths to the federal government on a voluntary basis — some of it comprehensive, some of it inaccurate. Still, no state has ever been found in violation of disclosure requirements and federal grants have never been withheld, according to Catherine Nolan, who directs the Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, a sub-agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Execs charged in W.Va. river spill

The Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — When state inspectors arrived at Freedom Industries asking about a licorice smell enveloping West Virginia's capital city, the point person at the tank farm, Dennis P. Farrell, told them he knew nothing about a chemical leak.

He seemed to brush off cause for concern over the odor in January. It was the industry's busy season, after all, with chemical shipments coming and going.

On a brief tour, inspectors and Farrell quickly saw what was already contaminating 300,000 people's drinking water: a 400-square-foot pool of chemicals, 4 inches deep in some spots, had oozed out of an old abandoned tank, through a dilapidated, cracked containment wall and into the Elk River below. The

company tried to stop the flow by tossing a cinder block on top of one bag of absorbent material, which failed, according to state email records.

Almost a year later, Farrell, three other former Freedom executives, the company itself and two other employees are facing criminal charges in the spill. Executive Gary Southern and former joint owners William E. Tis, Charles E. Herzog and Farrell face Clean Water Act charges for their roles with Freedom. During their time as Freedom corporate officers, Farrell, Tis, Herzog and Southern "approved funding only for those projects that would result in increased business revenue for Freedom or that were necessary to make immediate repairs to equipment that was broken or about to break," the in-

dictment said.

The men ignored or failed to fund other projects to repair, maintain and improve equipment and systems needed for compliance with environmental regulations, including addressing drainage problems in the containment area.

Southern's attorney, Robert Allen, said Wednesday that his client plans to plead not guilty and "vigorously fight the charges."

According to health officials, after the spill, more than 400 people were treated at hospitals for symptoms that matched what's expected from exposure to the chemical, known as MCHM.

Per state orders, Freedom tank farm was razed in October, including the leaky World War II-era tank with two holes, just a few millimeters each.



MICHAEL RUBINKAM/AP

Reading, Pa., City Councilman Jeff Waltman successfully fought to save the city's Christmas tree, a 50-foot Norway spruce residents compared to the spindly tree in "A Charlie Brown Christmas."

Charlie Brown Christmas tree wins over Pa. town

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM
The Associated Press

READING, Pa. — Reading's official Christmas tree has brought the city plenty of grief. Good grief.

When the 50-foot Norway spruce went up last month, it drew immediate comparisons to the scraggly sapling in "A Charlie Brown Christmas." Its giant bare spots and asymmetrical branches were no one's idea of Christmas tree perfection — especially in Pennsylvania, one of the nation's largest producers. Some residents and city officials called it an embarrassment and demanded it be replaced with a more suitable specimen.

Instead, Reading decided to embrace the Charlie Brown theme.

Workers wrapped a blue blanket around its base — a Linus — and adorned it with a single red ball. The city announced a worldwide photo and essay contest, with winners to receive copies of the book version of the beloved TV special. And on Saturday, the public is invited to give the tree a makeover, just like the "Peanuts" gang surprised Charlie Brown by turning his puny pine into a trimmed, twinkling tannenbaum.

Turns out Reading's tree wasn't bad at all, really. It just needed a

little love. "Christmas is so commercialized that we tend to forget what Christmas was used to be like," said Mayor Vaughn Spencer, channeling good of Charlie Brown himself. "Sometimes we have to keep things in perspective, and I think that's the lesson here."

Amy Johnson, the daughter of the late "Peanuts" creator Charles Schulz, said her father would be tickled that "A Charlie Brown Christmas" has made a real-world impact nearly a half-century after its release. "All he ever wanted to do with his strip was make people happy," she said. "And if he could bring the town together, that would make him very happy."

As generations of fans know, "A Charlie Brown Christmas" has the lovable loser picking a tree for the Christmas play. After he rescues a tiny sapling that's losing its needles, the other kids scold him for his ineptitude and laugh derisively at the tree. Then Linus tells the biblical story of Jesus' birth, and the gang has a change of heart.

City Councilman Jeff Waltman said the conflict symbolizes Reading itself — a full of potential and ready for transformation.

"This tree carries its own little spirit," he said. "It has its own little voice now."

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STARS AND STRIPES

NATION

Sources link North Korea to Sony hack

By **BERNARD CONDON, ERIC TUCKER AND MAE ANDERSON**
The Associated Press

NEW YORK—A U.S. official says North Korea is linked to the unprecedented hack of Sony Pictures that exposed a trove of sensitive documents and escalated to threats of terrorism, driving the studio to cancel release of the movie "The Interview" believed to be the motive for the cyberattack.

The attack is possibly the costliest ever for a U.S. company, said Avivah Litan, a cybersecurity analyst at research firm Gartner. "This attack went to the heart and core of Sony's business and succeeded," she said. "We haven't seen any attack like this in the annals of U.S. breach history."

Federal investigators believe there is a connection between the Sony hack and the isolated communist nation, according to an official who spoke on condition of anonymity because the official was not authorized to openly discuss an ongoing criminal case.

At a press conference Thursday, White House spokesman Josh Earnest declined to blame North Korea. Earnest said he doesn't want to get ahead of investigations by the Justice Department and the FBI.

North Korea has denounced "The Interview" but earlier this month said the hack might have been carried out by sympathizers. The movie features a pair of journalists played by James Franco and Seth Rogen who are asked by the CIA to assassinate North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un.

A besieged Sony on Wednesday canceled the Christmas Day release of the film, citing threats of violence by the hackers and decisions by the largest multiplex chains in North America to pull screenings. The hackers, who call themselves Guardians of Peace, had made threats of violence

reminiscent of Sept. 11, 2001, if movie theatres showed the film. Sony later said it has "no further release plans for the film."

"We are deeply saddened at this brazen effort to suppress the distribution of a movie," Sony Pictures said in a statement.

National Security Council spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan said the U.S. government had no involvement in Sony's decision. She said artists and entertainers have the right to produce and distribute whatever content they want in the U.S.

John McCain, a Republican senator from Arizona, called Sony's decision to cancel the movie a "troubling precedent that will only empower and embolden bad actors to use cyber as an offensive weapon even more aggressively in the future."

How much the cyberattack will ultimately cost Sony is unclear. Sony faces trouble on several fronts after nearly four weeks since the hackers first crippled its computer systems and started dumping thousands of emails and private documents online.

In addition to vanishing box-office revenue from "The Interview," leaked documents could muck up production schedules, experts say. There will be the cost of defending the studio against lawsuits by ex-employees angry over leaked Social Security numbers and other personal information. And then there are actors who might decide to work at another studio.

Beyond the financial blow, some say the attack and Sony's capitulation has raised troubling questions about self-censorship and whether other studios and U.S. companies are now also vulnerable.

"Artistic freedom is at risk," said Efraim Levy, a senior financial analyst at research firm S&P Capital IQ. "Are we not going to put out movies that offend some constituencies?"

spokesman Chris Ward said in a statement to Stars and Stripes regarding the showing of the movie at its Pacific theaters.

The decision was made in September when AAFES confirmed other movies would be available, Ward said. AAFES has not received any command requests for the movie, he added.

Had Sony not decided this week to pull the movie, service-members stationed in the Pacific would not have been able to see it. Ward said Sony had decided not to release the movie in Asia.

First-run movies that will be shown at Exchange theaters outside the U.S. from Dec. 17-31 are "The Hobbit," "Annie," "Night at the Museum," "Into the Woods," and "Unbroken."

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Possible damage to Sony

BOX OFFICE LOSSES

With a modest budget of about \$40 million, "The Interview" had been predicted to gross around \$30 million in its opening weekend. Doug Stone, president of film industry newsletter Box Office Analyst, forecast that Sony could have grossed \$120 million in U.S. and foreign box office revenue from the film. It has already spent tens of millions on marketing.

SCRIPT SPOILERS

A leaked script of the Sony's upcoming James Bond film "Spectre" led to an online frenzy of articles warning readers of "major spoilers."

Sheth Shapiro, a professor at the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts, thinks the potential damage from a hit to the blockbuster franchise is big. "How can they proceed if everyone in the audience has already read the script?" he said.

Others disagreed, noting that people flooded to movies like "Titanic" though everyone knew the ending.

FLEEING TALENT?

It's not yet clear if the leaks of sensitive emails will cause agents and top actors to think twice about working with Sony.

In the short term, some think it may

hurt because the massive leak hurts prestige and indicates Sony is not being run as well as it should, said Shapiro.

Others say business interests will trump ego.

LEGAL WOES

Earlier this week, four former employees sued Sony for not protecting their private information from hackers. The lawsuits seek class-action status on behalf of the nearly 50,000 Sony Pictures employees whose Social Security numbers and other private data was exposed.

Legal experts said the cases are likely just two of many that will be filed over the data breach.

SOURCE: The Associated Press

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AAFES made the call in
Sept. to not show the film

By **ASHLEY ROWLAND**
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea—Months before Sony scuttled the release of "The Interview," AAFES had already decided against showing the movie depicting the assassination of Kim Jong Un in any of its theaters.

But unlike Sony Pictures Entertainment, which announced Wednesday that it was pulling the movie because of threats to U.S. theaters, AAFES said it had decided not to show it because other films scheduled to be released around the same time are expected to have wider audience appeal.

"The decision was not related to political concerns about the content of the film," Army and Air Force Exchange Service

EUROPE

PORTRAYING HEROES



Leonard van Oord takes his helmet off to listen for enemy movement while portraying a squad leader of the 106th Infantry Division as part of a re-enactment Saturday. The 106th fought in the same forest 70 years ago during the Battle of the Bulge.

Re-enactors aim to catch spirit of US WWII troops in Battle of Bulge

By JOSHUA L. DEMOTTS
Stars and Stripes

Pvt. Edwin Cotter kneels in the cold, wet mud of the Prümberg, a large hill above St. Vith, near the German border, catching his breath as snowflakes float to the ground blanketing the forest around him. Shovels rhythmically break ground and the barking commands of soldiers disturb the otherwise peaceful setting.

"Cotter!" ... schunk ... schunk...
"Use branches for cover, think about camouflage!" ... schunk ...

Soldiers with the 106th Infantry Division begin digging foxholes as they prepare to take their turn on the front lines in the Ardennes Forest. The date is Dec. 13, 2014, yet it feels and looks exactly as it must have 70 years ago when the U.S. and its allies were engaged in war against Nazi Germany. These soldiers are actually re-enactors, mostly from the Netherlands, who commit a lot of time and money to

portray World War II U.S. infantrymen.

‘Those people absolutely look like Americans 70 years ago; it’s amazing what they did out here.’

Herb Shearer
106th Infantry Division veteran of the Battle of the Bulge

actor, American Patrol maintains a high level of authenticity. Focusing on different units every year, the group studies each unit in depth, looking at everything from the uniforms worn to the unit’s achievements and everything in between.

"We don't just want to look good or pose in a uniform," said van Oord. "We want to know the unit we portray and the history. We want to understand their living conditions."

This year, for the 70th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge, American Patrol teamed up with about five other groups to portray units from the U.S. 106th Infantry Division. According to Carl Wouters, the 106th Infantry Division Association’s Belgium liaison, the actions of the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne overshadowed those of the 106th ID, but St. Vith arguably was an equally important road junction that had great tactical importance for the Germans.

STAR PAGE 11



Mike Struik, portraying a wounded U.S. soldier, lies in pain during a Battle of the Bulge re-enactment on Saturday.



Koen Monnickendam looks back at the line of foxholes he and other re-enactors occupied Monday while portraying the 106th Infantry Division in the very forest that unit fought in 70 years ago.



Wesley van Reen displays his authentic looking cigarette case complete with a family photo, a '40s pin-up girl and homemade '40s replica cigarettes on Sunday.



Dutch re-enactors, from left to right, Wesley van Reen, Rico Peters and Sjoerd Bijsterveld, warm up with small fires near their foxholes. They were portraying the 106th Infantry Division in the heights above St. Vith, Belgium.

EUROPE

FROM PAGE 10

Despite being stretched too thin with little-to-no experience, the young men of the 106th, the last infantry division to be activated in World War II, truly lost their innocence overnight when the Germans attacked them on Dec. 16, 1944. Two of the division's three regiments were surrounded and completely cut off from supplies and reinforcements. After three days of holding out and taking mass casualties, both regimental commanders independently decided to surrender what was left of their regiments on Dec. 19, 1944.

"The actions of the division made it possible for the other units to move in from the rear, join the fight and plug the hole in the 'dam,'" Wouters said. "Against all odds, they put up one hell of a fight. For that, they deserve credit, praise and everlasting respect."

Paying respect and remembering are largely the reasons American Patrol members participate in these re-enactments.

"We do this to remember the people who liberated Western Europe 70 years ago, to make sure

They would've been real good soldiers back in World War II; they would have. I'll never forget this.'

Sheaner attending the re-enactment near St. Vith, Belgium

Two 106th ID veterans of the Battle of the Bulge, Herb Sheaner Jr., 90, and Dick Lockhart, 91, came to the re-enactment site on Prümberg, where actual fighting had taken place, to see what the young re-enactors were doing.

They were here for the third annual Flag of Friendship Ceremony held in St. Vith on Sunday. The re-enactors also stood in formation, performed a 27-gun salute and carried flowers in the ceremony.

Sheaner and Lockhart saw the men in their foxholes and were given a tour of the headquarters, where they had coffee and talked with the re-enactor commanding officer before witnessing a mock battle with an advancing German unit.

According to Sheaner, the young re-enactors could've been his buddies 70 years ago at about the right ages and wearing the same clothing and gear.

"Those people absolutely look like Americans 70 years ago, it's amazing what they did out here," Sheaner said.

"They would've been real good soldiers back in World War II; they would have. I'll never forget this."

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The young men of American Patrol, a Dutch re-enactment group, listen to orders from their platoon leader on Sunday in the forest of Prömerberg, the large hill between St. Vith and Schonberg.



Herbert Sheaner visits the mostly Dutch World War II re-enactment groups that are praying his unit, the 106th Infantry Division, on Monday. Sheaner fought there as a 20-year-old soldier in the Battle of the Bulge.



Dutch re-enactors portraying U.S. soldiers in the 106th Infantry Division march to the front lines above St. Vith on Saturday.



Re-enactors portray German forces on Monday as they fight re-enactors portraying American soldiers.



Leonard van Oord, portraying an American squad leader is taken captive by a man playing the role of a German soldier during a re-enactment.

INDEPENDENT NEWS FOR THE U.S. MILITARY COMMUNITY

Whenever They Fight and Wherever They Live

The first Stars and Stripes was printed during the Civil War, when a band of Union soldiers published a handful of editions.

During World War I, Stars and Stripes reappeared in Paris on February 8, 1918, to serve the doughboys of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), under order of General of the Armies John J. Pershing. An all-military staff produced it weekly until the war's end.

A second renaissance began on April 18, 1942, when a small group of servicemen began publishing a four-page weekly Stars and Stripes in London. They sold each copy for "tuppence" (about 5 cents) and in no time doubled their page count to eight pages, printing daily instead of weekly.

The first World War II edition of Stars and Stripes featured an interview with Gen. George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff. Marshall quoted Gen. Pershing, World War I Commander of the AEF, who described Stripes as a major factor in sustaining morale. Stars and Stripes later found a champion and protector in Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander and later president of the United States.

Eisenhower enforced a hands-off policy in regard to Stars and Stripes that continues to the present day.

Operations expanded, following GIs to the battlefield to bring them the news. During the war, Stars and Stripes published over 30

separate editions, running up to 24 pages per issue.

At one time, Stars and Stripes had some 25 printing locations in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific. The Pacific edition was launched a week after VE day (Victory in Europe, May 8, 1945).

The war ended—but Stars and Stripes kept going. Its reporters and photographers continued to join American troops in the field, throughout the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, during the 1990s Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and in Bosnia and Kosovo.

From the 2003 outset of Operation Enduring Freedom, Stars and Stripes was there to report first-hand. The war in Afghanistan continues to receive steady coverage. And during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Stripes reporters embedded with military units in Kuwait and Iraq, as well as on Navy ships in the region.

Stars and Stripes today is a multimedia news organization. The majority of Stars and Stripes unique reporting efforts is read now in digital form, either online at stripes.com or via mobile offerings for iPhone, Android and iPad, in over 200 countries around the world.

The print newspaper is still available for servicemembers, government civilians and their families in



Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific—and in contingency areas. Washington, D.C., hosts the Central office, where daily editions are transported to printers in Afghanistan, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Djibouti, as well as in Germany, Italy, UK, Japan, and South Korea. Stars and Stripes also publishes several weeklies (Stripes Guam, Japan, Korea and Okinawa), designed to serve the

needs of their respective military communities.

A U.S. edition comprised exclusively of Stars and Stripes reports from around the world now serves stateside forces and veterans. The U.S. edition is published in partnership with commercial newspaper publishers who serve communities with large military populations.

STARS AND STRIPES RECOGNIZED FOR EXCELLENCE

2014 VFW News Media Award – For outstanding contribution to a better understanding of our American way of life and its institutions and interests by honest and forthright reporting.

2013 Best American Newspaper Narrative Writing Contest – Notable Narrative Winner
Recipient: Martin Kuz: "Soldiers Recount Attack"

2013 National Headline Awards – Second Place: News Series (Forever After: A Warrior Wounded; A Family Challenged)

2013 min Best of Web: Redesign – Honorable Mention
Stripes UK website

2011 Military Photographer of the Year – Honorable Mention
Recipient: Joshua DeMotts

2011 Sigma Delta Chi Award – Breaking News Photography (Newspaper Circulation 100,001+ or Affiliated Website/National Magazine) Recipient: Laura Rauch: "For those I love I will sacrifice"

2011 John Reagan "Tex" McCrary Award for Excellence in Journalism – Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation

2010 Military Reporters and Editors Awards – Overseas coverage (< 100,000 circulation)
Recipient: Jon Rabinoff

2010 National Headliner Awards – First Place: Public Service (Forcing Change) – Third Place: News Series (Coming Home: The Men of Triple Deuce)

2009 George Polk Awards in Journalism – George Polk Award for Military Reporting
Recipients: Charlie Reed, Leo Shane III and Kevin Baron

2009 min Editorial & Design Awards – Editorial Print / Special Supplement: HEROES 2009; Custom Publication Design: Stripes GAMER

2007 Military Reporters and Editors Awards – Overseas coverage (< 100,000 circulation)
Recipient: Monte Morin

2006 Military Reporters and Editors Awards – Overseas coverage (< 100,000 circulation)
Recipients: Monte Morin, Joe Giordano; Honorable mention: Nancy Montgomery Photography; Fred Zimmerman

2005 Military Reporters and Editors Awards – Overseas coverage (< 100,000 circulation)
Recipient: Steve Lower Photography; Terry Boyd

2004 American Legion Excellence in Journalism Award – Ground Truth Series

2003 Scripps Howard Foundation National Journalism Award – First Amendment, Finalist

NATION

Congress not likely to stop new Cuba policy

By DEB RIECHMANN
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A lack of unanimity in both political parties toward President Barack Obama's sudden move to re-establish ties with Cuba complicates any congressional effort to scuttle the most significant change in U.S. policy toward the communist island in 50-plus years.

His initiative faces some strong resistance among lawmakers, with criticism coming mostly from Republicans, who say the new policy reverses Cuba's decades-long policies of repression, human rights abuses and aggression. Some prominent Democrats voiced opposition, too.

Opponents spoke of holding

up money to set up a full-service U.S. embassy in Havana, blocking Obama's nominee as ambassador to Cuba or other such steps. But even if they were to pass sweeping legislation to stop what Obama wants to do, he could veto it and they are unlikely to muster the two-thirds majority to override a veto.

The Republicans will control both the Senate and the House come Jan. 6, but they will face pressure from businesses and the farm industry — eyeing opportunities for commerce in Cuba — not to stand in the way of expanded ties.

The U.S. declared an embargo on most exports to Cuba in October 1960 and severed diplomatic relations in January 1961.

Three months later, Fidel Castro declared Cuba a socialist state — just a day before the doomed, U.S.-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion meant to topple him. After Castro became ill in 2006, his brother, Raul, took charge of the nation, less than 100 miles off the southern coast of Florida.

Now Obama says he will ease economic and travel restrictions on Cuba and work with Congress to end the trade embargo. This came after Cuba released American Alan Gross, who had been imprisoned for five years, and a Cuban who had spied for the U.S. In exchange, the U.S. freed three Cubans jailed in Florida.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, one of three lawmakers who flew to Cuba before dawn to escort Gross home,

praised Obama's move.

Leahy, the top Democrat on the committee that oversees foreign aid, said that over the years, he's heard members of Congress tell presidents, "Hang tough on Cuba and those Castros will be out of there any day now."

"That was said to President Kennedy, President Johnson, President Nixon, President Ford, President Carter — you see what I'm driving at," Leahy said. "The fact is they are there. The fact is, Cuba is still there."

Another Democrat, New Jersey Sen. Bob Menendez, the outgoing chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, voiced opposition to the new Cuban policy.

Menendez, whose parents are Cuban immigrants, said Cuba is

not going to reform just because Obama believes that if he extends his hand in peace, the Castro brothers suddenly will "unclench their fists."

Spits were evident on the Republican side, too.

Sen. Marco Rubio, a Cuban-American and potential presidential candidate, said the new U.S. policy would give Cuba a needed economic lift — something "the Castro regime needs to become permanent fixtures in Cuba for generations to come."

More telling for the outlook in the new Congress was the response of Sen. Bob Corker, the incoming chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, who was cautious but not critical of Obama's action.

Cuban cigars to have easier path in coming to America

By LILLIAN CUNNINGHAM
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — For cigar aficionados around the country, the warming of U.S.-Cuba relations might best be celebrated beside the smoky glow of a Cohiba. And yet stateside, that still won't be easy to do for some time.

On Wednesday, the White House announced that it would reestablish ties with Cuba. In addition to opening a U.S. embassy in Havana, the government will ease travel restrictions for Americans to the island nation. Commercial imports of Cuban goods, however, are still frozen despite the diplomatic thaw.

In 2013, the global retail value of the cigar market was more than \$23 billion, according to data from Euromonitor International. And Corporacion Habanos, an iconic producer of Cuban cigar brands like Cohiba, was the 18th-largest cigar company in the world last year, selling more than 215 million units.

For those citizens to make their way into American shops, Con-

gress would need to lift the trade embargo on Cuba, which is codified in U.S. law and beyond the scope of the executive power that Obama exercised on Wednesday. The president did, however, say in a news conference that he hopes his actions will lead to "a serious debate about lifting the embargo," and that "increased commerce is good for Americans and Cubans."

While the sale of Cuban cigars is less than imminent, small quantities will soon be easier to bring into the United States for personal use. Speaking on background, a Treasury Department official said rules on enforcement of Cuban cigar importation would ease, according to the travel changes announced by Obama.

To this point, the importation of tobacco from Cuba was not previously authorized, even for the small group of citizens who were permitted to travel between the two countries. Once the president's changes take effect in the coming weeks, however, authorized American travelers will now be allowed to import up to



RAMON ESPINOSA/AP

A worker selects cigars at the H. Upmann cigar factory in March 2013.

\$100 of Cuban alcohol or tobacco products.

Due to decades of embargo, cigar makers have long looked for other ways to satisfy Americans'

taste for the smoky contraband. In the United States, Swisher Sweets is currently the most popular brand, with a market share of 31 percent. But many brands cre-

ate cigars that are "Cuban style" or "made with Cuban seed," in an effort to skirt the illegality of importing cigars produced on the island.

Gitmo: Despite policy, official says base is 'maintaining current operations'

FROM FRONT PAGE

The Pentagon spokesman for U.S. military activity in Latin America and the Caribbean said the administration was still committed to closing the base's war-on-terror prison, which currently hold 136 foreign captives there in an operation staffed by about 2,000 U.S. troops and civilians on temporary duties.

But the U.S. military uses Guantanamo for other purposes. Its airstrip has been a launch pad for drug-interdiction and

humanitarian-relief missions in the Caribbean. U.S. Coast Guard and Navy vessels pass through on resupply missions. Just this past weekend, the Coast Guard Cutter Tampa was in port.

"As of today, the Defense Department is maintaining current operations and policies throughout the region," said Army Lt. Col. Myles B. Caggins III, the spokesman. "We continue to support the president's goal of reducing the detainee population at Guantanamo through transfers

and prosecutions."

Beyond the Detention Center Zone, there was no hint this week of the coming upheaval in U.S.-Cuban relations on the base, which resembles small-town America. It has a church, a McDonald's, a scruffy golf course, schools for sailors' children, and every morning at 8 a.m., the blare of the Star Spangled Banner.

At the U.S. Navy's base radio station, called Radio Gitmo, the shelves were bulging with fresh stocks of "Rockin' in Fidel's Back-

yard" T-shirts, Castro bobble head dolls and other souvenirs. It was also offering a new item: \$5 Santa caps in advance of the holiday season.

During the height of the Cold War, tens of thousands of troops served at Guantanamo with munitions hidden in hillside bunkers and U.S. Marines guarding a tense frontier — as portrayed in the Hollywood hit "A Few Good Men" starring Jack Nicholson, Tom Cruise and Demi Moore.

The 17.4-mile fence line was

known as the Cactus Curtain. Then in 1999, U.S. President Bill Clinton had the Marines remove the minefield, heralding a new era. In the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, successive Guantanamo base commanders, Navy captains, described the U.S.-Cuban relationship along the minefield as "benign."

Now, only the occasional sound of Cuban mines popping off in the heat or by something rustling in the minefield remind of the dangers of the frontier.

WORLD

Putin vows economy fix

By LAURA MILLS
AND VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV
The Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed Thursday to fix Russia's economic woes within two years, voicing confidence that the plummeting ruble will recover and promising to diversify Russia's gas-dependent economy.

Speaking with strong emotion and looking confident, Putin also displayed a defiant stance toward the West, which he insisted was still trying to destroy Russia.

Putin acknowledged that Western economic sanctions over Russia's actions in Ukraine were just one factor behind Russia's economic crisis, accounting for roughly 25 to 30 percent of the ruble's troubles. He said a key reason for the currency's recent fall was the nation's failure to ease its overwhelming dependence on oil and gas exports.

As Putin spoke, the Russian currency was trading at 61 rubles to

the dollar. That was slightly lower than last night but up 12 percent from the historic low of 80 to the dollar that it hit earlier this week.

The Russian leader sought to soothe market fears that the government could use administrative controls, such as obliging exporters to sell their currency earnings, to help stabilize the ruble.

Putin said the nation's currency reserves are sufficient to keep the economy in stable condition, adding that the Central Bank shouldn't aimlessly "burn" its \$419 billion in reserves.

"Our economy will overcome the current situation. How much time will be needed for that? Under the most unfavorable circumstances I think it will take about two years," he said.

Putin struck a defiant note against America and the European Union, saying that sanctions slapped against Russia after it seized the Black Sea region of Crimea in March were part of a

historical campaign to weaken Russia. He accused the West of trying to infringe on Russia's sovereignty, adding that the Ukrainian crisis was just a pretext for Western action.

"Sometimes I think, maybe they'll let the bear eat berries and honey in the forest, maybe they will leave it in peace," said Putin, referring to Russia's famed symbol. "They will not. Because they will always try to put him on a chain, and as soon as they succeed in doing so they tear out his fangs and his claws."

He said by fangs and claws he meant Russia's nuclear weapons, adding that the West wants to weaken Russia to win control over its rich natural resources.

"Once they've taken out his claws and his fangs, then the bear is no longer necessary. He'll be someone a stuffed animal," he said.

"The issue is not Crimea, the issue is that we are protecting our sovereignty and our right to exist."



PAVEL GOLOVNIK/AP

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday during his annual news conference in Moscow that the economy will rebound and the ruble will stabilize.

Putin defended Russia's increased military activities, including Baltic flights that NATO said put civilian flights at risk, as a necessary response to what he described as aggressive Western action.

Despite his anti-Western rhetoric, Putin urged a political solution for the crisis in Ukraine, where

pro-Russian insurgents have been battling Ukrainian government troops since April, leaving 4,700 people dead.

Putin also held out hope for normalizing ties with the West, saying that Russia still hopes to expand its gas supplies to southern Europe using a prospective gas hub on Turkey's border with Greece.

People attend the funeral Wednesday of a student killed in Tuesday's Taliban attack on a Peshawar, Pakistan, school. A three-day official mourning period ended Wednesday, a day after seven Taliban gunmen killed 148 people.



MOHAMMAD SHAJAD/AP

Siege a 'horrific wake-up call' for Australia

The Associated Press

SYDNEY — Australia's prime minister said Thursday that a deadly siege in a Sydney cafe may have been preventable, as the chorus of critics demanding to know why the gunman was out on bail despite facing a string of violent charges grew louder.

Man Haron Monis, 50, an Iranian-born, self-styled cleric with a lengthy criminal history, burst into a downtown Sydney cafe on Monday wielding a shotgun, taking 17 people hostage. The siege ended 16 hours later when police stormed into the cafe to free the captives, two of whom were killed in a barrage of gunfire, along with Monis.

"This has been a horrific wake-up call," Prime Minister Tony Abbott told Macquarie Radio. "This was an atrocity — it may well have been a preventable atrocity, and that's why this swift and thorough review is so important."

Court documents detail Monis' long history with the law. In 2011, Nolen Hayson Pal — his ex-partner and mother of their two sons — told police Monis had threatened her life. He was subsequently charged with stalking and intimidation intending to cause fear of physical or mental harm.

Pal testified in January 2012 that Monis said to her, "If I don't get to see the boys more than I am seeing them now, I'll make sure you pay for it — even if it means I have to shoot you."

Monis was ultimately found not guilty of the charge. A year later, Pal was stabbed to death and set on fire.

Police charged Monis' then-partner, Amirah Droudis, with Pal's murder, and charged Monis as an accessory. Both were out on bail on the charges when Monis launched his siege on the cafe. He was also facing 40 charges of sexual assault, and had been granted bail on those charges as well.

Monis was convicted and sentenced last year to 300 hours of community service for sending what a judge called "grossly offensive" letters to families of soldiers killed in Afghanistan from 2007-09.

Three days before he began his siege, Australia's highest court refused to hear his appeal of the convictions for sending the letters. The next business day, Monis walked into the Lindt Chocolate Cafe, a short stroll from the courtroom where the ruling was delivered.

Pakistan buries school victims

The Associated Press

PESHAWAR, Pakistan — As they buried their children Wednesday, families spoke of their dreams. One boy had just gotten high marks on his midterm and hoped to become a pilot. A 13-year-old was about to become a doctor. Another kid just loved playing video games with his cousins.

At cemeteries across the Pakistani city of Peshawar, families lowered the rough wooden coffins of young boys and their teachers into the cold ground and gathered under funeral tents or at home, trying to comprehend the militant attack a day earlier on a school that killed 148 people, almost all of them young students.

The Pakistani government and military vowed a stepped up campaign aimed at rooting out militant strongholds in the country's border regions along the border with Afghanistan. In a sign of how deeply the attack shook Pakistan, the head of the military flew to Kabul and sought help from the Afghan government — which with Islamabad has long had a tense relationship — against militant commanders behind the attack, a Pakistani military official told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of

anonymity.

In downtown Peshawar, the family of Shyer Khan, a 14-year-old student killed on Tuesday, gathered to comfort his father, who was too overwhelmed by grief to talk. Shyer's older brother, Muneeb, was in the auditorium when gunmen burst through the doors Tuesday morning, took the stage and began shooting randomly. He fell to the floor and perished.

"There was so much bloodshed," Muneeb said softly. "I closed my eyes and lay on the floor for an hour."

When the militants moved on to other parts of the school, he escaped. His younger brother, however, was in a nearby classroom and was killed. At the gathering in the Khans' home, his family spoke of how Shyer was a fan of video games like "Call of Duty" and teasing his sisters.

The Pakistani Taliban, which has waged an insurrection against the government for a decade, claimed responsibility for the attack. The group says it was seeking revenge for a military assault launched in June in North Waziristan.

Pakistan has often been accused by Afghanistan of tolerating or protecting Afghan Taliban or other militants, while only trying to crack down on militants

who attack Pakistani targets.

But in the wake of Tuesday's bloodshed, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif used his strongest language yet vowing there will be no discrimination between "good or bad Taliban."

"We will continue this war until even a single terrorist is not left on our soil," he said.

Across Pakistan, stunned people held candlelight vigils in solidarity with the Peshawar victims.

In Peshawar, families were simply trying to cope. The army-run school was well respected in the city, and many parents sent their children there in hopes of a good education.

"My son was a brilliant student," Haji Dost Muhammad said. His son Asad was shot in the back and killed, the family learned. He "wanted to be a pilot," his father said, "but his soul flew from his body before he could fly a plane."

Another father on Wednesday buried his son, Muhammad Harris, 13, in the Peshawar suburbs. The boy dreamed of becoming a doctor, said Ghulam ud Din, a retired military man.

He pointed toward the fresh grave. "But today I buried both the body of my son and his dream here in this graveyard."

WORLD

Romanians far removed from drab routine

By ALISON MUTLER
The Associated Press

BUCHAREST, Romania—Romania has changed dramatically in the 25 years since the people rose up against dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, executed him and began the slow transformation to a market economy and democracy. Here are five ways that daily life has changed:

1) Registered typewriters to smart phones

Under communism, typewriters could not be bought in the shops, because the regime was fearful of people distributing anti-government manifestos. Those who had typewriters had to register them with the police every year and explain why they needed them.

Today, even young children have smartphones and tablets and people enjoy high-speed Internet.

2) Cars banned in winter ... now parked all over the sidewalk

Ceausescu rationed everything from bread to meat and gasoline. The few people who had cars could only get 20 liters (5.3 gallons) a month, often with waits at the pump of up to 48 hours. Private car use was banned altogether in the winter in the 1980s as Ceausescu squeezed people even further to pay off the country's foreign debt.



Today in Bucharest, where more than a tenth of the Romanian population lives, it can take two hours to cross the city when traffic is bad and cars clog the sidewalks, forcing pedestrians to walk in the road. Affluent families often have several cars.

3) Two hours of TV a day

Romanians famously tuned into Serbian, Bulgarian, Hungarian or even Russian television as their own state TV station was so lousy. Two hours of TV, much of that dull "news" about the first couple. In the 1980s, even

"Dallas" was taken off the small screen after Ceausescu deemed its values too decadent.

Today, viewers can pick from the national TV broadcaster's five channels and more than a dozen cable television stations offering a round-the-clock staple of news, religion, pop music, reality TV and sports for a small fee. There's huge choice — but the quality is still questionable.

4) North Korea-inspired "shopping malls"

After a visit to North Korea in 1971, Ceausescu was inspired

to build big in Bucharest. He constructed the first "shopping malls," which the population wryly dubbed "hunger circuses" as food was so scarce.

Capitalism has brought myriad modern Western-style malls, some inside the malls of old. They are so popular that there is a name for one who spends too much time in one: a "mallist" or "mallista."

5) Demolished churches to thousands of new churches

Under communism, religion was not banned, but churchgoing



Left: Romanians walk at a Christmas fair in central Bucharest on Monday. Under communism, churchgoing was discouraged for Communist Party members and the Securitate secret police. Above: A woman lights candles by gravestones during a religious service for victims of the anti-communist uprising 25 years ago, at the Heroes cemetery, in Timisoara, Romania, on Wednesday.

PHOTOS BY VADIM GHIRDA/AP

was discouraged for Communist Party members and the Securitate secret police. More than a dozen churches were razed or moved in Bucharest for Ceausescu's House of the People (also inspired by his trip to Pyongyang).

Religion has flourished since then and the number of churches and other houses of worship has grown from 12,000 to 20,000 today, according to Emil Moise, director of Solidarity for Freedom of Conscience, a nongovernmental organization that advocates a separation of church and state.

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EUROPE



ANTHONY FAIOLA/The Washington Post

Earlier this month, promotional signs appeared advertising luxury vacation apartments being constructed in Prora, Germany. A group of investors are transforming the seaside town on the site of the Strength Through Joy resort, a Nazi vacation destination that was never fully realized.

Hitler's vacation paradise is reinvented as luxury condos

By ANTHONY FAIOLA
The Washington Post

PRORA, Germany — Built by the Third Reich in the run-up to World War II, the Strength Through Joy resort was a Nazi vision of tourism's future. Happy, healthy Aryans would stay and play at the 10,000-room complex on the Baltic Sea, eating, swimming and even bowling for the Führer. Think Hitler's Cancun.

But 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the complex nicknamed the Colossus of Prora is part of a growing debate in modern Germany that pits commercialism against Vergangenheitsbewältigung — or the German word for how the country should come to terms with its dark past.

Idyllic blocks of six-story buildings stretching for 2.3 miles went up before World War II slowed construction, leaving an unfinished hull that was later retrofitted into training grounds and housing for East German soldiers. But a group of investors in this seaside town is now doing what the Nazis never could: realizing the site's final stage of transformation into a vacation wonderland. Large parts of the complex are being gutted and rebuilt into developments, including one called "New Prora" that will house luxury beachfront condominiums — half of which have been sold — as well as an upscale hotel and spa.

It's not just the cashing in on a major Nazi landmark that troubles opponents. In a sense, some argue, the renovation also is fulfilling the Third Reich's initial plan to turn the colossus into a massive tourism hub. In promotional material, developers are hailing the original project — whose design is believed to have been chosen by Hitler — as a "world-famous monument" recognized in his day

Colossus of Prora

The Colossus of Prora was mass-termed in the 1930s by Robert Ley, a top Hitler lieutenant. He led the Strength Through Joy effort, which was meant to be a cornerstone of the resort here.

At Prora, thousands of small, heated rooms facing the sea would recharge the minds and bodies of the German masses, preparing vacationers for life as the masters of Europe. They would enjoy communal meals and common entertainment areas.

Yet the colossus never lived up to Hitler's ambitions. Despite the importation of forced Polish labor to help build it faster, the resort became a low priority as World War II raged. It was left unfinished at the war's end and was briefly claimed by the Red Army before being finished into barracks for the East German military.

After reunification, historic preservationists and other government officials made determinations that the colossus was too expensive and architecturally significant to tear down. So the government sold its various blocks to different developers. A youth hostel opened in part of the complex in 2011. But the complex is now in the midst of a full-blown redevelopment, with the first owners of luxury holiday homes moving in over the summer.

— Anthony Faiola

for "award-winning architecture." Nevertheless, critics say, their plans also may wash away many of the elements that provided the reason for preserving the colossus in the first place.

"These are not harmless buildings," said J.Rostock, co-founder for the Prora documentation center. "The original purpose for Hitler was the construction of (a resort) in preparation for the war to come. This way of dealing with the building trivializes it and affirms the Nazi regime."

The facades of some blocks, for instance, are being brightened by dozens of quaint sea-facing balconies, changing the nature of the imposing, austere architecture that stood as a monument to insatiable militarism. In addition, the one documentation center at the site explaining the Big Brother-esque Strength Through Joy program — a Nazi effort to provide affordable fun to workers living the National Socialist dream — may be moved to the fringes of the complex and away from moneyed vacationers or, some fear, abandoned altogether.

Without doubt, recriminations of the Third Reich are far and wide in modern Germany, with war-era crime history taught from elementary school onward and a pacifist national identity built largely on a rejection of the past. But the Prora project is highlighting the always-thorny question here of how to deal with the most tangible relic of Germany's troubled past: Nazi architecture.

In the years after the war, some Nazi-era structures were preserved as monumental testaments to an inhuman regime, while others were pragmatically transformed into offices, army barracks and spaces for other uses. The Berlin stadium built for Hitler's 1936 Olympic Games is now home to the Hertha Berlin soccer club. The Detlev-Lohwedder-Haas — former home of Hermann Göring's Ministry of Aviation — now houses a branch of Germany's Finance Ministry.

Yet opponents in some circles — particularly historians and Jewish groups — are growing increasingly uncomfortable with projects that smack too much of commercialization or appear to slight history.

Anti-Islamist rallies grow amid immigrant backlash

By LEON MANGASARIAN
Bloomberg News

DRESDEN — An anti-Islamist group drew the biggest crowd ever for one of its rallies, even as Germany's leaders urged people not to participate in a movement that has gained in strength since starting two months ago.

Police estimated that 15,000 protesters took part in Monday night's rally and march in the eastern city of Dresden, with another 5,500 attending a demonstration against the group.

"We don't want radical Islamists here," Thomas Schmidt, 53, said at the rally, a German flag wrapped around his shoulders. "People keep trying to brand us as Nazis — but we're not Nazis. We're just worried citizens."

The organizers, who call themselves Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West, or Pegida, demand stricter immigration laws, resistance to "violent, misogynistic political ideology," and the protection of Christianity's "Western culture."

There have been similar, smaller protests in cities such as Düsseldorf in past weeks.

Pegida is part of a wave of anti-immigrant groups sweeping Europe that established parties in countries such as Britain, France and Sweden find difficult to counter. Pegida isn't a party, but it follows election successes this year of the anti-euro Alternative for Germany, or AfD, that's critical of migrants and is taking voters from Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union and her former Free Democrat allies.

"Pegida is a diffuse movement based on fear; I think it will gain more support," Joachim Scharfe, 57, a church employee, said at Monday's counterdemonstration outside the city's 18th century Hofkirche cathedral. "Most Pegida backers aren't neo-Nazis — they're people looking for simple answers."

The number of refugees pouring into Germany has increased almost 60 percent this year, with the German government estimating that 200,000 will enter the country in 2014. Last year, Germany surpassed the U.S. as the top destination globally for refugees, when 127,000 people applied for asylum in the country.

"All Baba and the 40 Dr. Dealers — depart this immediately," read one sign held up by two men on the edge of Dresden's historic center last night. The crowd frequently broke into chants of the slogan used by those who took to the streets to topple the East German government in 1989: "We are the People!" The crowd criticized television and newspaper coverage of the movement with chants of "Media Lies!"

Headed by Lutz Bachmann, 41, an advertising agency and business consultant, Pegida relies on social media including Facebook where its page has more than 42,000 "Likes." "We are strictly not against Islam but rather against Islamists and Islamization," Bachmann told the Junge Freiheit newspaper. "Pegida consistently rejects violence."

“We don't want radical Islamists here. People keep trying to brand us as Nazis — but we're not Nazis. We're just worried citizens.”

Thomas Schmidt
Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West

The group has drawn scorn from German political leaders. Ralf Jaeger — the Social Democratic Interior Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, the country's most populous state — said "neo-Nazis" are standing in the Pegida Merkel warned the protests can't be used to push an agenda against refugees.

"In Germany, we have a right to demonstrate, but there is no room for incitement and slander against people who have come to us from other countries," Merkel said Monday in Berlin. "Therefore we have to ensure that such events aren't exploited by their initiators."

There are about 4 million Muslims in Germany, which has a total population of 81 million, according to the central Council of Muslims in Germany's website. A poll by public broadcaster ZDF published last week showed 25 percent of Germans think foreigners bring advantages, 24 percent see their bringing disadvantages and 45 percent say the plus and minus of foreign residents balance out.

The number of Germans in far-right parties fell by 700 to 21,700 from 2011 to 2013, according to the Verfassungsschutz, Germany's domestic security agency. Yet several high-profile institutions have been targeted this year in attacks claimed by neo-Nazis.

Three firebombing attempts have taken place in Berlin since August on the Reichstag which houses parliament, a parliament office building and the headquarters of Merkel's CDU, according to German news agency DPA. In all three attacks, which didn't cause any damage, far-right propaganda or a letter claiming responsibility was left at the scene.

Three bullet wounds due to be used as housing for asylum seekers were also burned on Dec. 11 in the Bavarian town of Vorr, state Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann said in a radio interview.

Backers of Salafism and radical Islamism have also been targeted, according to the Federal Interior Ministry. Salafites have also been involved in clashes. Kurds demonstrating against Islamic State in Hamburg in October battled radical Islamists for three consecutive nights as tensions over fighting in Syria spilled into Germany.

EUROPE



MICHAEL SOHN/AP



FRANK JORDANS/AP

Above: A man takes pictures beside the night train to Paris as it leaves the main station in Berlin on Dec. 11. German railway company Deutsche Bahn is ending the sleeper service between Paris and Berlin, citing unsustainable losses. Right: Passenger Marie-Helene smiles after arriving at the Berlin main station.

Abort the night train?

German company, citing losses, ending its sleeper service to Paris — to riders' chagrin

By FRANK JORDANS
The Associated Press

BERLIN — Commuters jostle on and off their gleaming high-speed trains at Berlin's main railway station on a cold December morning, but one platform stays stubbornly empty. Finally, a grimy engine draws in, pulling carriages that look like they saw their best days in the 1980s.

It's the sleeper train from Paris, 20 minutes late. But none of the dozen passengers who tumble out with heavy bags and rucksacks seems to mind. It's the last stop on a long journey, much as it will soon be for the train itself.

German railway company Deutsche Bahn is ending the sleeper service between Paris and Berlin this week, citing unsustainable losses. The service has been running since before World War II, and used to go all the way to Moscow.

Fierce competition from budget airlines has lured passengers away from night trains that were once a mainstay of cross-border travel in Europe, said Deutsche Bahn spokeswoman Susanne Schulz.

"Demand has dropped by 30 percent over the past decade because of the sinking cost of airline tickets," Schulz said.

A midweek journey from Berlin to Paris by night train (4 bunks to a room) costs from 70 euros (\$87) and takes 12 hours. A two-hour flight with one piece of checked luggage costs from 55 euros.

Along with the link to the French capital, Deutsche Bahn is ending sleeper services between Amsterdam, Prague, Basel and Copenhagen, and cutting the connection to Amsterdam from its overnight service to Warsaw.

Railway enthusiasts fear other routes could soon follow, spelling doom for Europe's night trains as a whole. Campaigners have launched petitions calling on governments and the European Union to save what they argue is an ecological and family-friendly way to travel.

The carbon footprint for the Paris-Berlin rail journey is less than half that of a flight, according to Deutsche Bahn's website. While children pay close to full fare on airlines from the age of 2, they can ride the sleeper for free until they turn 15, and need only to reserve a seat or bed.

Others evoke the romance of rail journeys, and the fact that passengers are lifted out of the bustle of daily life for the time it takes to reach their destination.

"Going from Paris to Berlin in two hours is simply too fast,"

said Marie-Helene, a regular on the Paris to Berlin service who declined to give her surname. "I love reading and there's plenty of time for that on the night train."

Pointing to the two big bags in front of her, she noted that budget airlines would have charged her a hefty add-on fee. "I don't like to

travel light," she said, laughing. "It's also perfectly viable as a business connection," said Jon Worth, a consultant who started taking night trains as a means of discovering Europe and now uses them to travel between meetings. "You don't need to book a night in a hotel and you wake up in the

morning at your destination." Deutsche Bahn says it lost 12 million euros (\$15 million) last year on the night trains it's now cutting. Investing in modern rolling stock would cost millions.

That might be necessary if it wanted to tempt travelers back into its bunks, though.

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EXCHANGE

WORLD

Why Japanese elections matter to the US

By ANNA FIFIELD
The Washington Post

TOKYO — Japanese voters went to the polls on Sunday — well, about half of them did anyway. Turnout was a record low of 52 percent, a sign both that many people did not believe there was a need for a snap parliamentary election now, and that they do not have great affection for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his policies.

Nevertheless, Abe's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, together with their coalition

ANALYSIS

partner the Komeito, kept their two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives and have pledged to carry on doing what they've been doing.

The election may not have generated huge excitement or change in Japan, but here are three reasons why the result matters for the United States:

1. Abe is strong.
Say what you will about Abe (and as many Japanese say they disapprove of Abe and his Cabinet as say they approve), he is one of the most powerful prime ministers in recent Japanese history. "The reason Abe is popular is because of his leadership," Jasper Koll, managing director of research at J.P. Morgan in Tokyo, told The Washington Post last week. "He makes decisions."

Now in his second stint as prime minister — the first one ended after only a year in 2007, the result of health problems — Abe seems to have the kind of staying power that Japan has been sorely lacking in recent history. He is Japan's 17th prime minister in 25 years, but with Sunday's election result, he has a real prospect of spending another four years in office, taking his term to six. That gives a determination to make progress on difficult challenges like the economy and structural reforms, analysts say, and it will usher in a period of stability.

From a U.S. perspective, Abe is a known quantity and a reliable partner who's — mostly — saying all the right things. He has vowed a determination to ease some of the post-war constraints on Japan's military, which would enable it to come to the U.S.'s defense if its ally were under attack. Washington, wary of a strengthening China, is



JUNI KUROKAWA/AP

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, third from the right, strikes a pose with members of Japan's girls' pop unit "Momonoi Clover Z" during his cherry blossoms viewing garden party at Shinjuku-gyoen garden park in Tokyo in April 2013.

happy about this evolution.

Indeed, the White House welcomed Abe's re-election. "We appreciate Prime Minister Abe's strong leadership on a wide range of regional and global issues, from typhoon relief in the Philippines, to the Ebola response, to the international fight against ISIL," Josh Earnest, a spokesman for President Barack Obama, said in a statement Sunday, using an acronym for the Islamic State group. "The United States looks forward to deepening our close alliance cooperation with the government and people of Japan to promote global and regional security and prosperity, and bilateral cooperation on defense guidelines revision, TPP and maritime security."

2. Maybe that trade deal will get done.
Progress on the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade deal involving the United States and 11 other Pacific Rim nations has ground to a halt, largely because of a dispute with Japan over agricultural tariffs. One politician here described Mike Froman, the American negotiator, and Akira Amari, his Japanese counterpart, as being "like Tom and Jerry, always fighting with each other."

If he wants to move forward with the

agreement, Izumi Devalier, an economist at HSBC, wrote in a research note, "Prime Minister Abe will need to expend considerable political capital overcoming strongly-entrenched vested interests."

But maybe he will be willing to take on those vested interests now that he has a new mandate and the U.S. Senate is about to have a more trade-friendly leadership. Republicans, who have broadly supported the TPP deal, are considered more likely to give the Obama administration "fast track authority" — meaning that the deal, once agreed, could not be changed by Congress before it is approved.

"If Congress moves towards (fast track authority), that will make it possible for Abe to show his final cards for compromising on TPP," said Gerald Curtis, an esteemed Japan expert who teaches at Columbia University. "There's no way Japan is going to show its hand if there's no way that Congress is going to fast track it."

3. That Okinawa base problem? Just got worse.

That was the good news for the U.S. Here's the bad news: Abe's LDP fared well everywhere except Okinawa, where it bombed, to use the political jargon.

All four LDP candidates running on Okinawa, the subtropical island chain south of the mainland, were beaten in their constituency races in Sunday's election. (However, due to Japan's somewhat complicated proportional representation system, all won parliamentary seats through the LDP list.)

The four LDP candidates had said they supported relocating the Marine Corps air station currently located at Futenma, a prime patch of land in the middle of the most heavily populated part of the main island, to a more remote location at Henoko, farther north.

The overwhelming majority of Okinawans, fed up with being home to the majority of Japan's noisy and (they say) dangerous American military bases, want the air station moved out of their prefecture.

Abe said the Okinawa election results were "unfortunate" and that he would "reflect deeply upon them. The relocation to Henoko is the only option. We'd like to move forward with the plan while providing a sufficient explanation," he said.

The top in the race for the LDP comes just a month after an anti-base candidate trounced the ruling party-backed incumbent in Okinawa's gubernatorial race. The winner in that race, Takeshi Onaga, has vowed to stop a new base from being built at Henoko.

Although analysts are highly doubtful that Onaga will be able to make good on that promise, his victory, combined with the LDP drubbing on Okinawa and the presence of an anti-base mayor in the area that includes Henoko, mean that building the new base is going to be politically tricky.

The victorious politicians in Okinawa are all making clear that Tokyo and Washington will be directly going against Okinawans' wishes, as expressed at the ballot box, if they go ahead with the new base at Henoko.

"LDP loss in Okinawa unlikely to change policy, but it sustains anti-base momentum resumed by Gov Onaga," tweeted James Schoff, a Japan expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. "A long negotiation process begins."

In Japan, McDonald's is running out of french fries

By ANNA FIFIELD
The Washington Post

TOKYO — Already reeling from a butter shortage, Japan is now being buffeted by another food crisis: McDonald's is running out of french fries and will start rationing the crispy delicacy.

There's no super-sizing here. From Wednesday, customers will be able to buy only small packs of fries with their orders, which in Japan includes crab croquette burgers and gurakoro, a patty that includes shrimp and mac and cheese.

The reason for the shortage? Labor disputes at U.S. West Coast ports are holding up shipments. As a result, only 55 percent of the monthly average volume of french fries is likely to be imported to Japan in December, the Asahi Shimbun reported.

An announcement in red letters on the fast-food chain's Japanese website alerts customers that the

chain has had difficulty procuring stable supplies of french fries has led it to take this stance.

"This is a measure we've decided to take because we might run out of fries. We apologize to customers for the inconvenience," a company official told Kyodo News. Meal deals that usually come with medium fries will be 40 cents cheaper, and McDonald's is not placing any limits on how many small packets of fries a customer can order. No word yet on the impact on another local McDonald's product offering: the classic Quattro cheese fries.

With the major U.S. ports of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland and Seattle tied up in a contract dispute, McDonald's has taken emergency measures: It is airlifting supplies of frozen fries — 1,000 tons of them — and has put in an order for another 1,600 tons to come from East Coast ports. However, these won't arrive until late January.

STARS AND STRIPES

Send Your Wish List to Santa

(and he will send you a note back)

— Address your letter to:
Santa Claus at the North Pole
 (drop in any APO/EPO mailbox)

See selected letters online:
stripesrewards.com/letterstosanta

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Video helps police recover stolen wreath

RI WESTERLY — A Connecticut woman has been arrested after Westerly police say home-surveillance video caught her stealing a large wreath from someone else's front porch.

Police Chief Ed St. Clair said Christa Bradley, 46, of North Stonington, turned herself in Wednesday after police found the wreath hanging on her front door.

Homeowner Mary Sullivan put a video of the theft on Facebook that showed a woman walking up to the homemade wreath and walking off with it.

The video was reposted, and St. Clair says that led to the wreath.

Police disperse crowds at mall sneaker sale

OH TOLEDO — Police used pepper spray to disperse a crowd of people waiting in line for a shoe sale at an Ohio mall.

Multiple media reports said dozens of people were gathered before 6 a.m. Wednesday at Franklin Park Mall in Toledo to get tickets allowing them to buy the Nike Air Jordan shoe later this week.

Jeremiah Fletcher, 19, who was waiting in line, said police fired pepper spray three to four times.

Police hope sketch will help ID embalmed head

PA PITTSBURGH—Police in western Pennsylvania are hoping that a sketch artist's rendering will help them identify the embalmed head of a woman found in the woods last week.

Economy Borough police Chief Michael O'Brien tells The Associated Press that the drawing isn't completed, but will be released to media outlets once it is.

The head appears to be that of a woman in her late 60s or early 70s, but police have no idea where it's from — especially since it was embalmed.

The chief says: "What's bizarre is not that we've found a head, it's that we've found a head that's embalmed."

Police are contacting medical schools to see if the head is from a cadaver, and are entering DNA into an FBI database for missing persons.

Measure aims to aid live music venues

CA SAN FRANCISCO — A San Francisco supervisor wants to make sure new housing developments in the city don't push out live music venues.

Supervisor London Breed unveiled legislation on Tuesday that would require that potential residents are notified that a live music club is nearby before they sign a lease or buy a unit. It would also prohibit neighbors from suing a permitted music venue on the grounds it's a nuisance if the venue is operating within the requirements of its permit.

Breed told the San Francisco Chronicle the clubs are part of the cultural history and bring significant economic benefits.

THE CENSUS

3,000

The number of rescue animals flown to better lives by retired businessman Jeff Bennett, a volunteer with **Pilots and Paws**. The South Carolina-based charity enlists small plane pilots to take animals from overcrowded shelters that have high euthanasia rates to foster homes, rescue groups and less-crowded shelters that don't kill them. Bennett estimates that he's flown about 1,100 hours in his small, four-seat Cessna aircraft since starting his volunteer work with the group six years ago. "Most of the time I do puppies and kittens, but I've done snakes, rats, rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs, snakes, tortoises, sea turtles, falcons, pigs and a kinkajou," he said.



JAMES QUIGG, DESERT DISPATCH/AP

Soldiers spread cheer at veterans home

Col. Kevin Jacobi, of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, greets Joseph Crowder, a resident of the Veterans Home of California in Barstow, Calif. Soldiers from Fort Irwin completed their march from the base to the retirement home on Tuesday, an annual tradition.

Police say mother gave young sons marijuana

MI CADILLAC—A woman from Michigan's northern Lower Peninsula faces child abuse and other charges after authorities say she gave her 10- and 12-year-old sons marijuana for medical reasons.

The 31-year-old woman from the Wexford County village of Mesick had a pretrial conference Tuesday in 84th District Court in Cadillac.

The Associated Press isn't naming the woman to avoid identifying the children.

Wexford County Prosecutor Anthony Badovinac told the Cadillac News the woman gave the 10-year-old marijuana to help with emotional issues and the 12-year-old marijuana to treat ADHD. Badovinac said the woman indicated she would rather have a child use marijuana than pills that were prescribed.

Guns OK'd at parades, other public events

ID COEUR D'ALENE—The Coeur d'Alene City Council says guns will now be permitted at public events such as parades.

The Coeur d'Alene Press reported the council unanimously made the change Tuesday night, changing an ordinance prohibiting guns within 1,000 feet of a parade. City Attorney Mike Gridley said the rule was originally created to avoid conflict in the community when the white supremacist group Aryan Nations was still headquartered in the region. The Aryan Nations compound closed after a lawsuit brought by the Southern Poverty Law Center bankrupted the group in 2000.

Gridley noted that in 2008 the Idaho Legislature passed a law prohibiting cities from regulating the possession, transportation or carrying of firearms. Councilman Ron Edinger said that the

city could be at risk of a lawsuit if someone believed the local rule violated the newer state law.

Lottery to end Monopoly game as losses pile up

IN INDIANAPOLIS — A Monopoly-themed lottery game that never caught on with players is being canceled this month, but not before racking up about \$500,000 in losses for the Hoosier Lottery.

Lottery officials in the 23 states where the Monopoly Millionaires Club draw game is played announced this week that the game that launched in October would end Dec. 26.

Sales of the game have fallen well short of expectations, forcing states to pay extra to the Multi-State Lottery Association to make up the difference. Hoosier Lottery officials had lost nearly \$348,000 on the game through Nov. 30, and The (Munster) Times reported

that figure is expected to grow by the game's end.

The Hoosier Lottery sold just \$540,415 in \$5 Monopoly tickets through Nov. 30. The lottery sells about \$2 million in scratch-off tickets daily.

City kills measure to opt out of pot sales

AK ANCHORAGE — The Anchorage Assembly has rejected a proposed ordinance that would have banned legal marijuana sales within municipal boundaries.

The Alaska Dispatch News reported assembly members listened to four hours of testimony Tuesday and voted 9-2 to kill the measure proposed by Assemblywoman Amy Demboski.

Alaska voters approved legalization of recreational marijuana use last month.

From wire reports

WEEKEND



FIGHT TO THE FINISH

Director Peter Jackson departs Middle-earth after one last action-packed 'Hobbit' film

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WEEKEND: GADGETS & CHARTS



COURTESY OF AUCTIONSBYCELLULAR/TNS

Jim Alvarez is the founder and CEO of AuctionsByCellular, which allows companies to conduct charitable auctions via smartphones.

The business of online giving

BY JOHN CARPENTER
Chicago Tribune

At her 2013 gala fund-raising event, which included a silent auction, Jayne Drew noticed people checking their phones as they sat down to dinner.

Rudeness? Certainly not to Drew, who couldn't have been happier.

"They were getting alerts that they'd been outbid, and entering new bids," said Drew, development director for GiGi's Playhouse, a Hoffman Estates-based organization that supports educational programs for people with Down syndrome.

GiGi's Playhouse is a client of AuctionsByCellular, a startup that's working in the emerging space of online philanthropy.

Startups such as GiveCentral, Zealous Good and GiveForward are among other companies that are innovating the way in which people give. That's happening as charitable giving, particularly online giving, continues to grow and as more givers are making their contributions on mobile devices.

Launched in 2011, AuctionsByCellular won a Chicago Innova-

tion Award this year, and it has helped raise more than \$140 million for nonprofit customers, CEO and founder Jim Alvarez said.

Attendees at a charity event using the system get a text message after they sign in. That leads them to their personal bidding page, loaded with items for sale. They also receive instant notifications when they've been outbid, and they can place a new bid directly from their phone.

Drew said she considers this the key to boosting donations for her organization.

"In the past people would make a bid, then move on," she said. "Unless you really competed for one particular item, you kind of forgot about it."

Steve MacLaughlin, director of product management for Blackburn, a South Carolina-based fundraising consultant, said online giving remains a small percentage of overall donations—about 10 percent—but that it's growing quickly. Charitable giving over the past 12 months was up by about 4 percent, but online gave at almost 13 percent, he said. MacLaughlin attributed the surge primarily to the growing use of mobile devices.

ON THE COVER: Martin Freeman plays Bilbo Baggins in "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies," which concludes the trilogy.

Warner Bros. Pictures

GADGET WATCH

Digital photo management app does it all

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Services

Myllo, a digital photo management software, got its name from "My Life Organized," according to Kevin Gilbert, memory evangelist for the company.

During a phone call he also pointed out that the company recently had a study done and found that 1.3 trillion digital photos will be taken worldwide in 2015.

With that in mind, Gilbert said the premise of gathering, saving, protecting and showing digital images helped create Myllo.

After using the software, I can attest that Myllo does it all.

The system syncs your digital photo library across all your devices (iPhone, iPad, desktop PC or a Mac) with ease, literally in seconds. Android users should have a version in spring 2015.

After a simple setup, I had a folder of 181 imported images on my Mac desktop, and almost instantly they appeared on my iPhone. I then put the app on my iPad, and the photos appeared in seconds.

The interface is user friendly, with tabs along the side for importing, viewing folders or settings, for example.

With the click of a button you can have your images play in a slideshow, or just organize them in any way you want. Images in Myllo can be shared on Facebook and other social media platforms, or you can do the reverse and import photos you have stored on Facebook, Flickr and iPhoto.

There are also editing tools to make changes on each image for exposure, contrast, highlights and shadows.

A great feature lets you organize your photos by dates, people you were with or the location they were taken. Once you make any changes, they are synced with all your other devices using Myllo.

If you have any experience with digital photography applications, you're going to find the interface very easy to use.

Newcomers to digital photography can start by having all their 2014 holiday photos organized in seconds. Just by watching the included setup video, they'll feel like they've been using the software for years. It's that easy and intuitive.

If you are sharing photos on multiple devices, the sync panel lets you choose to have an original full resolution file, a smaller editable preview file or a thumbnail on each device. This way, if one

of your devices does not have enough room for the original files, you can still see a small preview.

The default settings keep the original files on your computer and thumbnails on each device. But the previews are editable 1mb files (including raw files), which you can tone and adjust to your liking.

When you go back to the original files, all the adjustments you made are there. If you don't like what you did, you can reset the files to the original content.

Myllo offers a free trial. After you get hooked, annual subscriptions are available in packages of \$100 for 100,000 images up to \$250 for 500,000 images. Each level also adds many other features.

Online: myllo.com



Myllo syncs your digital photos across all your devices.

The Chargedock

is a wireless charger for Ventev. It's a combination portable charging

battery built as a desktop dock with an Apple Lightning connection. Just flip open the lid and dock your phone for a charge, even with most cases on.

The device comes with a microUSB cable for charging the dock itself and an LED indicator shows you how much battery power is left in the 200mAh lithium polymer battery.

Online: Ventev.com; \$39.99

The Twelve South HiRise Deluxe for iPhone and iPad is a desktop dock worth considering. The company refers to its product as "the ultimate pedestal for iPhone and iPad."

Its metal design is eye-catching and works as a perfect desktop companion for hands-free use and direct USB charging.

Rubber padding on the bottom ensures that the device stays put. Both Lightning and microUSB cables are included.

Twelve South also has introduced the ultra-thin Surface-Pad cases for iPhone 6 (\$39.99; 6 Plus \$49.99).

They are made with premium-quality soft leather and designed to protect the iPhone and double as a hands-free stand. Inside the front cover are slots to hold ID or business cards.

Online: twelvesouth.com



The HiRise Deluxe for iPhone and iPad is a perfect desktop companion for hands-free use and direct USB charging.

TNS photos

ITUNES MUSIC

Top 10 songs on the iTunes Store for Dec. 17:

- "Blank Space," Taylor Swift
- "Take Me to Church," Hozier
- "Uptown Funk (feat. Bruno Mars)," Mark Ronson
- "Thinking Out Loud," Ed Sheeran
- "Lips Are Movin'," Meghan Trainor
- "The Hanging Tree," James Newton Howard
- "Shake It Off," Taylor Swift
- "I'm Not the Only One," Sam Smith
- "The Heart Wants What It Wants," Selena Gomez
- "Stay With Me," Sam Smith
- "Lips Are Movin'," Meghan Trainor

— Compiled by TNS

— Compiled by TNS

SPOTIFY MUSIC

The most streamed tracks on Spotify from Dec. 8-14:

- "Take Me to Church," Hozier
- "Thinking Out Loud," Ed Sheeran
- "Uptown Funk," Mark Ronson
- "Love Me Harder," Ariana Grande
- "I'm Not the Only One," Sam Smith
- "I Don't—With You," Big Sean
- "Jealous," Nick Jonas
- "The Heart Wants What It Wants," Selena Gomez
- "Stay With Me," Sam Smith
- "Lips Are Movin'," Meghan Trainor

— Compiled by TNS

ITUNES MOVIES

Top 10 movies downloaded from the iTunes Store for Dec. 17:

- "The Equalizer"
- "Expelled"
- "The Maze Runner"
- "Guardians of the Galaxy"
- "This Is Where I Leave You"
- "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles"
- "The Captive"
- "A Walk Among the Tombstones"
- "EIP"
- "Down of the Planet of the Apes"

— Compiled by TNS

VIDEO GAMES

Game Informer rank the Top 10 downloadable games for December:

- "Hearthstone: Goblins vs. Gnomes," PC, iOS
- "Game of Thrones Episode One—Iron from Ice," PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360, PC, iOS
- "Talos Principle" PC
- "Kingdom Rush: Origins," iOS
- "This War of Mine," PC
- "Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions," PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360, PC, iOS
- "Terra Battle," iOS
- "Legend of Grimrock II," PC
- "Lara Croft and the Temple of Osiris," Xbox One, PC
- "Lumino City," PC

— Compiled by TNS

APPS

Top 5 new paid apps for Dec. 17:

- ANDROID
- SimplePlans
 - Kingdom Rush Origins
 - Game of Thrones
 - Pumped BMK 2
 - Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath

Top 5 paid apps for Dec. 17:

- APPLE
- Heads Up!
 - Minecraft—Pocket Edition
 - Nights of Freddy's 2
 - Triva Crack (Ad Free)
 - Nights of Freddy's

— Compiled by TNS

WEEKEND

CHECK IT OUT

Events, entertainment and other ways to fill your free time

**NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM:
SECRET OF THE TOMB**

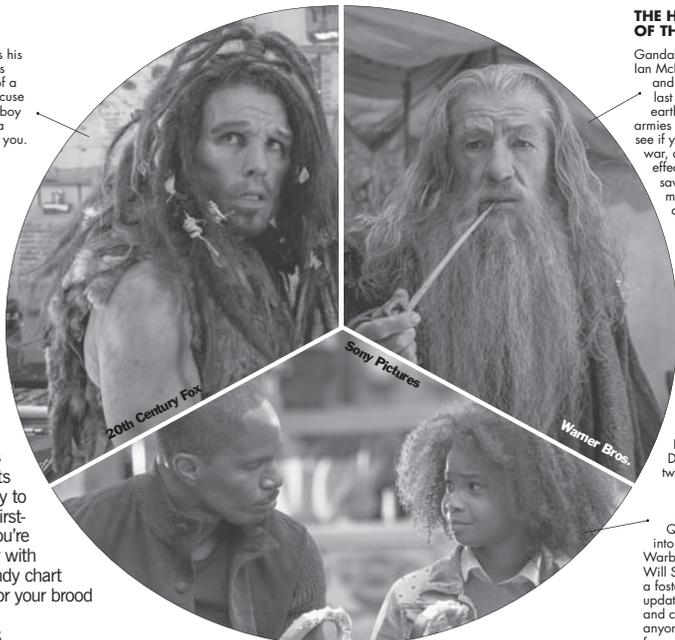
Ben Stiller (pictured, as a caveman) leads his gang of misfit toys — er, museum artifacts that come to life — to London in search of a MacGuffin that gives this franchise an excuse to churn out a third movie. If you have a boy (or are one mentally), or you're more of a fan of slapstick, this might be the flick for you.

1

It's the most
movie-full time
of the year

One of the grandest holiday traditions for some families is to go see a movie on Christmas Day. As usual, the film industry has done its best to ensure that you have plenty to choose from. AAFES offers three first-run movies in on-base theaters. You're probably at least passingly familiar with all of them, but if not, here's a handy chart to help you decide which is best for your brood — or yourself. Pass the popcorn!

• **Movie reviews on Pages 24-26.**

**THE HOBBIT: THE BATTLE
OF THE FIVE ARMIES**

Gandalf (pictured, played by Ian McKellen) and the dwarves and hobbits assemble one last time for more Middle-earth-style carnage. With five armies involved, it's the flick to see if you're in the mood for war, and/or crazy special effects. Or a completist who saw the first five Tolkien movie adaptations by director Peter Jackson and need to see the last one, too. If that's you, you're probably already sitting in the theater as you read this, waiting for the lights to dim.

ANNIE

Do you like musicals? Do you have young or teenaged girl (or are one mentally)? If so, this is definitely the movie for you. Jamie Foxx and Quvenzhané Wallis step into the shoes of Daddy Warbucks (now known as Will Stacks) and Annie (now a foster kid, not an orphan) to update this Broadway classic and charm the pants off of anyone who likes their movie fare escapist and adorable.

2

'LittleBigPlanet3': Cute,
creative, communal

If you're not smiling just looking at this little nattily knit fellow, something's wrong with you. But seriously — the lovable elements of this PlayStation 4 title are back, and the previous versions' flaws (single-player mode, playability) have been addressed. This game is your best bet for all-ages creativity and fun.

• **Game review on Page 37.**



3

Keep an eye on Santa
(for a change)

It's finally that magical time of year when Santa stops creepily watching us all the time and starts shoveling gifts our way. Google amplifies the fun with a website that tracks Santa and enables people to send messages to good girls and boys on Santa's behalf. It also has an interactive Advent calendar with games and more.

• **Try it at tinyurl.com/l4uv6ll.**



4

Middle-earth meets
'Office'; laughs ensue

Just as every generation thinks its experience was simultaneously better (we actually played outside all day; none of these newfangled devices for us!) and worse (I had to walk to school five miles uphill each way — in the snow!), every generation of "Saturday Night Live" fans looks to the comedians of yesterday and thinks the show used to be funnier. But "SNL" still hits the occasional home run. One such was last weekend's "The Office: Middle Earth." Martin Freeman combines two of his greatest roles to hilarious effect.

• **Watch the video at tinyurl.com/snltoome**

WEEKEND: MOVIES

Jackson leaves Middle-earth with 'The Hobbit'

By JILL LAWLESS
The Associated Press

After a long and eventful journey, "The Hobbit" trilogy has reached its bloody climax.

Not a minute too soon for director Peter Jackson, who has been longing to unleash mayhem on Middle-earth.

"It's the first time we've got to kill dwarves," said the director, his enthusiasm for death and destruction at odds with his laid-back manner and luxurious surroundings in a London hotel suite.

"It's hard to get any emotional power in a film unless you are able to actually kill some of your main characters," he said. "We've been hampered with that in the first two 'Hobbit' movies. But at least we have a good dwarf death toll in the third one."

"The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies" wraps up the trilogy span from J.R.R. Tolkien's slim book about home-loving hobbit Bilbo Baggins, coaxed away from his burrow to help a band of dwarves retake their mountain home from a destructive dragon.

The third film sees the dragon dispatched before a cataclysmic clash involving armies of dwarves, elves, humans, eagles and dastardly orcs.

It's a CGI extravaganza, with all the visual overkill that 3-D and 48-frames-per-second filming can provide. But Jackson says this film was the most emotionally satisfying of the three. (It's also the shortest, at a relatively brisk 144 minutes). For one thing, while the first two movies charted a journey, this one largely stays put, at the Lonely Mountain of Erebor.

"It was a joy not to have to do any big helicopter shots of people walking across New Zealand landscapes," Jackson said — although the country's tourist authorities might disagree. Tolkien tourism has become a big draw for the small nation.

"The thing that I like about this one, probably more than anything — even more than killing dwarves — is that it's got this feeling of a thriller about it," Jackson said. "I enjoyed being able to be sharper and crank the tension up and up and up until the battle breaks out."

His enthusiasm is shared by Martin Freeman, who plays reluctant hero Bilbo. The film brings a peril-striven emotional climax to the hobbit's complicated friendship with dwarf leader Thorin Oakenshield (Richard Armitage).

"I always like dark tones anyway," said Freeman, who



JOEL RYAN, INVISION/AP

Actor Martin Freeman, left, and director Peter Jackson reunite for "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies," the third in a trilogy of films adapted from J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy novel "The Hobbit."

recently took a break from playing dependable Dr. Watson in "Sherlock" to star as morally compromised insurance salesman Lester Nygaard in the TV series " Fargo."

"I like playing light and I like playing comedy, but my natural inclination is very often not toward that... I like stretching out. I kind of feel very fulfilled when acting not happy."

"Battle of the Five Armies" completes a Tolkien saga that includes Jackson's three "Lord of the Rings" films. The director says the darkening mood of the "Hobbit" films was a deliberate attempt to segue into the more grown-up world of "The Lord of the Rings," set decades later.

"Ultimately these movies will be judged in decades to come as a six-film series that will start with the first 'Hobbit' film and

finish with (final 'Rings movie') 'The Return of the King,'" Jackson said.

"If we'd made 'The Hobbit' first we'd probably have made it much more like a young children's story, which is how the book's written."

Jackson has spent a decade and a half in Middle-earth, and says "it certainly feels like it's time to move on to other things." He has one more bit of "Hobbit" business to complete, an extended cut of the new movie with about half an hour of extra material.

A lot has changed since he embarked on his journey. The digital technology the films rely on has become ever more sophisticated.

"When we did the first 'Lord of the Rings' movie we couldn't do CGI water and fire," Jackson

said. He can now — "The Battle of the Five Armies" opens with a spectacular dragon attack on Lake-town.

And the image of the fantasy genre has been transformed. Jackson could not have imagined when he started that a show like "Game of Thrones" would receive serious cultural kudos.

"I always used to get very annoyed, because if you were a filmmaker making a fantasy film, it was like a license to be a little bit silly, a little bit lightweight and comical," Jackson said. "It was almost like you couldn't treat it with any degree of seriousness."

If his films have done anything, Jackson said, "I hope it's let people know that you don't have to treat fantasy that way. You can give it the respect that it deserves."

Cast of characters for 'The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies'

The Fresno Bee

A my film that calls itself "The Battle of Five Armies" lets you know that there are going to be a lot of characters. It's been a year since the last adventures of Bilbo Baggins and the rest of the cast of characters. Here's a quick reminder of some of the major players.

Alfrid (Ryan Gage): Chief henchman to the Master of Lake-town.

Azog (Manu Bennett): Orc leader who pursues Thorin and the Company of Dwarves.

Bain (John Bell): Son of Bard the Bowman.

Balin (Ken Stott): Dwarven leader who joins the Company of Dwarves.

Bard the Bowman (Luke Evans): Enlists every man in Dale to take up weapons against the Orc horde tearing through the city.

Bifur (William Kircher): Part of the Company of Dwarves.

Bilbo Baggins (Martin Freeman): Hobbit, who has traveled with the company of Dwarves because of his thievery skills, now looks to help broker peace.



Freeman

Bofur (James Nesbitt): A member of the Company of Dwarves group.

Bolg (John Tui): Orc warlord who's the son of Azog.

Bombur (Stephen Hunter): One of the Company of Dwarves.

Dain (Billy Connolly): Ironfoot and his Dwarven army collide with the Elven forces.



McKellen

Dori (Mark Hadlow): Flute-playing part of the Company of Dwarves.

Dwalin (Graham McTavish): Company of Dwarves member who was a Dwarf of the House of Durin.

Eldon (Hugo Weaving): Mighty Elven king who's the

Lord of Rivendell.

Elfi (Dean O'Gorman): One of the youngest members of the Company of Dwarves.



Bloom

Galdriel (Cate Blanchett): Gandalf's ageless friend and powerful ally in the White Council.

Gandalf the Grey (Ian McKellen): After managing to escape near death, Gandalf hopes to rally the armies of Elves, Dwarves and Men to

stand together.

Gloin (Peter Hambleton): One of the Company of Dwarves.

Kili (Aidan Turner): Member of the Company of Dwarves who has feelings for Tauriel.

Legolas (Orlando Bloom): Thranduil's only son. The Elf is a master archer.

Nori (Jed Brophy): Part of the Company of Dwarves.

Oin (John Callen):

Company of Dwarves members.

Ori (Adam Brown): One of the loyal Company of Dwarves.



Armitage

Radagast (Sylvester McCoy): Wizard who helps Gandalf.

Saruman (Christopher Lee): Powerful wizard who goes on a darker journey in the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

Smaug (Benedict Cumberbatch): Fire-breathing dragon that attacks Lake-town.

Tauriel (Evangeline Lilly): Captain of his Guard banished for the rebellious act of helping the Company of Dwarves.



Pace

Thorin Oakenshield (Richard Armitage): He is ready to sacrifice friendship and honor in his search for the legendary Arkenstone.

Thranduil (Lee Pace): Leader of the Elves who in Erebor finds himself in a face-to-face with a very changed Thorin.

WEEKEND: MOVIES



WARNER BROS. PICTURES/AP

“The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies” brings to an end the adventures of Bilbo Baggins (Martin Freeman, left), Thorin Oakenshield (Richard Armitage, not shown) and the Company of Dwarves.

Ending on a high note

‘Hobbit’ a roaring blockbuster of a war movie

By COLIN COVERT
Star Tribune

J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth tales of elves and men and hobbits are fittingly set in mountainous country. They reach a heroic level of entertainment with their characters and material. They are enthralling stories about the value of true friendship, the meaning of love, courage, corruption by evil and salvation by unity, themes inspired by Tolkien's military experiences in World War I.

The “Lord of the Rings” fantasies and their forerunner “The Hobbit” are colossal, and so are Peter Jackson's mammoth adaptations. Since their debut 13 years ago, his six-film series has richly exploited (and at times rewritten) the books' massive resources. “The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies” concludes the story in high gear, offering a level of nonstop tension and forward motion few other movies can equal. It's designed to leave the audience drained and exhilarated, and from its opening scenes of exploding awesomeness there's no looking back.

Beginning where “The Desolation of Smaug” halted, the new film opens with the dragon's airborne attack against Laketown, a frenzy of darkness, death and destruction. Lashing out like a flame-breathing vulture, Smaug (dastardly voiced by Benedict Cumberbatch) shields its stolen wealth by scorching the defenseless men, women and children.

The selfish, cowardly leader of the watery land-fall (Stephen Fry) has no aim beyond sneaking away most of the town's gold. The film eliminates him faster than Tolkien did, and more amusingly. Nobody makes death more creative than Jackson. Bold archer Bard the Bowman (Luke Evans) battles Smaug from the city's highest structure to save the rest, even after his longbow snaps.

Greed troubles the dwarf team, too. Their once gallant head, Thorin (Richard Armitage, disturbing and twisted), is as crazed by wealth as the fiery beast. The newborn tyrant directs his men to protect the realm's treasure citadel from all, including the legions of orcs under Sauron's malignant command. Soon there's a full-fledged battle (royal including the resourceful wizard Gandalf (Ian McKellen), gallant elf Legolas (Or-

New on base

“The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies” is playing at the following military facilities:

Europe
Lakenheath, Mildenhall, Ansbach, Baumholder, Grafenwohr, Hohenfels, Ramstein, Spangdahlem, Stuttgart, Vilseck, Wiesbaden, Aviano, Vicenza and Brunssum.

Pacific
Atsugi, Misawa, Showboat, Village, Benny Decker, Fleet, Negishi, Yokota, Zama, Foster, Futenma, Hansen, Kadena, Kinsler, Schwab, Courtney, Yongsan South Post No. 1, Casey, Henry, Humphreys, Kunsan and Osan.

Online: thehobbit.com

lando Bloom) and new arrival Dain (irrepressible comic Billy Connolly).

At the center of it all is the meek, solemn, nervous, soulful hobbit Bilbo Baggins, played by Martin Freeman, a canny dramatic performer whom audiences enjoy instinctively.

It's hard to find a thing not to praise. The haunting Howard Shore score makes the already broad scope of the movie seem almost operatic. The set design is astonishing and inspired. Jackson makes us feel like we're seeing the past in historical “found” locations; nothing seems as if it were constructed for the sake of the movie.

Freeman isn't the most prominent cast member, but he is the best thing in the movie. He plays a runt-of-the-litter character who is interesting to watch and listen to. Most importantly, he keeps a straight face in comic scenes where the only straight face would have been paralyzed. The actors do fine jobs, delivering many flashes of brilliantly ugly wit, as when Laketown's loathsome surviving official keeps robbing everyone through the titanic climax.

“The Battle of the Five Armies” is a roaring blockbuster of a war movie that manages to be great thrills and ridiculous fun at the same time.

“The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies” is rated PG-13 for intense fantasy action violence and frightening images. Running time: 144 minutes.



KERRY BROWN, 20TH CENTURY FOX/AP

From left, Mizuo Peck, Robin Williams, Ben Stiller, Rami Malek and Patrick Gallagher star in “Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb.”

‘Museum’ a sentimental affair with some mildly amusing gags

By ROGER MOORE
Tribune News Service

There's a mildly amusing Pompeii gag in “Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb.” It involves a scale model toy Roman soldier Steve Coogan and his Old West cowboy pal (Owen Wilson) and a monkey in need of extinguishing a model volcano's fire.

Then there's a funny bit with Ben Kingsley, playing a pharaoh brought back to life, riffing with Ben Stiller as security guard Larry Daley, about “Exodus” — the Old Testament event.

And there's a gag that tops both these rare highlights, one that involves a famous song and dance man, a London theater and a wax figure of Sir Lancelot (Dan Bennett of “Downton Abbey”).

Otherwise, the film is a tedious, sentimental affair.

Stiller plays two roles in this third installment — Larry, the night watchman who knows the museum's exhibits come to life after hours, and a Neanderthal exhibit made in Larry's image. The Museum of Natural History's exhibits are in danger of losing their after-dark/afterlives because of the failing powers of an Egyptian tablet. Larry and his friends slip off to London, where the parents of young Pharaoh Alkmenrah (Rami Malek) might know how to save the day.

The British Museum is guarded by Rebel “Pitch Perfect” Wilson, a funny lady who manages a couple of moldering zingers in her few scenes.

Robin Williams, in his last film role, returns as Teddy Roosevelt, whose symptoms as the tablet's magic wanes have him impersonating everyone from FDR and JFK to Reagan and W. — weakly.

It was Mickey Rooney's final film, too, and he has but a single scene. At least Dick Van Dyke gets to show off his dancing moves one more time. Rooney, Van Dyke and Bill Cobb return as the original night watchmen, the ones who tried to rob the Museum of Natural History in “Night at the Museum.”

Minor moments of slapstick might tickle the kids, but anybody older, especially those who remember what Williams was like in his prime and how funny Stiller was just two “Museum”

New on base

“Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb” is playing at the following military facilities:

Europe
Lakenheath, Mildenhall, Ansbach, Baumholder, Grafenwohr, Hohenfels, Ramstein, Spangdahlem, Stuttgart, Vilseck, Wiesbaden, Aviano, Vicenza and Brunssum.

Pacific
Atsugi, Misawa, Showboat, Village, Benny Decker, Negishi, Yokota, Zama, Foster, Futenma, Hansen, Kadena, Kinsler, Schwab, Courtney, Yongsan South Post No. 1, Casey, Henry, Humphreys, Kunsan and Osan.

Online: nightatthemuseum-movie.com

movies ago, will wish this tomb had stayed sealed.

“Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb” is rated PG for rude humor and language. Running time: 97 minutes.

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Night at the Museum 3 (PG) - Thur 16:00, 18:00, 20:30, Fri 15:45, 18:00, 20:30, 22:30, Sat 15:15, 17:00, 18:45, 20:30, 22:30, Sun 15:15, 17:00, 18:45, 20:30, Mon & Tue 16:00, 18:00, 20:15

Paddington (PG) - Thur & Fri 15:45, Sat & Sun 16:00, Mon & Tue 15:30

Penguins From Madagascar (PG) - Sat & Sun 13:30

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay 1 (PG-13) - Sat & Sun 17:30

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WEEKEND: MOVIES

Films put new spin on Broadway classics

By LINDA WINER
Newsway

One is brand new, the other's true blue. One has a famous street urchin zipping around Manhattan on a bike and in a real helicopter. The other has a witch with a curse and a fairy-tale prince on a real horse.

In other words, "Annie" and "Into the Woods" — the two big holiday movies for kids and their grown-ups — could hardly be more different. Yes, both are adaptations of hit Broadway musicals. Both

'Actors who can kind of sing'

Meryl Streep is the witch with her own virtuosically polysyllabic Sondheim rap and special reasons for keeping Rapunzel in a tower. "She loves her child and wants to protect her from the bad things in the world," she joked.

Streep took voice lessons for three months to do justice to Sondheim and what she considers a great piece of American theater history.

The cast also includes Anna Kendrick as Cinderella, Christine Baranski as her evil stepmother, Tracey Ullman as Jack's mum, Emily Blunt and James Corden as Mr. and Ms. Baker, Chris Pine and Billy Magnussen as two young and goofy princes and, oh yes, Johnny Depp as the omnivorous Wolf.

It is rare that the writer of the musical is hired for the screenplay. But when Lapine heard Disney was going to make the movie, he asked director Rob Marshall if "I could write the first draft ... Disney said we had to make it PG and two hours ... It was so much harder than I ever thought it was going to be."

Marshall, the former theater director whose successful movie version of "Chicago" changed Hollywood's opinion of Broadway adaptations, made almost all the actors audition. "He said, 'I want actors who can kind of sing,'" says Blunt, who remembers her fear of singing in front of people. "And then we sang with a 65-piece orchestra! With Stephen Sond-

have all-star casts not previously celebrated for their singing and dancing. Both stories are timeless, in their fashion, and each has a rabid fan base that will consider any changes as sacrilege.

"Annie," based loosely on the 1977 musical (and 1982 movie) about a spunky little orphaned redhead in the 1930s, has been updated with new musical arrangements and with Quvenzhané Wallis as a spunky black foster child. She lives with other kids in the apartment of meanie Miss Hannigan, played by Cameron Diaz as a raucous failed rock singer. Instead of Daddy Warbucks, Annie's wealthy sav-

ior is the billionaire head of a cellphone company, portrayed by Jamie Foxx, with Rose Byrne as his vice president and Bobby Cannavale as the unscrupulous campaign manager of his mayoral run.

On the other side of the family-entertainment spectrum is "Into the Woods." It is based with remarkable fidelity, despite some cuts, on the 1987 Stephen Sondheim/James Lapine witty and disturbing fairy-tale mashup that puts Cinderella, Beaststalk Jack and Little Red Riding Hood into the same forest with the show's invented couple, the Baker and his Wife.



Left: Quvenzhané Wallis and Jamie Foxx star in "Annie." Right: Anna Kendrick stars in "Into the Woods." Both films offer a modern twist on hit Broadway musicals.

heim in the next room!"

The ensemble feeling was forged during six weeks in a rehearsal room. "It was like we were a touring company," marvels Corden, the British theater actor-comedian about to host a late-night TV show here. "It just happened to have Meryl Streep in it."

Unlike "Into the Woods," which was Marshall's idea, this new "Annie" was born after producers including Jay Z, Will and Jada Pinkett Smith bought the rights. Will Gluck, who directed the movies "Friends with Benefits" and "Easy A," was approached by Sony Pictures. "I

PETER MOUNTAIN/Disney

Wallis, Foxx bring 'Annie' back to life

By ROGER MOORE
Tribune News Service

"Annie," a musical that the decades have rendered into a punchline, is modernized, made more street-wise and brought back to life in a production backed by Jay Z and various members of the Will and Jada Pinkett Smith empire. The new "Annie" is intimate and hip, sarcastic and flip. It opens by mocking the clichéd redheaded cheerfulness of the Depression-era comic strip, and proceeds to give the little orphan — "Not an orphan. I'm a foster kid!" — sass to go along with a heart so big it melts all of New York.

Quvenzhané Wallis, that wonder of a child cast from "Beats of the Southern Wild," is no tap dancing Broadway baby with a voice built to reach the balcony. But director Will Gluck and the producers tailor this production to her talents, and it pays dividends.

Annie has the charisma enough to turn a school report on Franklin

New on base

"Annie" is playing at the following military facilities:

Europe
Lakenheath, Mildenhall, Ansbach, Baumholder, Grafenwöhr, Hohenfels, Ramstein, Spangdahlem, Stuttgart, Vilseck, Aviano, Vicenza and Brunnsum.

Pacific
Atsugi, Misawa, Showboat, Village, Benny Decker, Negishi, Yokota, Foster, Futenma, Hansen, Kadena, Kinser, Schwab, Courtney, Yongsan South Post No. 2, Henry, Humphreys and Osan.

Online: annie-movie.com

Roosevelt into a performance piece, with her classmates keeping the beat. She charms her "Hard-Knock Life" roommates at the foster home, but not the wannabe who collects checks from the state to take care of them all. Miss Hannigan is a bit-

ter drunk who shrieks at the five kids she cares for.

Meanwhile, Daddy Warbucks has been transferred to Will Stacks (Jamie Foxx), a cellphone magnate who sees his run for mayor as a chance to grow his business. He's a Purrell addict, fretting about having to meet people and, you know, get gems. "Whoa, whoa," he gripes to the campaign manager Guy (Bobby Cannavale) and his assistant Grace (Rose Byrne). "I gotta feed hobos?"

Stacks is a victim of his own spit-takes at every event where he has to eat soup kitchen food. But if viral videos can drag him down in the polls, video of him scooping Annie out of danger in traffic brings him up. Guy convinces Stacks to take in the kid and get as many photos of "Little Orphan Annie" as he can.

All Annie wants to do is find her real parents, visiting the restaurant where she was abandoned years before, waiting and hoping.

Gluck ("Easy A") keeps the pace brisk through the early acts. Some songs from the stage

know that if I were going to do 'Annie,'" he said, "I would have to do it this way."

An untraditional 'Annie'

Gluck not only directs the new version but he's also an executive producer, wrote the screenplay and some lyrics. He says he knew he didn't want to do a "traditional musical." The movie begins in a classroom with the familiar white, redheaded Annie, then switches focus to a little black girl in the room.

"I wanted to alert the audience that loves the old 'Annie' that we are aware this doesn't exist in a bubble. ... There are,

like, 35 references to the old movie."

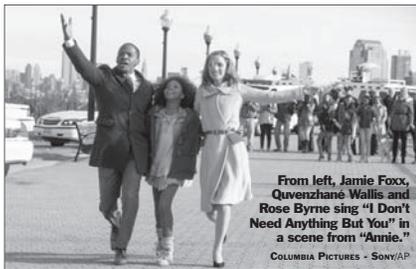
The film, not the Broadway show, is clearly his frame of reference, and he intentionally cast kids who don't have a Broadway belt.

Although Thomas Meehan, the show's original book writer, and lyricist Martin Charnin have not had much to do with the movie, most of the iconic songs — including "Tomorrow," "It's the Hard-Knock Life," "You're Never Fully Dressed Without a Smile" and "Maybe" — are still very much here.

Many of the arrangements are new, however, with the complex polyrhythms of the New York streets. Gluck wants it to be contemporary, but says he feels "very responsible" to composer Charles Strouse, who came to the set several times. "I feel very responsible to his music."

Wallis had not sung in public before, but now is the singing, dancing, acting center of a huge musical. Still, she is very much a kid. When asked what she would like most to do in the world, she said "adopt a thousand puppies."

Diaz, too, had never sung in public but said she needs to tackle fears "before they terrify me." She said she doesn't think about filling the shoes of other famous Miss Hannigans because "This is a whole new film." The responsibility is helping make an "Annie" for a new generation, she said. "This will probably be the only 'Annie' they are going to know."



From left, Jamie Foxx, Quvenzhané Wallis, and Rose Byrne sing "I Don't Need Anything But You" in a scene from "Annie." COLUMBIA PICTURES • SONY/AP

musical are moved offstage but kept as part of the texture, sung by pop singers such as Sia and Halli Cauthery. Others are transformed into marvels of kid-friendly choreography. Byrne and Wallis surprise in the giddy duet "I Think I'm Gonna Like It Here." Diaz is fearlessly mean in "Little Girls," and she and Cannavale kill "Easy Street." Foxx is a proven crooner who shows a kid-friendly side in his duets with Wallis.

The banter is clever. We're reminded that Sandy, the dog, shares the name with a certain storm. And the picture is pep-

pered with cameos — Patricia Clarkson as a customer burned by Stacks' cellphones, Ashton Kutcher and Milla Kunis star in a movie whose premiere the rich guy and the orphan attend, and Michael J. Fox endorses Stacks' mayoral race opponent.

Even with all this sparkle, the film staggers through its third act. By then, the script has rubbed the rough edges off the villains and made whatever point it was going to make several times over.

"Annie" is rated PG for some mild language and rude humor. Running time: 118 minutes.

WEEKEND

Europe

THE EUROPE EXPERIENCE



PARY SMITH/Stars and Stripes

Wooden chalets with all sorts of holiday decor, garden accessories and more for sale attract crowds to the Christmas market in Winchester, England. The market, which sits in the shadow of the Winchester Cathedral, runs through Sunday.

BE CHARMED:

Christmas market in Winchester, England

Looking for a Christmas market with all the coziness of a small-town event but that still offers a huge range of merchandise? There's still time to enjoy the Christmas market in Winchester, England, which runs through Sunday.

The market, which sits in the shadow of the magnificent Winchester Cathedral, attracts thousands of people, so there might be a logjam at the entrance. But the line moves quickly, so don't be discouraged.

There is a small skating rink surrounded by scores of wooden huts with vendors offering holiday items and food. The charm of the market lies not so much in its festive atmosphere, but in the town itself. While in Winchester, take time to stroll its cozy streets with their half-timber buildings and balconied storefronts. Take a peek inside its inviting, rustic pubs (which probably will be filled with local residents as well as marketgoers).

If you're lucky, it will be snowing, and you'll get the full Dickensian Christmas experience.

Winchester is about an hour's ride by train from London's Waterloo station. From Winchester's train station, catch a bus to the town center, a 10-minute ride. The bus stops just steps away from the Guildhall.

Market hours are 10 a.m.-7:30 p.m. through Saturday and 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday. There is a fee to use the skating rink, which will be open through Jan. 4, with "tiny tots" sessions available. Ice skating sessions last for one hour, including the time it takes to fit your skates. Skate rental is included in the ticket price. See the market website at winchester-cathedral.org.uk/christmas/christmas-market.

TOP TRAVEL PICKS

Dutch Dickens fest

The Dutch city of Deventer takes on the air of England in centuries past this Saturday and Sunday as its picturesque Bergkwartier hosts its annual Dickens Festival.

About 950 characters from Dickens' works — from Ebenezer Scrooge and Oliver Twist to the supporting cast of the upper classes, orphans and ruffians — will walk the decorated streets, serenaded by carolers. Those in pursuit of last-minute Christmas gifts have more than 200 stalls to peruse, as well as shops and galleries, which will be open on both days. A Christmas concert will take place on Sunday afternoon at the Broederenkerk.

Festival hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. both days. Entry to the festival is free, although there are modest fees to visit the Christmas market in the Grote Kerk and the antiques market in the Oude Mariakerk. The 9-euro parking fee charged by the central parking area includes use of a courtesy shuttle. Organizers note that visitors should expect waits of an hour or more to enter the festival area. Deventer is about 70 miles east of



Karen Bradbury

See the Europe Traveler blog at stripes.com/travel/europe-travel

Amsterdam.

Learn more at dickensfestijn.nl.

Shopping in Stuttgart

In Stuttgart through the weekend, a fun and colorful solution is at hand for those who have left gift shopping to the last minute: the Christmas Shopping Lounge at the Phoenixhalle in Römerkastell. The event, which also goes by an unprintable nickname, offers a chance to browse and purchase quality goods with a certain flair, the products of a young generation of designers and artists from Germany and beyond.

About 150 creative types will present their wares in pop-up stores set up in architecturally appealing surroundings. Shoppers will find a mix of fashion, costume jewelry, household accessories, art, graphics, photos, food and more.

To enhance the shopping experience, the stalls will echo with the sounds of DJ music, creating an atmosphere akin to that of a club. Cocktails and hot mulled wine will be available on premises.

The hall opens at noon both days, closing at 10 p.m. Saturday and 8 p.m. Sunday. Entry costs 4 euros, or about \$5. Learn more at tinyurl.com/of3lep2.

Metal fest in Karlsruhe

For sounds as soft as a falling snowflake, head anywhere but Karlsruhe, Germany, this Saturday, when the Knock Out Festival's metal-all-the-way lineup takes to the stage. This year's bands include Anvil, Edguy, Gothard, Pretty Maids, Primal Fear and Unisonic.

The Schwarzwaldhalle will serve as the venue for the loud evening out. Doors will open at 3:30 p.m. The first band takes

to the stage at 5 p.m., and the party will go on until about 1 the next morning.

Tickets at the door cost \$9 euros (about \$73) for standing room or 65 euros for a seat in

the hall. No children under age 8 are allowed, and those under 16 must be in the company of a parent or authorized guardian.

Find more details at knockout-festival.de.



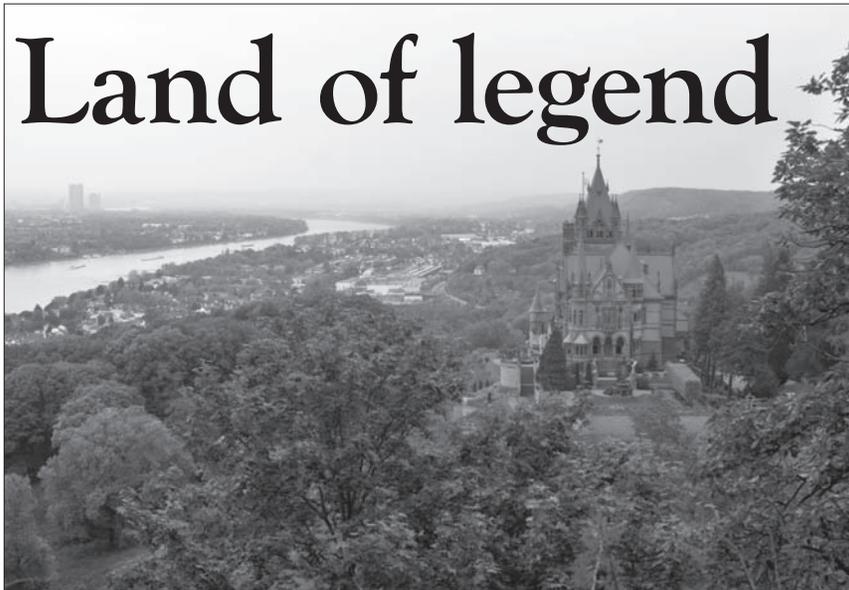
COURTESY OF GERARD DUBOIS/VVV Deventer

The Dutch city of Deventer is the backdrop for the 24th edition of its annual Dickens Festival, where about 950 characters from famous books by 19th-century British author Charles Dickens come to life. Organizers advise visitors to pack patience and expect an hour's wait at the festival's entrance.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Europe

Land of legend



PHOTOS BY ERIC A. BROWN/Stars and Stripes

The view toward Bonn, Germany, beyond Schloss Drachenburg from the hiking trail en route to the top of Drachenfels, or Dragon's Rock.

At Drachenfels, a hero is said to have slain a dragon

By ERIC A. BROWN
Stars and Stripes

Perched high above the Rhine River sits an igneous rock formation which, according to legend, was home to a fire-breathing dragon that terrorized residents in the surrounding villages.

Located just 90 minutes north of Wiesbaden, near Bonn, Drachenfels, or Dragon's Rock, overshadows the resort town of Königswinter. Bustling with tourists in summer, the area is quieter this time of year.

Lured by the name "Dragon's Rock," I chose to tackle Drachenfels before exploring the town below.

The Drachenfels Bahn, a cog railway, which has been in operation since 1883, is a unique way to get to the top of Drachenfels, though it does not run in December, resuming operations in January.

During my mid-November visit, I chose to expend some energy and hike to the top with my impatient dachshund, Nelson, leading the way.

The hiking path starts out steep, offering spectacular views along the way. Roughly a third of the way up is the Nibelungenhalle, a domed structure housing a reptile zoo, where relatives of the dragon, Fafnir, such as crocodiles and alligators, still live.

The exhibits there include the cave where Siegfried is alleged to have slain the dragon.

At the halfway point along the trail is the cog train's intermedi-

ate station and location of the spectacular neo-Gothic Schloss Drachenburg, a beautiful mixture of villa, mansion and castle constructed in the 19th century. Drachenburg has its own fascinating history. Plans to turn it into an amusement park around 1910 failed. During World War II, the Nazis used it as a school for the elite for a time. The damaged castle was then occupied by the Americans; later, refugees were housed there. A lengthy restoration project was completed in 2010.

Drachenburg is open for public and private tours, includes a bistro and gift shop and is a great place to take a break before tackling the last leg of the hike to the top of Drachenfels.

About a 10-minute hike past rock bluffs reinforced with concrete, steel anchors and caging to hold back intimidating boulders, Burg Drachenfels is well worth the effort.

The top offers some of the most commanding views of the Rhine River valley I've seen. From the summit, which reaches nearly 1,000 feet, I could almost make out Cologne's famed cathedral, despite poor weather.

A sheltered view, visitors can wander over to the glass-enclosed Drachenfels restaurant and cafe.

After warming up with a hot coffee, I thought twice about walking back down and considered riding the rail—but Nelson convinced me otherwise.

brown.eric@stripes.com



The writer's dachshund, Nelson, cautiously leads the way down from the top of Drachenfels, or Dragon's Rock.



Besides an impressive collection of reptiles, stained glass and art, the Nibelungenhalle (reptile zoo) above Königswinter, Germany, boasts a 40-foot-long dragon at its entrance.



By SCHILLINE/Stars and Stripes

ON THE QT

ADDRESS

Drachenfelsstrasse 53,
53639 Königswinter

TIMES

- The Drachenfels cog rail is open daily and runs every half-hour during the summer. It is closed mid-November through the end of the year. Departure times during the off-season vary, so check the timetable on its website or the times clearly posted at the station.

- The reptile zoo is open daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. from March 15 through Nov. 1.

- Schloss Drachenburg is open daily 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. from April to Nov. 2; weekends noon to 5 p.m. from Nov. 3 to March 27. Closed Dec. 22 to Jan. 6.

COSTS

- The Drachenfels cog rail costs 10 euros for an adult round-trip ticket (8 euros one-way) and 5.50 euros for a child's round-trip ticket (5 euro one-way); groups of 15 or more receive additional discounts.
- Entrance to the reptile zoo costs 5 euros for adults and 3 for children 3-14 years old.

FOOD

An assortment of restaurants and cafes are located in Königswinter; however, at the top of Drachenfels is a restaurant with a glass dining area overlooking the Rhine River valley. Prices range from 8.50 euros to about 10 euros. Kids menu items are 6.50 euros. Make reservations at info@der-drachenfels.de.

INFORMATION

- Drachenfels: der-drachenfels.de
- Cog railway: drachenfelsbahn-koenigswinter.de
- Reptile zoo: nibelungenhalle.de
- Schloss Drachenburg: schloss-drachenburg.de

—Eric Brown

WEEKEND: AFTER HOURS

Europe

After Hours: Germany

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Burgers topped with goat cheese and figs? Burgers with brie? Vegetarian patties made of ground walnuts and served with sun-dried tomatoes and blue cheese?

It all sounds weird. But if you're interested in burgers served with a twist, Hans im Glück could be the place for you. The German chain has been serving its unique offerings for years at various cities in Germany. In Stuttgart, a new establishment just opened.

The new burger joint is among a series of restaurants and cafes adjacent to the new massive Milaneo shopping mall, a major downtown redevelopment project that opened in October.

Hans im Glück is a bustling eatery with a big menu that boasts freshly made burgers, some served with hay cheese imported from Austria.

It also has an extensive vegetarian burger menu, which soon

HANS IM GLÜCK

Where: Mailänder Platz 7, Stuttgart. It is attached to the Milaneo mall along the B-27 near the city library.

English menu: Yes

Prices: About 8 euros for a burger.

Dress: Casual

Hours: Mon.-Sat., opens at 10 a.m., closing open ended; Sunday, noon-10 p.m.

Contact: (+49) (0) 711-30006718

— John Vandiver

after a meaty Thanksgiving, looked promising during a recent visit.

I ordered the walnut burger, which didn't taste a thing like nuts, but was nonetheless delicious. It was a bit pricey as far as burgers go, at 7 euros. But topped with blue cheese, sun-



PHOTOS BY JOHN VANDIVER/Stars and Stripes

In addition to standard beef burgers, the Hans im Glück restaurant in Stuttgart also serves numerous vegetarian burgers, such as this one made of walnuts.



The restaurant just opened at Stuttgart's Milaneo mall, a major downtown redevelopment project that opened in October.

dried tomatoes and served on a fresh sourdough bun, it was a decided step up from McDonald's.

At lunchtime, you can get a combo that comes with fries, a soft drink and an after-meal hot drink of your choice for an added 4.50 euros. In the evening, you can add a cocktail to the combo for 7.50 euros above the cost of the burger. The full service bar offers scores of cocktails to choose from.

The restaurant's decor is unique, with dozens of birch trees that function as support beams scattered around the restaurant.

All in all, it's a decent dining choice for anyone looking to experiment with a German take on an American staple.

vandiver.john@stripes.com



Support beams made of birch are one of the unique design features that gives the restaurant a unique look.

Season's readings: There are books for all kinds of cooks

By ERICA MARCUS
Newsday

Cookbooks come in as many shapes and sizes as cooks do. They also come in profession. This year, we waded through hundreds to find a few volumes that will appeal to most of the cooks on your holiday gift list. Whether the intended recipient is a meat lover or a vegetarian, a novice baker or an advanced cander, there's a book for that. Here are some of our favorites:

• **For the Italophile:** "Di Palo's Guide to the Essential Foods of Italy: 100 Years of Wisdom and Stories from Behind the Counter" by Lou Di Palo with Rachel Wharton (Ballantine Books, \$28). Scion of one of the best markets in New York's Little Italy, Di Palo introduces a dozen of the country's signature products — including balsamic

vinegar, prosciutto and olive oil — and offers history, buying advice, recipes and stories from his 60-year (and counting) career.

• **For the canner:** In her authoritative "Mrs. Wheelbarrow's Practical Pantry: Recipes and Techniques for Year-Round Preserving" (Norton, \$35), Cathy Barrow holds your hand through water-bath canning (jams, sauces and pickles); pressure canning (stocks, soups and beans); curing meats and fish with salt, brine and smoke; and even making your own cheese.

• **For the novice baker:** In Nick Malgieri's "Pastry: Foolproof Recipes for the Home Cook" (Kyle, \$29.95), the veteran



TNS

cookbook author turns his attention to beginners. "If you have a bad case of pastry phobia or a fear of rolling," he writes, "I can promise that if you follow the simple instructions here, you'll be able to tackle any pastry project you like."

• **For the vegetarian:** London restaurateur Yotam Ottolenghi hit big in 2011 with his first vegetarian cookbook, "Plenty." His newest, "Plenty More: Vibrant Vegetable Cooking from London's Ottolenghi" (Ten Speed, \$35), focuses on cooking techniques that best utilize his favorite ingredients' potential. He presents recipes in chapters titled Tossed, Steamed,

Blanched, Simmered, Braised, Grilled, Roasted, Fried, Mashed, Cracked, Baked and Sweetened.

• **For the armchair traveler:** "My Paris Kitchen: Recipes and Stories" (Ten Speed Press, \$35) is a delicious third act from David Lebovitz. His blog, davidlebovitz.com, which chronicles his life and meals, has been distilled into this beautiful book. In addition to 100 recipes ranging from French classics to dishes that reflect Paris' burgeoning international community, there are terrific stories about living, shopping and cooking in one of the world's culinary epicenters.

• **For the coffee geek:** If you don't know the difference between arabica and robusta, if you're wondering how coffee cultivation in Ethiopia differs from that in Costa Rica, if you're confused about the myriad methods of brewing coffee, you won't

find a better resource than "The World Atlas of Coffee: From Beans to Brewing — Coffees Explored, Explained and Enjoyed" by James Hoffmann (Firefly Books, \$35). Even confirmed coffee geeks will benefit from this volume, at once encyclopedic and approachable.

• **For the carnivore:** This year brought numerous nose-to-tail meat cookbooks authored by chefs of farm-to-table restaurants. "Cook's Illustrated Meat Book: The Game-Changing Guide That Teaches You How to Cook Meat and Poultry With 425 Bulletproof Recipes" (America's Test Kitchen, \$40) is as up as it is indispensable. Here is everything you need to know about buying, storing, freezing, thawing, aging, brining, cooking, carving and serving meat — and that's before you get to 450 pages of recipe-laden chapters on beef, pork, lamb and veal and poultry.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Europe

Tradition trumps kitsch

More buyers choose German wooden crafts over modern holiday bling

By LEON MANGASARIAN AND ALESSANDRO SPECIALE
Bloomberg News

The makers of Germany's traditional wooden holiday decorations have stuck with the tried and true, ignoring bling, singing Santas and dancing reindeer in their handmade artisanship.

That strategy is paying off as the more than 300-year-old craft unique to the Ore Mountains in eastern Germany — a picturesque area dotted with castles and fortresses that forms a natural border between the country and the Czech Republic — has never been more in demand. The artistry is a staple of Christmas markets and sold around the world.

Kept alive during communism as a source of hard currency, sales of Erzgebirge Christmas tree ornaments, nutcrackers and candle-lit holiday pyramids have doubled since

reunification in 1990 to about 50 million euros (\$62 million) a year. The thriving industry, which dates to the 17th century, directly employs about 2,000 people and stands in contrast to other traditional crafts, such as Venice's Murano glass, struggling for survival as cheap knockoffs draw away customers.

“Handcrafted Christmas decorations are a way to hit the brakes in our fast-paced lives,” Dieter Uhlmann, head of the Association of Erzgebirge Artisans and Toy Manufacturers, said of the appeal of the region's goods.

Buyers are drawn to the artisanship using methods going back centuries. Wendt & Kuehn, founded in 1915 in the village of Gruenhainichen, Germany, follows 40 steps to



Photos courtesy of ruemmlerfotografie

Workers use lathes to carve wood for traditional Christmas ornaments in the workshop of Wendt & Kuehn Gruenhainichen, Germany.

‘Where in the world can you find a business with products that have been available for about 350 years that are still produced in the same way?’

Ringo Mueller
Fourth-generation woodcrafter, Seifen, Germany

make the company's signature wooden angels with wings or smaller angels holding musical instruments or toys.

The manufacturer, which has survived two world wars, hyperinflation and a state takeover under the communists, returned to family ownership in 1990. The entire assembly process is

still done in-house, with Christmas figures cut, fit together and paint-

ed by hand based on 2,500 designs from the company's founders. The spruce, beech and linden come from the nearby forests in a landscape that transforms into a snow-covered wonderland in winter.

In tune with its old-fashioned approach, Wendt & Kuehn, which has increased sales 4 percent annually for the past three years to about 8.5 million euros, offers a rare service for a Christmas decoration maker: Its own repair department can fix angels that are broken or singed by candles.

Chief Executive Officer Claudia Baer, the third generation of the family to run Wendt & Kuehn, compares what her company does to the push that started in the 1980s in Italy to promote local foods



A worker hand paints a traditional wooden angel Christmas ornament in the Wendt & Kuehn workshop. The company's artisans follow 40 steps to make its signature angels, such as those on display at right.

and centuries-old gastronomic traditions.

“We’re a counter-movement, just like Slow Food,” Baer said at the company’s 19th century half-timbered factory. “Smartphones are out of date in a flash, but we’ll be producing the same things in 10 years.”

The region also has been vigilant in protecting its craft.

Uhlmann said the success of the decorations — popular in the United States, Germany and even Asia — has led to counterfeiters being produced abroad by machine and passed off as handmade.

“We’ve won numerous court cases against people who do this,” the association chief said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 31

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Europe

FROM PAGE 30

The Ore Mountains have been a center for mining dating to the 14th century. Wooden toy-making began in the 17th century as a way to earn extra money and was expanded in the 19th century as mining began to decline.

The company founded by Ringo Mueller's great grandfather in 1899 originally produced small wooden toys. Mueller, in the heart of the region in the village of Seiffen, avoided nationalization during communist rule by focusing on traditional Christmas decorations, sold chiefly in the West, to gain hard currency.

"Where in the world can you find a business with products that have been available for about 350 years that are still produced in the same way?" Mueller asked. "It is a tradition that is worth working for."

Today, the Erzgebirge draws travelers from as far away as Asia looking for ornaments, and many of the castles have been converted into hotels. On a recent Sunday, the streets in Seiffen were teeming with tourists.

Among the visitors were Niels Kiessling and Susi Weissbach, both 25, who came with their one-month-old daughter to buy a wooden pyramid. The ornaments, which have a propeller on top that spins the table-top decoration with the heat of candles on the base, are as common in Germany as stockings in the United States.

"It's important to have a pyramid in our new house," said Weissbach, a resident of the eastern German city of Zwickau. "Our parents had it and we want it, too."

One nod to modernity is the

KNOW & GO

There are about 150 woodcarving workshops in Seiffen, Germany, alone (earning it the nickname "Germany's Toy Town") and many more in the surrounding towns and villages. Many shops sell Erzgebirge woodcarvings year round. Christmas decorations are the main focus, but several have found another niche in making Easter decorations, too.

To find out where you can watch artisans making the decorations, visit seiffen.de/handwerker.

To buy online, see seiffen.de/online-shops.

Interested but not buying? Then visit the Toy Museum in Seiffen (spielzeugmuseum-seiffen.de/spmng.htm), which tells about the history and technique of wood-carved toys and traditional decorations.

use of the Internet, which the Erzgebirge producers have successfully embraced to widen their customer base. The online price in the U.S. for Wendt & Kuehn's wooden angel figurines starts at about \$25. For everything else, tradition remains key.

"We love these decorations because we knew them as children and they bring back wonderful memories," said Jacqueline Lorenz as she painted wooden birds at the Werkstatt Leichtsenering in Seiffen. "That's why people keep buying them."



Courtesy of ruemmerfotografie

The workshop of traditional wooden Christmas tree ornament makers Wendt & Kuehn is located in Gruenhaihchen, one of several toy-making towns in Germany's Ore Mountains.



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WEEKEND

Pacific

THE PACIFIC EXPERIENCE

HOLIDAY EVENTS OFF BASE

Events are as accurate as possible at press time. Since times or event schedules can change, please verify events before attending.

Japan

CHRISTMAS ART FESTA 2014 (Tokyo):

Through Dec. 20; enjoy art at 23 galleries in Ginza and Kyobashi, the most sophisticated shopping district of Tokyo; tinyurl.com/kytp5ij.

WORLD CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL 2014 AT YOYOGI PARK (Tokyo):

Dec. 20 & 21; Christmas food and music, goods and more; five-minute walk from JR Harajuku Station & Meiji Jingumae Station on Metro Chiyoda Line.

CHRISTMAS MARKETS AT KOSAKA (Akiita prefecture): Dec. 20 & 24, 5:30 p.m.; goods such as ornaments, dolls, general merchandise, along with German sausages and cookies, hot wines, and beer, plus performances and illumination; at Meiji Hyakunendori Street and Kokusan Koryu Hiraba areas, 30-minute ride from Ohwani Hirosaki I.C. on Tohoku Express; tinyurl.com/o9wzi9n.

CHRISTMAS TOY RUN (Tokyo): Dec. 23, 1:30-3:30 p.m.; Santas give away cookies and eco-bugs to those seeing the parade on streets of Harajuku and Aoyama areas, start and end at Meiji Jingu Gaien Memorial Picture Gallery; JR Shinanomachi Station on Sobu Line; JR Shinjuku Station.

MARCHE DE NOEL (Tokyo): Through Dec. 25, 11 a.m.-10 p.m.; Christmas market featuring Christmas goods including ornaments and dolls in front of Dean & DeLuca B1 of Tokyo Midtown; tinyurl.com/m7e5e8x.

CHRISTMAS MARKETS AT SAITAMA SHINTOSHIN KEYAKI HIROBA (Saitama prefecture): Through Dec. 25, 5-6 p.m. weekdays, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.; Christmas goods such as ornaments, dolls and more at Keyaki Hiroba of Saitama Super Arena.

KARUIZAWA WINTER FESTIVAL (Nagano)

prefecture): Through Dec. 25; featuring ice skating, ice hockey, curling, live concerts, food booths, illuminations and more at Yanozaki Koen, five-minute walk from JR Karuizawa Station or 20-minute ride from Usui Karuizawa I.C. on Jyoshinetsu Express.

ROPPONGI HILLS CHRISTMAS MARKET (Tokyo):

Through Dec. 25, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.; featuring German-style Christmas market including ornaments, trees, goods and more at O-yane Plaza of Roppongi Hills, Hibiya Station on Hibiya Line or four-minute walk from Oedo Line; 03-6406-6000.

YOKOHAMA RED BRICK WAREHOUSE CHRISTMAS MARKET (Kanagawa prefecture):

Through Dec. 25, 11 a.m.-10 p.m.; featuring German-style Christmas market including ornaments, trees, Christmas goods and more at Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse; 15-minute walk from JR Sakuragicho and Kan-nai Stations.

CHRISTMAS FANTASY AT TOKYO DISNEYLAND:

Through Dec. 25; trees and sparkling illuminations; Tokyo Disneyland Station; tokyodisneyresort.co.jp.

CHRISTMAS WISHES AT TOKYO DISNEYSEA:

Through Dec. 25; Tokyo DisneySea Station; tokyodisneyresort.co.jp.

Okinawa

2014 CHRISTMAS MUSIC HANABI COLLABORATION:

Dec. 20, 6:30 p.m.; 10,000 fireworks with music, and

see a Christmas tree decorated by fashion designer Junke Kashino; Ginowan Seaside Park (Ginowan Tropical Beach), 40-minute ride from Naha Airport; www.rkyukyukaiensai.com/en.

South Korea

"THE NUTCRACKER" BY UNIVERSAL BALLET (Seoul): Dec. 19-31; Universal Art Center; 10,000-100,000 won; tinyurl.com/3e6rwh.

ON BASE

Japan

CAMP FUJI

Go to Naeba Ski Resort with MCCS Trips and Recreation Dec. 25-27.

YOKOSUKA

Visit Snow Monkey Park Dec. 24-25 or enjoy New Sanno Hotel brunch and Tokyo DisneySea or Disneyland discount Dec. 25 with Aquatics.

YOKOTA

On Dec. 20, go to Fuji-Q Highland Amusement Park or "The Nutcracker" ballet; and Dec. 25, visit Disneyland with ITT.

CAMP ZAMA

Get in some last-minute shopping on Dec. 21 with an Outdoor Recreation trip to IKEA and Yokohama Lala Port Shopping. There are also tours on Dec. 25 for ski and snowboarding for beginners or a Christmas dinner & night illumination.

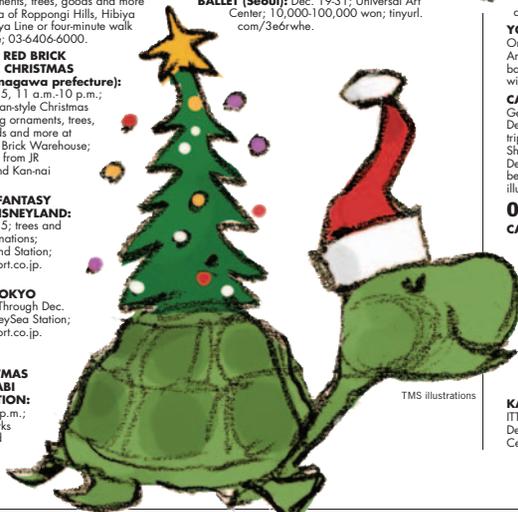
Okinawa

CAMPS KINSER, FOSTER AND HANSEN

Tours offices offer the following: Dec. 20, 4:30-9 p.m., Christmas Fireworks Cruise; Dec. 21, 5-10 p.m., Kariyushi Beach Resort Ocean Spa Hotel Illumination & Dinner; Dec. 21, 4:30-10 p.m., Peaceful Illumination; Dec. 23, 5-9:30 p.m., Southeast Botanical Garden Illumination & dinner buffet; Dec. 24, 3:30-8:30 p.m., Christmas Eve Sunset Dinner Cruise

KADENA

ITT has a trip Dec. 20 and again Dec. 31 to the Ioman Illumination Celebration tour.



TMS illustrations

Looking for even more to do? For additional events, concerts and activities, go to stripes.com/military-life



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25	26	27	28	29	30	31								29	30	31				

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We will respond with a confirmation number or contact you if your first choice of dates is not available. For current availability, call our Reservation Desk or check our website: www.thenewsanno.com Available dates on the above calendars are subject to change without notice.

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WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Pacific

For early risers: Sunrise festivals in South Korea



Courtesy of KTO NY

Jeongdongjin Sunrise Festival is in Gangwon province on Dec. 31. This is one of the most popular spots and features cliffs, a rustic railway and more. For more: tinyurl.com/k5viala9. Other sunrise festivals include: Ulsan Ganjeolgot Sunrise Festival at Ganjeolgot Cape in Ulsan; Maryanggo Sunset and Sunrise Festival on the west coast; Seongsan Sunrise Festival, the most famous place for viewing the sunrise on Jeju Island; Yeosu Hyangiram Sunrise Festival in South Jeolla province; and Homigot Sunrise Festival in North Gyeongsang province on the easternmost point of the Korean Peninsula.



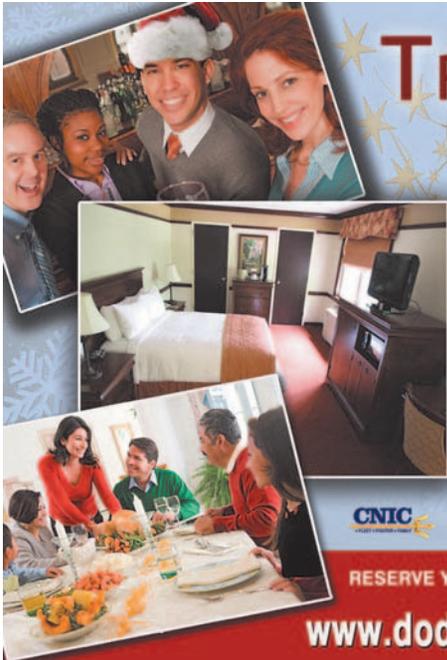
Courtesy of JNTO

Celebrate the Emperor's birthday — a national holiday in Japan — on Dec. 23. Emperor Akihito turns 81 and he and his family receive people's well wishes at the Imperial Palace, above, which can be entered from Nijubashi Bridge on this day. The emperor and his family appear and greet visitors at 10:20, 11 and 11:40 a.m. Camp Zama Outdoor Recreation Center will take a trip there.



THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN/LATWP

Ring in the new year with Happy Island Countdown at **Yokohama Hakkeijima Sea Paradise** at 3 p.m. Dec. 31 in Yokohama, Japan. For more: seaparadise.co.jp. Visit Dec. 20 with Camp Fuji Trips and Recreation or Dec. 25 with Yokota Air Base ITT.



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WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Pacific



PHOTOS BY CHIYOMI SUMIDA/Stars and Stripes

Left: Two-year-old Mari Iwata of Tokyo paints a tame version of a "shisa" dog at Ryukyu Gama pottery workshop in Nago, Okinawa. The workshop lets tourists experience the art of creating the much-loved mythical lion-dog, which, as seen above, can be a fierce and powerful guardian against evil spirits.

Okinawa's top dog

Make your own mythical symbol of island culture

By CHIYOMI SUMIDA
Stars and Stripes

Shisa dogs, crosses between a lion and a dog, are imaginary guardians that Okinawans have loved and cherished for centuries.

Some welcome visitors at the entrances of homes and other buildings, while others gallantly perch on rooftops to ward off evil spirits.

Today, they have become a symbol of Okinawa, one of the most popular vacation destinations in Japan. Hence many pottery workshops on the island, such as Ryukyu Gama (kiln) in Nago, open their doors for tourists to make their own *shisa* dogs.

Ryukyu Gama is located conveniently near other tourist sites like the Nago Pineapple Park and the Churaumi Aquarium. No reservation is required unless a group is larger than 10 people.

On a recent visit, I found the workshop in a large bright red building, flanked by a pair of huge *shisa* dogs at the entrance. Before I reached the workshop corner, hundreds of *shisa* dogs greeted me. On one table was an army of solemn traditional guardians; on the next was a gang of playful figures with beaming smiles.

Walking through an aisle of display

models helped me get an idea of the kind of *shisa* dog I wanted to make.

My imagination swelled in anticipation of making a big pair of dignified-looking *shisa* dogs, like many I often see in town, until a friendly workshop staffer, Seiya Tamaki, gently reminded me that something so large might be a little ambitious for a first effort.

I compromised and chose a modest-sized wall-hanging model instead.

The supplied materials and tools were basic and simple, including a clay ball about five inches in diameter, a wood roller, a bamboo spatula and a toothbrush. Following the directions shown on a small DVD monitor and occa-

sional advice from Tamaki, I got to work. Spreading the clay flat is like rolling out bread dough.

Familiar and easy work so far. A challenge came when it came to making a mouth and a nose.

A big opening was for the mouth and three marshmallow-size round clay pieces were for the nose.

Gradually, the face began to take shape as if it was emerging from the earth.

After about three hours of struggle, I was done. All I needed to do was wait for it to be delivered to my home after going through a firing process in a kiln.

I was told earlier by a workshop staff that a *shisa* will resemble the person who made it.

Now I can hardly wait for it to arrive, to see if it looks like me.

sumida.chiyomi@stripes.com



Above: A smiling "shisa." According to staffers at the workshop, a "shisa" will resemble the person who makes it. Right: A regal-looking lion-dog figure.



REV SCHELLING/Stars and Stripes

ON THE QT

DIRECTIONS

Ryukyu Gama is on Highway 84 in Nago, Okinawa. Take the Okinawa Expressway north and get off at the northern end exit No. 10, Kyoda. Take Highway 58 north to the Hakuginbashi intersection. Turn left (there's a sign to the Churaumi Aquarium, Nago Pineapple Park and Mount Yae). Proceed on Highway 84 until you see a bowling alley, Nago Super Bowl, on your left. The Ryukyu Gama is across the street on your right.

TIMES

10 a.m.-6 p.m. daily.

COSTS

From 1,500 yen for painting a ready-made *shisa* figure to 5,000 yen for making a *shisa* to your liking.

FOOD

There is no food at the facility. An A&W restaurant is across the street.

INFORMATION

Telephone: 0980-43-8660; website <http://taiken-jp.net/ryukyu-english-info.html>

— Chiyomi Sumida

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE



Courtesy of JINTO

The founder of Nikka Whisky traveled to Scotland in 1918 to learn the whisky distilling process.

Taking top spot from the Scots

Japan gaining worldwide attention for its award-winning whiskies

By ERIK SLAVIN
Stars and Stripes

The Japanese topped the Scots for a major whisky honor, to the surprise of many who know

Scotch only by reputation — and practically no one who regularly drinks high-quality whisky.

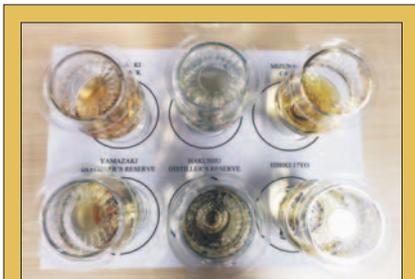
Suntory's 2013 Yamazaki Sherry Cask whisky earned top billing in the influential "Jim Murray's Whisky Bible 2015" for a drink of "near indescribable genius."

Media worldwide wrote stories asking how this could possibly happen to Scotland, which fell out of the top five and got beat out for Murray's second- and third-place spots by Kentucky bourbon and rye. The attention drew comparisons to a famous 1976 Paris wine tasting, where lightly regarded California wines trounced French offerings in a blind judging.

The reality is that there is still plenty of good whisky in Scotland, but Japan's best whiskies have been every bit Scotland's equals for years. It's simply a question of personal preference.

Japan's expertise leaves U.S. servicemembers based in the country with an opportunity to try these whiskies at a fraction of what they cost as imports. For example, Nikka's Taketsuru blended malt costs about \$37 in Japan, or \$73 at U.S. retailer Total Wine.

The giant of Japan's whisky



Eric GUZMAN/Stars and Stripes

A selection of Suntory whisky product samples was presented to members of the press during a briefing and tasting session at Foreign Press Center Japan on Nov. 13.

Whisky 101

- Age is a number, not a mark of quality. One of the best whiskies I had during comparison research for this story was a Scotch bottled in the 1970s. It was 5 years old. If you see a bottle of 21-year-old whisky and it's cheap, you're most likely paying more for age than taste.

- Blended whiskies are a great place to start. Nikka Black Pure Malt costs about 2,000 yen (\$18) in Japan, and it's garnered scores in the 90s

(out of 100) from some of the world's top whisky authorities. mastertofmall.com/whiskies/nikka-pure-malt-black-whisky

- Narita Airport is a whisky gateway. I'm wary of even mentioning this for fear that they'll stop, but the duty-free shop near the United gates at Narita does free tastings of just about everything they carry, including 21-year-old Hibiki, which goes for 16,000 yen a bottle.

— Erik Slavin

Editor's note: The Associated Press style dictates that the whisky spelling of this artfully distilled drink should refer only to Scotch or Canadian liquors, and all others should be referred to as whiskies. However, in an effort to make this story easier to read — and to reduce snobbery — we decided to embrace this spelling for all.

Welcome to the big-boy whisky table, Japan and America.

industry is Suntory, which got even larger when it acquired Jim Beam this year.

Some companies see the quality of their products head south after massive growth, but there is no evidence of that at Suntory, judging by its annual international awards. Its single-malt Yamazaki brand is prized; however, its 17- and 21-year-old Hibiki blends, about \$70 and \$135 at the Narita duty-free shop, are some of the most complex yet easy-drinking whiskies on the Japanese market.

"The key to the Japanese success is that they never got cocky," said Mike Murphy, import manager for Japan trading company Whisk-e. "They never thought their whisky was good enough."

Murphy first came to Japan as a Navy sailor, 30 years later, he's seen the industry transformed.

The big Japanese whisky distilleries are great at understanding their clientele, Murphy

What's in a name?

Definitions of whisky/whiskies can vary between nations and sometimes even between states.

Scotch is defined by The United Kingdom's Scotch Whisky Act in detail. The quick version: it has to be produced in Scotland for water and malted barley, and processed at that Scottish distillery into a mash. If it's not Scottish, it's not really Scotch. The United States recognizes the U.K. claim on Scotch.

Irish whisky must be made in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland to be considered legitimate, according to European Union and U.S. law. There are many smaller quality distilleries, but the best known globally are Jameson and Bushmills.

Blended whiskies comprise the vast majority of the world's supply. They are blends of whiskies and grains. They often provide excellent value. Higher-end blends are mixed to bring out the best qualities of several whiskies.

Single malt is the product of a single distillery. These are rarer than blends and tend to be more expensive, though quality blends can be just as pricey. Some single malt whiskies are also single grain whiskies.

Corn whisky is distilled from a mash of at least 80 percent corn. Unlike other whiskies, it need not be stored in an oak container, according to U.S. federal law.

Bourbon, rye, wheat and rye malt are whiskies that cannot exceed 80 percent alcohol and contain no less than 51 percent of their respective grain. Many international trade agreements consider the name Bourbon a U.S. trademark. Although it can be made anywhere in the U.S., bourbon is strongly associated with Kentucky and Tennessee.

— Erik Slavin

explained.

Through the 1970s, they knew their customers were going to drink whisky with soda, or over lots of ice — unlike drinkers in countries who typically drank high-quality scotch straight or with a splash of water. Consequently, distillers made whisky that would stand up to being watered down.

As Japan boomed in the 1980s, business travelers began discovering its best drinks. Distillers responded, buying past from Scotland and studying that country's techniques more closely.

As they learned the European ways, they began adding their own touches.

SEE WHISKIES ON PAGE 36

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Pacific



PHOTOS BY WYATT OLSON/Stars and Stripes

At Saigon Vietnamese Cuisine in Honolulu's Chinatown, a "char siu" sandwich, above, satisfies those who might like some greens with their tasty meat. The sandwiches are served on freshly baked baguettes and stuffed with shredded, marinated carrot and white radish, fresh basil, cucumber and a creamy sauce. At left, Hofun beef stew is loaded with meat steeped in a broth made slightly sweet by star anise and chives.

After Hours: Hawaii

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Perhaps the best attribute of Vietnamese food is its range, from fresh, raw vegetables to rich and meaty soups, making it the perfect ethnic cuisine for a group of diners with mixed tastes.

It's also distinctive from the neighboring fare of China and Thailand due to the roughly 100 years of Vietnam served as a French colony, ending in the 1950s.

Saigon Vietnamese Cuisine has plenty of competitors in Honolulu's Chinatown, but its cheerful staff and wide selection of barbecued sandwiches make it stand out.

One of the first times I ate a late lunch here, a mother and daughter sat down at an adjoining table and giddily proceeded to order two *banh mi* sandwiches. The server apologized to the two regulars that an earlier customer had placed a huge carry-out order of sandwiches so they were out of crispy baguette bread for the day. Their crestfallen faces looked like kids discovering that Santa Claus had skipped their tree.

I knew I'd have to try those sandwiches.

During a later visit, I ordered a *char siu* pork sandwich and understood their letdown. The sandwiches are served on freshly baked baguettes and stuffed with shredded, marinated carrot and white radish, fresh basil, cucumber and a creamy sauce with hints of horseradish and mustard seed.

Choices of meat for the sandwiches are

SAIGON VIETNAMESE CUISINE

Address: 164 No. King St., Honolulu
Getting there: Frequent city buses pass near the restaurant on Nimitz Highway and King Street, including the number 20 from Waikiki Beach. For a complete listing see: thebus.org/Route/Routes.asp.
Parking: Metered parking on the street or in the municipal parking ramp with entry off Nimitz Highway between

Kekaulike and River streets. Out-door parking lot off Nimitz Highway between Maunakea and Kekaulike streets.

Hours: 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily
Costs: Sandwiches cost \$6.25 to \$6.99.
Information: 808 599-1866
Hours: Open daily 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.

—Wyatt Olson

four styles of pork — shredded, barbecued, steamed or *char siu* — and barbecued chicken and beef. Different styles of meats can be combined on sandwiches.

Sad to say, liver pâté, one of my favorite ingredients on Vietnamese sandwiches, isn't available here. No matter, the meats they do offer are freshly prepared and juicy.

For beef lovers, the noodle soup is the hearty lunch, running from \$8.99 to \$9.99 for a large bowl that's a challenge to empty. Various cuts of beef are available, such as steak, tendon, tripe, brisket and meatball.

I favor the Hofun beef stew on the menu because the broth is thick and slightly sweet with star anise and chives. For the right level of "heat," I spice the bowl to my taste with the red chili paste that's present on all tables. This soup also comes with

chunks of liver; I'm not a fan, but I don't request a hold on them because I think they add flavor to the broth.

Each bowl comes with a heaping platter of raw vegetables, such as spicy green peppers, bean sprouts, basil and other Asian leafy greens, along with a sliced lime, for adding to the broth. The hot soup lightly scalds the greens but leaves them sufficiently crispy to hold their own distinctive tastes.

If beef isn't your thing, soups are also served with seafood, fish balls, wontons and duck.

Another stand-out here are the build-it-yourself spring rolls (\$15.50 to \$16.25). This is too much food if you're dining solo, so bring a friend and start rolling.

The crispy rice skins are dipped quickly into a bowl of water to soften them. Then you layer them with shrimp prepared in a



variety of ways — including sugar-cane-coated — clear vermicelli and a mix of leafy-green vegetables, bean sprouts and pickled veggies. Once they are rolled, they're dipped into sauce that is at the same time sour, sweet, salty and spicy.

olson.wyatt@stripes.com

Whiskies: High-quality ingredients, attention to detail elements of Japanese success

FROM PAGE 35

The introduction of mizunara oak casks gave several whiskies distinctive flavors. For example, Suntory's current Yamazaki Mizunara carries a lingering vanilla taste, along with some spiciness and cinnamon.

That said, Japan's whiskies don't conform to one style.

Shinji Fukuyo, Suntory's chief blender, says the thing that unites Japan's best whiskies is devotion to high-quality ingredients. "Very pure and clean water

makes very sophisticated spirits," Fukuyo said. "The Japanese consumer has very sophisticated taste."

Obsessive attention to detail is also critical. Fukuyo displayed photographs of a trip to Spain, where he visited the lumberjacks cutting the wood for sherry casks that would hold his whisky.

There are a handful of other major players in Japanese whisky, including Nikka, which began after its founder sailed to Scotland in 1918, returned to Hokkaido

with a Scottish bride and opened a distillery. A television show based on the couple is now an NHK hit.

Ichiro's Malt is what the cool kids are drinking, though you're less likely to find it at a typical izakaya in Japan. Ichiro's rarer bottles are selling for thousands of dollars at auctions in China.

Mars is another smaller distillery with a cult following, while beer giant Kirin runs a lesser-known distillery in Gotemba.

If all the talk of vanilla and wood casks makes whisky sound too complicated, it's only because of the passion of its devotees.

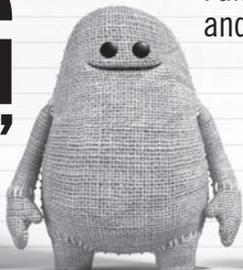
If you're new to whisky and can't readily identify the scents and tastes in the distiller's notes, that's OK too. For that matter, Murphy and plenty of longtime whisky fans have no problem with Jack Daniel's, or a whisky and soda in between drams of Japanese single malts.

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WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

'Little BIG Planet 3'

Fun game weaves creativity, sharing and platforming in one awesome title



BY MICHAEL S. DARNELL

Stars and Stripes

We are well into the holiday gaming season, that glorious time of year where every publisher on the face of the planet has pushed out a game to try to cash in on your Christmas cheer.

While it's not exactly accurate to call perennial platformer "LittleBigPlanet" an unknown quantity, its third and most recent installment is in danger of being overlooked by the Christmas shopping crowd.

It can be confusing out there for non-gamers looking to fill the stockings of their electronically minded loved ones, so let me help. If you have an owner of a PlayStation 4 on your shopping list, "LittleBigPlanet 3" is probably the perfect gift.

I say "probably" only to hedge my bets against those people who are just averse to fun, sunshine and happiness. Everybody else should be able to glean at least some enjoyment out of "LittleBigPlanet 3."

Don't believe me? Let's talk about the types of gamers that will love this game. There are the single-player fans, who just want a game to sit down and relax with after a long day. "LittleBigPlanet 3" delivers exactly that with a tremendous single-player campaign that finally fixes some of the issues with the previous games. In the other installments, the single-player modes were dull affairs that served more or less only as a gateway to the creative mode.

While users will still have to play through the single-player mode to unlock the widgets, stickers and doodads that make creative mode so expansive, the base game is actually fun.

This time around, the game borrows some elements from the "Metroidvania" style of games.

Certain areas won't be immediately accessible until you unlock a certain power-up or character. Some elements of this were present in the past, but here it's used to much greater effect. When you know you might have to come back to a level, you tend to enjoy playing it more than just wondering how the heck you can grab that one power-up.

Oh, and the much-maligned floaty jump physics of the past games has been reduced significantly. It's still not quite as tight as any of the "Mario" games, but the cheap feel of the past is gone. In past "LittleBigPlanet" titles, I played the single-player mode only for as long as it took to nab enough prizes to be able to re-create my artistic vision in creative mode. Now, I genuinely look forward to playing through the entire campaign.

Players can bring a friend to run through the campaign with, or they can just connect to a random player over the network. In fact, some of the puzzles in the campaign require two players to complete, so multiplayer aficionados might especially enjoy this game. I tested the online components extensively, and the netcode seems rock solid. I never once had a drop or lag issue and the online community is enormous, so there was never a long wait for a partner.

That leads us to what has always been the real strength of "LittleBigPlanet"

—the community and creative modes. For those unfamiliar with the series, "LittleBigPlanet" revolves around a creative mode that gives players nearly unlimited tools to build and design not only their own levels, but entire games within the game. "LittleBigPlanet 3" offers an astounding array of tools for budding game designers to play around with. If it can be imagined, it probably can be created here. Once you're finished creating your own level or racing game or role-playing action adventure, you can upload it to the PlayStation Network and share it with the world.

The community that has evolved around this feature is astoundingly large. There are hundreds of custom games players can join, offering up nearly an infinite amount of entertainment, even once the campaign is long completed. Even if you never touch the creative mode personally, you can spend hours just seeing how people have used the "LittleBigPlanet" toolset to create some truly impressive stuff.

Finally, this is one of the rare games I can honestly recommend for gamers of all ages.

Overall grade: **A+**

The art style and narration is mostly geared toward a younger audience, but there is plenty of challenge in the creative modes for adults to enjoy too. Between the excellent campaign and the increasingly complex creative mode, there is enough content here to easily justify a purchase, either for yourself or for that special gamer in your life.

Bottom line: "LittleBigPlanet 3" is easily among the best games of the year.

darnell.michael@stripes.com

Grade: A+

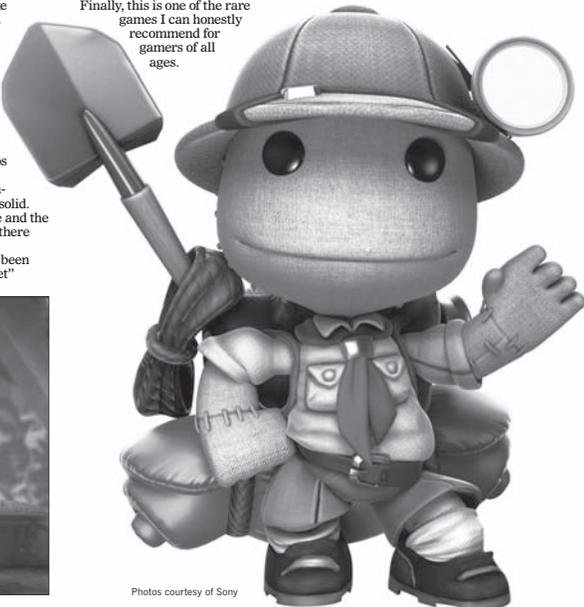
Platform: PlayStation 4 (cross-platform play on PS Vita)

Rating: E for Everyone

Online: littlebigplanet.playstation.com



"LittleBigPlanet 3" continues with the same wacky art style of its predecessors, with levels that riff on haunted houses, Hollywood and outer space.



Photos courtesy of Sony

WEEKEND: MUSIC

By RANDALL ROBERTS
Los Angeles Times

Those who have followed Nicki Minaj's often-thrilling ascent to hip-hop superstardom have been hoping for another straight-up rap album for years. After annihilating virtually all takers on mixtapes and guest verses starting in 2007, the 32-year-old began gunning for the pop charts, pouring forth two albums, "Pink Friday" (2010) and "Pink Friday: Roman Reloaded" (2012). Both often paired her charismatic wit and style with of-the-moment dance floor bangers and big-umbrella commercial sounds, along with a teasing dose of hard-edged hip-hop.

She's earned those hits, to the chagrin of some of her most devoted defenders — those who understand that when Minaj flips that switch and devotes herself to the art of the well-crafted hip-hop verse, uninterrupted electricity flows through her.

When she's on, her phrasing, her myriad personas, her playfully percussive vocal flow and the overall presentation combine to create as striking a presence as anyone who's ever rhymed along to beats. "The Pinkprint," released Monday, won't fully placate the hard-core rap heads, but it's got the bangs and the thrills many of us have hoped for, even if it's a slow build kind of power and slacks at times.

Minaj teased this new work with a promise that it would be hip-hop-centered, which had many of us slobbering and wondering about the possibilities — the could-be producers and collaborators, the themes, the approach. Would it be a concept album? A feast of tag-team verses? A confirmation that the "Pink Friday" pop stuff was a purse-fattening investment on future rap-feminist flawlessness?

Life, however, had other ideas, to the benefit of "The Pinkprint." Rather than fully keep her promise, the artist on "The Pinkprint" focuses on behind-the-curtain heartbreak ballads before moving into that unfiltered swagger. Enduring the end of a long-term love affair in her personal life, Minaj channels her emotions into as many slow-rolling explorations of love and regret as boasts about prowess, bank balance and flow.

She does so with help from prominent collaborators including label mates Drake and Lil Wayne, Meek Mill, Beyoncé, Ariana Grande and Chris Brown. Prominent producers such as Mike Will Made It, Dr. Luke, Hit-Boy and Alex Da Kid prove their status. The record's most striking and innovative track, "Four Door Aventura," glitters through the work of rising British beat-maker Parker Ighile.

Throughout "The Pinkprint," Minaj sounds equal parts wounded (opening "All Things Go," the slow-rolling rap track "The Crying Game") and relieved over the end of a once-overpowering affair. "If it was a record, it would have been classic," she raps on "I Lied," of the love and its unraveling. Elsewhere, she's a creative and sexual powerhouse. "Trini Dem Girls," a strange blend of reggaeton and hip-hop, is immediately memorable and featuring a breakout hook from the moniker Lunchmoney Lewis.

Minaj's wobbling hit "Anaconda" harnesses Sir Mix-a-Lot's ode to the butt, "Baby Got Back," for an update from Minaj's perspective. As she ver-

bally runs through a pair of male conquests, a "boy toy named Troy used to live in Detroit" and "this dude named Michael used to ride motorcycles," she celebrates her booty bounty.

On her duet with pop star Drake, "Get on Your Knees," Minaj is a hardened lover uninterested in emotion, a relationship or anything other than pure submission. On the album's high point, "Feeling Myself," Minaj and Beyoncé collaborate on a self-love anthem that overflows with sexual, feminist and lyrical power.

"The Pinkprint" lags near the end, even if for resolution's sake these songs need to be there. The midtempo pop-rap track "Bed of Lies" features the increasingly overplayed genre of the hook, Skylar Grey, and a silly cliché as the focus; it's a sonic speed bump that diminishes otherwise hot Minaj rhymes. The final song on the album (excluding the six bonus tracks on the deluxe version), "Grand Piano," is also the most bland. A weepy piano ballad, it strives to be the epic bookend but instead sounds like a subpar Celine Dion recording.

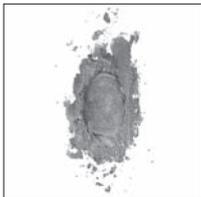
Those deluxe-version extras are tough to ignore, especially the set-closing "Truffle Butter" (featuring Drake and Lil Wayne), a beat-heavy house track that lives, like much of "The Pinkprint,"

in the thin green line separating art and entertainment.

If the late-add dance track confuses things, it's hard to fault Minaj. Throughout "The Pinkprint," she's intent on channeling her talent to explore and document her many moods. The combination is often, if not always, intoxicating.

Unfiltered Swagger

Minaj explores her many moods on 'The Pinkprint'



Nicki Minaj

The Pinkprint
(Young Money/
Cash Money/Republic)



Hip-hop artist Nicki Minaj performs in New York in November 2013. Her new album, "The Pinkprint," debuted on Monday and features collaborations with Chris Brown, Drake and Ariana Grande.

INVISION/AP

WEEKEND: ENTERTAINMENT

NEW ON DVD

“The Maze Runner”: A group of young captives must find a way out of a giant maze. Based on the James Dashner young-adult dystopian science fiction novels. “The Maze Runner” director Wes Ball gets off to a fast start, in part by the way the movie is put together and because the story is so thin there’s no need to spend time explaining why things happen. The combination of Ball’s direction and the solid performances by the young cast gives the characters some depth. Ball has also done a good job creating the world, which comes across as feeling both grand and claustrophobic. The scenes where the runners — those who daily travel through the maze to map it — deal with massive sliding doors is not for anyone who gets uncomfortable in tight confines. The action is the film’s main draw.



20TH CENTURY FOX/AP

Dylan O'Brien stars in the recent DVD release “The Maze Runner.”

“This Is Where I Leave You”: Give all the credit to Jason Bateman for making “This Is Where I Leave You” work. The former “Arrested Development” star gives this family dramedy the strong emotional core needed to hold together the less interesting storylines. The problem is that the film is based on Jonathan Tropper’s novel, a place where characters can get more attention. There is no way for the film to service all of the plots the same. But still, director Shawn Levy — who faced a similar glut of characters with “Cheaper By the Dozen” — finds a way, even with the shortcuts taken, to give the film a sweet quality that makes it likable.

“Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles”: New York’s under attack by the sinister Shredder. It’s up to Leonardo, Donatello, Raphael and Michelangelo to save the day. The big problem is that there isn’t enough Turtles and there’s too much April O’Neil (Megan Fox) in this action film. Despite the additional focus on Fox, the Turtles are still fun-loving and rear-kicking enough to save the day.

Also available:
“Grumpy Cat’s Worst Christmas Ever”: Aubrey Plaza provides the voice for the grumpy cat.

“Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Season 2”: Journey into the past to look at familial histories of 29 of today’s most recognizable names.

“The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis: The Final Season”: Final stories of lives and loves of the gang attending S. Peter Pryor Junior College.

“Arrested Development: Season Four”: Continuing story of the Bluth family. Jason Bateman stars.

“The Americans: Season Two”: Keri Russell and Matthew Rhys star in this tale of two Russian spies living a deep undercover life in America.

— Rick Bentley/The Fresno Bee

A few things you didn't know about ‘Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer’

By **CHUCK BARNEY**
Contra Costa Times

Laugh and call him names all you want, but there’s no denying that the furry misfit at the heart of “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” has outshone his naysayers to become the most famous holiday TV star of all. The seasonal perennial was the brainchild of producers Arthur Rankin and Jules Bass, who in 1964 took Johnny Marks’ novelty song and turned it into an instant television classic. When “Rudolph” first aired during a Sunday afternoon on NBC, it drew a 50 share of the audience, which was sensational even in a three-channel universe.

This year, “Rudolph” celebrates its 50th anniversary, extending its reign as television’s longest-running special. “It’s a feel-good story of redemption, with a distinctive, magical look to it,” says Rick Goldschmidt, author of “The Enchanted World of Rankin-Bass.” “Obviously, it’s a part of the holiday tradition for many families.”

Paul Soles, who provided the voice for Rudolph’s pal, Hermey the elf, believes the concept of outcasts rising up to be heroes is a key factor in the program’s staying power. “I don’t think there are many kids who, while growing up, didn’t at some point feel like an outsider or like they didn’t measure up,” he says. “So it’s not difficult to relate to — and love — these characters.”

With the help of Goldschmidt, we uncovered some things you didn’t know about “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.”

An international flavor Rudolph might appear to be an all-American reindeer, but he and his pals were lovingly brought to life overseas by Japanese stop-motion animators.

Northern exposure While the animation for “Rudolph” was done in Japan, the voice work was performed almost entirely in Toronto by Canadian actors. They were largely known for their fine work in radio dramas, which, at the time, were still very popular north of the border.

Rudolph’s a girl? Speaking of the people behind the puppets, it might come as a surprise that Rudolph was voiced by a woman. Billie Mae Richards, then 43, was an actress and singer who had a knack for doing little-boy characterizations.

A little nip-and-tuck Like many screen stars, Santa Claus and little Rudolph have had some cosmetic work done. The two original puppets were in miserable shape when discovered in someone’s attic in 2005. Santa’s fluffy eyebrows and half his mustache were missing, as was Rudolph’s famous nose. After being appraised on “Antiques Roadshow” (estimated value: \$8,000 to \$10,000), they were bought by a fan and restored by a Los Angeles animation studio.

Making a side trip The original 1964 airing of “Rudolph” did not have Santa traveling to the Island of Misfit Toys on Christmas Eve to rescue its downtrodden residents. Some disappointed viewers protested, and the show’s sponsor, General Electric, prodded Rankin and Bass to alter the ending. Score one for the outcasts.

His song went down in history Marks, who in 1949 penned his tune about a reindeer with an incandescent snout, initially was reluctant to lend the song rights to television. Recorded by Gene Autry, Andy Williams and others, “Rudolph” was his gold mine, and he feared overexposing it. Marks not only relented, he wound up writing all the show’s other songs.

A Burlly snowman Burl Ives, the voice behind the show’s dapper narrator, Sam the Snowman, was a late addition. Sam was to be played by Larry Mann, the guy who voiced Yukon Cornelius. But NBC and General Electric thought the show needed some star power. Enter the banjo-playing Ives.

Ratings silver and gold Even now — in an era of DVDs and splintered audiences — “Rudolph” remains a crowd favorite, as the special typically wins the Nielsen race on the night it airs. Last year, more than 13 million viewers tuned in to see Rudolph rescue Christmas once again.



WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

Vaccine problems could signal rocky flu season

By JONEL ALECCIA
The Seattle Times

Nancy Dragan wanted to ward off flu this year, so she got her family vaccinated early, a shot for herself and doses of the FluMist nasal spray for her two boys, ages 9 and 11.

"I trust the experts, I guess, and my pediatricians have always recommended it," said Dragan, 42, who works at the University of Washington.

But Dragan said she's disturbed at new evidence showing this year's vaccine — both the FluMist spray and the seasonal shots — likely won't protect very well against targeted flu viruses. In the case of FluMist, there are problems with effectiveness in two of the three or four flu strains it's formulated to hit.

"I'm starting to wonder if I should have done that," Dragan said. "It's a little bit nerve-wracking, for sure."

At the start of what could be a bad flu season, health officials are scrambling to reassure the public that even though this year's vaccine has problems, it's still the best way to prevent potentially deadly flu infections.

"The flu is a very wily and cagey virus," said Dr. Don Shifrin, a Bellevue, Wash., pediatrician. "Every year we try to play whack-a-mole with the flu virus. Some years we do better than others, but we're still in the game."

A report released in November by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that FluMist offered "no measurable effectiveness" against one virus, the H1N1 swine flu, among children last year. Because the vaccine hasn't changed, the same results might occur this year, health officials said.

When CDC officials recently announced that the 2014-15 vaccine is a poor match for about half of the H3N2 viruses that



ELLEN M. BANNER, THE SEATTLE TIMES/TNS

Despite flu-vaccine problems, experts say vaccines offer important defense against flu.

appear to be the dominant strain already spreading this season.

"Flu is unpredictable, but what we've seen thus far is concerning," CDC Director Dr. Tom Frieden told news reporters.

This could be a worse-than-normal year for flu, Frieden added, because seasons in which H3 viruses dominate typically cause more illnesses and deaths than seasons in which H1 viruses are common.

CDC officials also warned doctors about the problem, urging them — and consumers — to seek antiviral drugs such as Tamiflu and Relenza at the first sign of flu, especially for people particularly vulnerable to infection.

The antiviral drugs don't stop flu, but

they might shorten the intensity and duration of the illness, experts said.

The flu-vaccine problems are bad news for health officials, who recommend that everyone older than 6 months get shots or sprays. Only about 42 percent of adults and less than 60 percent of kids and teens got inoculated for flu last year, according to the CDC.

In a good year, flu vaccine is about 50 to 70 percent effective at preventing illness, experts estimate. In a bad year, more of those inoculated get sick anyway. In 2007-08, when there was a mismatch between vaccine and virus, efficacy dropped to just above 40 percent. Shifrin said he worries that might prompt some people to skip the

shots this year — and in the future. "It's very easy to scare people," he said. "We don't want to put out the message that the flu vaccine doesn't work."

The flu season has just started, health records show. About 94 percent of more than 13,000 samples tested so far by the CDC are the dominant H3N2 subtype of flu, about 6 percent are the B strain, and almost none were the H1N1 swine flu, which descended from the 2009 pandemic strain, according to new flu figures released last week.

But more than half of the H3 subtypes are a new H3 strain that has "drifted," or changed from the type targeted by this year's flu vaccine. As a result, the vaccine likely offers poor protection against that strain, Frieden said.

That subtype first showed up in March overseas, but it wasn't seen in large numbers in the U.S. until September. Because it takes about four months to manufacture a flu vaccine, it's too late to make a change, Frieden added. So far this year, about 150 million doses of flu vaccine have been released.

The problem with FluMist is different. Scientists still don't know why the vaccine failed almost completely to protect against the H1N1 swine-flu strain last year, particularly in the youngest patients.

"This was very surprising," said Mike Jackson, a scientific investigator at Group Health Research Institute in Seattle, one of five sites across the country that routinely conduct vaccine-effectiveness checks for the CDC. "It's really quite different from the way this specific vaccine performed in the last couple years."

News about problems with the vaccines is surprising and concerning for parents like Dragan.

"As a mother, my first priority is to protect my kids, but I don't want to put anything additional into them if it's not going to protect them," she said.

App helps keep at-risk dieters on track

By ERYN BROWN
Los Angeles Times

Qiana Sago knew she had a problem. Three years ago, at age 30, she weighed 269 pounds. She was taking pills for high blood pressure. Her triglycerides were "the highest you can have," she said.

Working as an LAX airport custodian, she was surrounded by fast food, which became a staple. "You ate it when you got to work, you ate it again midday," she said. "Then I'd get off work and eat more."

But, partly because she was provided access to unique fitness technology, the Inglewood, Calif., resident has turned things around — losing more than 40 pounds and working toward the day she can stop taking blood pressure medication.

Sago and 39 other young African-American women at Faith+Center Church recently participated in a clinical trial that used a smartphone app to track their eating and activity and teach them healthful diet and exercise habits.

Many such mobile health, or mHealth, programs are in their infancy. But researchers

and advocates for underserved, hard-to-reach patient groups hope they soon will contribute to major advances in the treatment of diabetes, heart disease and other chronic conditions.

Cellphones provide unprecedented, low-cost access to patients, experts say, because the technology is so widely used and the socioeconomic digital divide is shrinking. The Pew Research Internet Project reported earlier this year that 84 percent of U.S. adults with incomes below \$30,000 a year had cellphones; 47 percent had smartphones. Increasingly, phones — not home-based broadband connections — are the gateway to the Internet for all Americans.

Anything that you're doing online, that you want to extend to a low-income population, the way they're most likely to access it is through mobile," said Margaret Laws of the California Health Care Foundation in Oakland.

Vickie Mays, a researcher and psychologist at UCLA, collaborates with the school's Wireless Health Institute, which backed the Inglewood study. Mobile technology offers a powerful tool to assist people seeking to change bad eating and lifestyle habits, she said, because it can

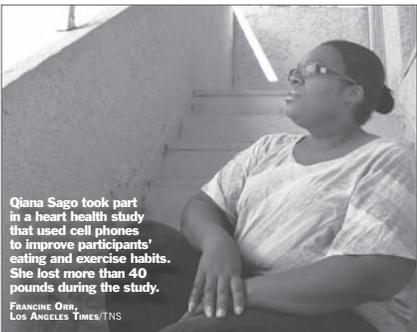
reinforce medical advice after a patient leaves the doctor's office.

Heart disease among young black women — a long-recognized problem — appeared to be an ideal condition to target with m-health programs, said Jo-Ann Eastwood, a nurse practitioner and associate professor at UCLA's School of Nursing who ran the church group study.

"I was tired of seeing women come in at 55 years old and they've already had a heart attack," she said. "Their illness hadn't been picked up early enough. That's what drew me to this population: Where could I do the most good?"

Sago and the other women selected for the study all were between 25 and 45 and had at least two risk factors for heart disease. They knew that they needed to eat well and exercise. But many said they were too busy caring for their children and parents — and working long hours — to find time to care for themselves. They also needed help understanding nutrition labels.

Eastwood taught the women about heart-healthy lifestyles and stress reduction in four diet-and-exercise classes before handing out custom-configured Android phones.



Qiana Sago took part in a heart health study that used cell phones to improve participants' eating and exercise habits. She lost more than 40 pounds during the study.

FRANCINE ORR, LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

The devices were disabled for voice calls but could be used to text others in the study group. The phones were loaded with an app, developed at UCLA, that interacted with the women, sending daily and weekly questions — "Did you eat five to six servings of fruit today?" — and tracking how much exercise they got via built-in accelerometers. Study participants were supposed to wear the smartphones whenever they were awake. They also had to measure their blood pressure on Sunday nights, using

Bluetooth-equipped blood-pressure cuffs that sent readings to the phones, which then streamed the data to the researchers.

Preliminary results from the study have been promising. Compared with a control group, the church women had significant improvements in blood pressure and cholesterol levels, lower levels of anxiety and stress and improved eating and exercise habits. The UCLA team reported their findings last month at an American Heart Association scientific meeting in Chicago.

WEEKEND: FAMILY

No kids required

How couples can start their own Christmas traditions

By JESSICA REYNOLDS
Chicago Tribune

There's an expectation that once couples have children, they will start their own holiday traditions. Christmas mornings will be spent as a nuclear family, reading aloud the note Santa left next to the plate of cookie crumbs and opening the presents left under the tree. Gift exchanges with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins will be worked into the schedule in the days before or thereafter — or maybe just sometime in the spring.

But for couples without kids, spending holidays on their own is sometimes a harder milestone to reach, at least without a fight.

"The assumption often among family members is that, if you don't have kids, then you have all kinds of free time and nothing else to do," said Amy Blackstone, associate professor and chairwoman of the department of sociology at the University of Maine.

Obviously this is rarely the case, but that belief can lead some relatives to think a couple's holiday plans should revolve around families that do include children.

"(As a society, we're not) culturally comfortable with the idea that a family can mean two people," Blackstone said.

But, she added, our culture is catching on to the idea that there are many types of families, some without children.

"My sister has convinced us that holidays equate to spending time with every single member of your extended family," said Julie Leventhal, lecturer of educational psychology at the University of North Texas.

While some people enthusiastically await the lavish family gathering, others dread it. And telling family members you want to spend the holidays with your partner — just the two of you — isn't the easiest conversation to have. Feelings will likely be hurt. People might feel snubbed.

Do you both agree?

Another wrinkle, of course, is when couples have different ideas about where and how to spend the holiday. So before you tell your family you're staying home, make sure your partner feels the same way.

It's less about how the couple spends the holidays and more about how they come to that decision, said Luis Congdon, a Seattle-based relationship coach who runs Lasting



The Kansas City Star illustration

Some couples prefer to spend holidays alone, and plan alternate celebrations with their families.

LoveConnection.com. He suggested couples have a frank talk about how well they get along with their respective families — and their partner's. Then they can decide whether they prefer to spend the big day with a particular side of the family — or alone.

‘The idea that (childless) couples don't form families of their own is a myth. They, like all families, enjoy and have every right to spend the holidays as a family too.’

Amy Blackstone
associate professor, chairwoman
of the department of sociology,
University of Maine

"If a couple can make the choice together, it always turns out better. If they force the other (person) to do something unwanted for the holidays, it can wreak havoc," Congdon said.

But sometimes the decision to celebrate alone is made for you. That's what happened to Melissa Chandler, 31, of Louisville, Ky., and her husband one Christmas Eve several years ago.

The couple was halfway through a four-hour roadtrip to visit family when it started to snow.

This was in the South, so the interstate quickly became impassable. The couple had to spend the night in a cheap motel, Chandler said. They found a Chinese restaurant within walking distance and spent the eve-

ning in their room eating egg rolls in bed and watching "A Christmas Story," until they fell asleep with the TV on, she recalled.

"What started out seeming like a disaster turned out to be one of our favorite memories," she said. The experience prompted them to start their own tradition of spending the holiday together in their own home. They don't have children, nor do they plan to, but they do have a Labradoodle and a cat that are considered bona fide members of the family.

Chandler said it was hard for her and her husband to explain their decision to their parents, adding that they always felt pressure to please both families and accept every Christmas dinner invitation. But she said that ultimately families on both sides respected, supported and maybe were even a little envious of their decision to celebrate Christmas by themselves.

Find other ways to celebrate

Instead of making up an excuse about why you have to spend Christmas alone, just be honest, Congdon said. Maybe plan another gathering, like a belated Christmas dinner or a New Year's Day brunch, as an alternative to celebrate the season.

If long-distance travel is what deters you from wanting to spend Christmas with family, consider planning a Skype session that day instead.

There's no reason to feel guilty about spending Christmas independently of parents, siblings or other relatives, even if you've traditionally celebrated with those people in the past, Blackstone said.

"The idea that (childless) couples don't form families of their own is a myth," she said. "They, like all families, enjoy and have every right to spend the holidays as a family too."

SPOUSE CALLS

Ushering in the season with carols and creche

Knelling on the living room rug, I open the large cardboard box and plunge my hands into a pearly froth of Styrofoam packing. I am searching for treasure, heirlooms handed down to me from my parents.

My hand closes on something solid and cool to the touch. I pull it from the protective billows and remove a layer of bubble wrap to reveal a ceramic shepherd. Placing him gently on the sofa, I reach in to find more: a kneeling camel, a wise man holding a golden box in his outstretched hands, Mary, Joseph, the manger, two standing camels, some sheep, more wise men and shepherds, the angel, her fragile wings wrapped in an extra layer of padding. Soon the cast is complete.

On the stereo, Nat King Cole croons, "The first Noel the angels did say, was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay." It's the album I always choose for this ritual of Christmas decorating.

The rough wooden stable is already in place; time to add the people. The baby is at the center, his parents turned to gaze at him. The smaller animals and shepherds are inside the stable while the Magi and their beasts of burden look in from the outside. Finally, I put the angel in place, suspended above the shingled roof on a strategically placed nail.

By this time Nat is singing, "O, Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by."

I've seen these sweet, solemn faces on most of the Christmases of my life. My parents made the nativity figures at Etlielson Air Force Base, Alaska, where we were stationed when I was in first grade.

Creating the creche was a joint operation for my parents. With two little ones at home — my sister was a toddler — they developed a tag-team assembly line. Dad went to the hobby shop on base and poured ceramic slip into the molds a few pieces at a time. When they were dry enough to un mold, he wrapped the greenware pieces carefully in newspaper and brought them home for Mom to smooth, and then stain after they dried completely. She worked in the laundry room in our basement. I was fascinated with the array of scraping tools, sponges, tiny paintbrushes and little colored bottles of ceramic stain lined up on the counter.

When she was done, my dad transported the pieces back to be fired in the hobby shop kiln. Then he would pour and bring home the next pieces for Mom to paint. The bottom of each is marked with the initials my parents shared: "J.H." When finished, the figures — clothed in muted shades of blue, red, green and gold — became the quintessential Nativity scene to me. They still are.

About 10 years ago, my mom gave the creche to me for Christmas. It has moved along with me for much of my life, and putting it in place ushers in the season at our house. Unpacking it in a new home after a move is cause for another layer of celebration, when each precious piece emerges intact.

As the holidays progress, a bright and sparkly Christmas tree becomes the center of attention in our home, especially as the pile of gifts beneath it grows. We admire the lights and our eclectic collection of ornaments.

Wrapping and mailing, shopping and baking, parties and events demand time and attention. In those busy days, I lose the sense of reverence for the mystery of Christmas I felt in early December when I unwrapped the figures of the Nativity set and put them in place.

A day or two might go by before I stop to look again at the serene and familiar faces all turned toward the baby in the manger. I've seen them so many times. I have them memorized, the details my mom intended and some she didn't. The angel's gold banner proclaims "Gloria in Excelsis Deo." A small flaw in the antique finish on Mary's face looks like a tear on her cheek.

Tonight, I think I'll put on Nat King Cole again. I want to hear him sing, "Come and behold him, born the king of angels ... O, come let us adore him, Christ, the Lord."

Terri Barnes is the author of "Spouse Calls: Messages From a Military Life." Contact her at spousecalls@aol.com or at stars.com/go/spousecalls.



Terri Barnes

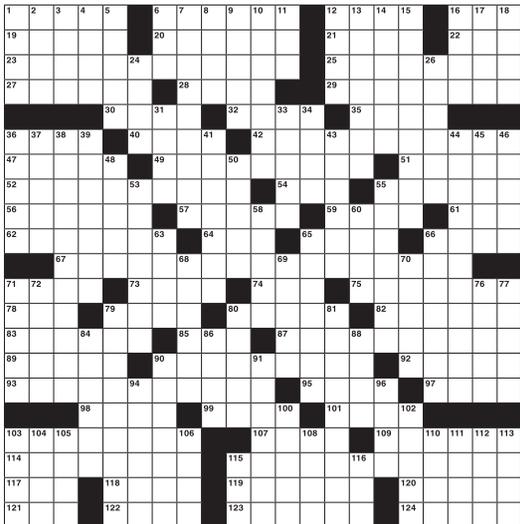
WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

WELL, GOLLY!

BY JIM PEREDO / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

- ACROSS
1 Bed cover
6 Flips
12 Symbol in the logo of "The Big Bang Theory"
16 ___ test
19 Drops
20 Title hunter of a 1922 film
21 "___ chance!"
22 It may be beaten, with "the"
23 Religious rituals for cats?
25 Web browsers
27 "Off the hook"
28 Cookware brand
29 Tofurky, to turkey, e.g.
30 Nagging question?
32 Demanding sort
35 Having left the company, maybe
36 Seeds
40 "Let's Be Cops" org.
42 Master of Japanese writing?
47 Sound before a big blow?
49 Orbitz offering
51 Poet who wrote "Let us not speak of them, but look, and pass on"
52 Strange pond scum?
54 Ingredient in some London pies
55 Jim of children's TV
56 Shred
57 "Zounds!"
59 Swear
61 Day care attendee
62 The tiniest amount
64 Never. Ger.
65 "Gilgamesh," e.g.
66 Turns down
67 "Grant your own damn wishes," e.g.
71 "Do the Right Thing" pizzeria
73 Fire proof?
74 Part of E.U.: Abbr.
75 Former auto exec Lee
78 Way of the East
79 Former White House press secretary Perino
80 Cop (to)
82 Markdown marker
83 Futilely
85 Born abroad?
87 "How deep is your love?" or "You should be dancing?"
89 Abnormal swelling
90 Olive Garden starter
92 Full complement for a Quidditch team
93 Comment from a driver who finally reached his destination?
95 Jog
97 Stop what you're doing
98 Goggle
99 ___ bean
101 Per
103 Arsenal warriors
107 Viet ___
109 Closest friend, slangily
114 Discusses at length
116 Never. Ger.
115 Surprised comment upon rummaging through a tea chest?
117 Cause of wear and tear
118 Chef Paula
119 See 80-Dawn
120 Caliban of "Star Wars"
121 "Just ___"
122 Start to go down the drain
123 Literary prefaces
124 Convinces
13 It might be clipped and filed
14 Capital on a river of the same name
15 Like early Sears business
16 Leftover bit
17 When doubled, part of many a Robin Williams tribute
18 Abbey area
24 Faithful, in old poetry
26 Korda who directed "Sahara"
31 Chemical compound often labeled "S"
33 Bam attachments
34 Pot money
36 Took care of
37 Blue expense
38 Some queerly attive
39 Fighter pilots fly them
41 Friday night series?
43 Veracruz's capital
44 Not learned
45 Keep a low profile?
46 Circus sights
48 Classic theater
50 Play again
53 Mosaicist or glassblower
55 About 2 1/2 acres
58 Made a false move?
60 End of a famous boast
63 "___ Flux," 2005 sci-fi film
65 Most chill-inducing dings and jackals
66 Many a bored student
68 Actress Woodward
69 Relative of the cha-cha
70 Brain-freeze drinks
71 Larsson who wrote "The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo"
72 U.S.'s first grocery chain
76 University of Miami athletes, for short
77 Means
79 Transportation service for the disabled
80 Alphabetical
81 Any four-letter word
84 Pals
86 Diet, info
88 Hair gel, e.g.
90 Sidestepped
91 Ending with cow or hole
94 Warmed up the crowd (for)
96 "___ honest ..."
100 "Heaven forbid!"
102 Strips
103 Rarity in un desirato
104 One of the friends on "Friends"
105 Deferral
106 Electronics giant
108 ___ the Great of children's lit
110 Picnic side dish
111 Brown who founded The Daily Beast
112 Annual "500"
113 Vandy cases?
115 Antithesis: Abbr.
116 Attorneys' degs.



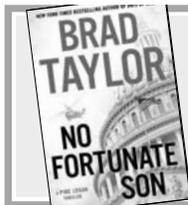
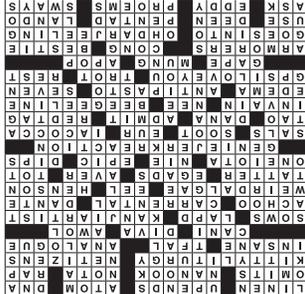
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116 Attorneys' degs.

GUNSTON STREET



"Gunston Street" is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and visit gunstonstreet.com.

RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



Veteran operator Pike Logan and partner Jennifer Cabill learn that their latest actions have gotten them fired, despite having saved thousands of innocent lives. But their shock and fury are cut short when a terrorist organization starts targeting military relatives — and taking them hostage.

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FACES

Parting gifts

Richard Armitage keeps treasures from his role in last 'Hobbit' film

By SHARON EBERSON
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Hundreds of questions with #AskThorin were waiting when the King under the Mountain was ready. Richard Armitage, the actor who portrays Dwarf leader Thorin Oakenshield in "The Hobbit" trilogy, jumped in to the live Twitter event recently and provided 20 answers, sharing his dislike of face glue and how much he'll miss stunts that require "hanging on a wire."

Minutes after the session and a few hours before the Los Angeles premiere of "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies," Armitage was on the phone answering more questions, such as, "Did you get anything from the set when filming came to an end?"

The man who owns a well-used first edition of "The Lord of the Rings" listed the treasures from his time as Thorin: "I was given my sword, Orcrist, the actual sword that I fought with that still has my prints on the hilt, and the oaken shield and the map (for the journey to the Lonely Mountain) and the key. The map was one of those props I used every day and I always had it inside my costume, so it's got my sweat on it and my blood — fake blood, that is," he added.

The 6-foot-2 England-born, New York-based actor portrayed the diminutive Thorin through three films, the first released in 2012. "The Hobbit" series has catapulted him from a familiar face on BBC TV dramas to the kind of recognition that hashtags are made of.

Armitage, 43, describes himself as a "moody actor" in his Twitter profile.

"It's true, it's true," he said with a chuckle, though in truth, he is a charming, engaged interviewee.

"I joined (Twitter) on my birthday (in August) and I sort of dived right in. It's been really fulfilling to engage with fans and show a side of myself that they would normally not see through my work, because I tend to take on quite serious, dark characters."

Thorin is that — and then some. In the "Hobbit" finale, the prickly leader descends into a madness that sees him choosing war over honor and duty. The films were not shot in chronological order, Armitage said, which was helpful in establishing the complexities of Thorin that bring him to this disagreeable state.

"One of the choices was to try and give him a sense of schizophrenia, where you really didn't know who he was going to be in any one scene," Armitage said. "I remember mak-

ing notes about the dragon sickness, which he thought was empowering and gave him like a life force but is, in a way, like drug or alcohol addiction can be. For the moment, when you get your fix, you're like a superhero. But there's a flip side where it takes a toll on your body and your mind."

Speaking directly about Thorin's fate is a no-no for the actor, but it is not a spoiler to say that the Dwarf king grasps his opportunities for reconciliations and redemption.

"We really had to care about him as that part of the story draws to an end. And at the same time, I didn't want to soften him in any way. That's a risk, the audience really disliking him at times ... I, too, felt there were moments I really didn't agree with his choices. It was fun to play a character like that who we knew could come back, and we had to see glimpses of that humanity in him."

Richard Armitage stars as Thorin in "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies." Armitage says he still has his sword, Orcrist, "the actual sword that I fought with that still has my prints on the hilt."

WARNER BROS. PICTURES/AF

Duggars patriarch says petition to cancel show is only giving them more exposure

From wire reports

A petition urging TLC to cancel "19 Kids and Counting" over the political views of the Duggar family "won't succeed," according to family patriarch Jim Bob Duggar. In fact, he said recently, all of the attention around the effort is working in the family's favor, giving the Duggars even more exposure.

The petition, which currently has more than 180,000 signatures, began as a response to the

family's recent comments against LGBT rights. It gained traction quickly and drew a lot of attention to some of the family's recent activism.

But Jim Bob Duggar probably has good reason not to be worried about the petition: The effort to raise awareness about the family's political views prompted its conservative supporters to launch a counter campaign, urging TLC to keep the show. A "Defend the Duggars" petition

on LifeSiteNews currently has almost 210,000 signatures — more than the petition telling TLC to scrap the popular series.

In a speech to the Booster Banquet at Hannibal-LaGrange University late last month, Duggar said: "Our show is the No. 1 show on TLC. We love everybody. It's a small group creating this fuss. All it has done is give us more exposure. We've gained 50,000 Facebook fans last week."

Actress Diane Guerrero writing memoir

Through her own story, Diane Guerrero wants to change the lives of others. Henry Holt and Company announced Thursday that the announced-Thai actress is working on a memoir scheduled for early 2016.

The book is called "In the Country We Love," and will tell of her family's ordeal when her

parents and older brother were taken from their home in Boston and deported to Colombia in 2000. Guerrero was 14 at the time and continued to live in the U.S., attending the Boston Arts Academy high school. She now volunteers for the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, which advocates for immigrants' rights.

According to Holt, Guerrero will "cast a much-needed light" on the fears of deportation faced by many immigrant families.

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OPINION

US may get dragged into Pakistan's war

By JOSH ROGIN AND ELL LAKE
 Bloomberg News

The massacre Tuesday at a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, is likely to set off a new round of fighting between the country's army and the Taliban. But the attack may also push President Barack Obama to renew the counter-terrorism partnership with Pakistan that has deteriorated since the U.S. killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011.

The latest U.S. intelligence assessment on Tuesday, according to counter-terrorism officials in Washington, is not pretty. It predicts more Taliban attacks in response to the Pakistani military's expected retaliation for the murder of at least 130 students at the school for the children of army officers.

A spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban, Muhammad Khorasani, said Tuesday that the attack on the school itself was in response to the campaign launched this summer by Pakistan's military against the Taliban in the provinces that border Afghanistan. He also grimly warned that the carnage at the school was "just the trailer," implying that a cycle of massacres may just be beginning.

This expected new wave of terror comes as the United States is already shifting military resources from South and East Asia to the Middle East, as the U.S. military is preparing to end the war in Afghanistan. Add to this the increased frustration from Washington with Pakistan's military intelligence agency for its continued support for a network of former officers that help direct and coordinate activities for the Afghanistan Taliban.

As the new crisis in Peshawar may change that dynamic, presenting an opportunity for the U.S. to re-engage in Pakistan's own war on terror, according to current and former U.S. officials.

In separate visits to Washington in recent weeks, Pakistani Army chief General Raheel Sharif and Defense Minister Khawaja Asif touted their military's recent offensives against militants in northwest Pakistan as key to their request for continued U.S. military assistance, even as Western forces withdraw from Afghanistan. On Tuesday, the spokesman for Pakistan's military tweeted, "This ghastly act of cowardice of killing innocents clearly indicate they are not only enemies of Pak but enemies of humanity."

Billions of dollars in U.S. aid to Pakistan's military since 2002 has come in the form of Coalition Support Funds, to reimburse Pakistan for aiding the fight in Afghanistan, and from fees paid in exchange for use of Pakistan's territory to transit goods in and out of Afghanistan. But with the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan near complete, there is no coalition to support and no need to transit goods, leaving the Pakistanis desperate to make the case for continued aid.

"The main reason the Pakistanis finally went into North Waziristan was because they kept saying they had to have it in order to continue to get U.S. Coalition Support Funding. To justify U.S. funding after the Afghanistan withdrawal, they had to show they are becoming more aggressive against terrorism at large," said Shamila Chaudhary, a former National Security Council specialist on Pakistan. "Now and then they say they have no choice but to continue doing it."

Michael Flynn, who retired this fall as director of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, said the Pakistani Taliban, or TTP, and other Jihadist groups would likely continue to launch these kinds of onslaughts. "Do we have the bandwidth to deal with the scale and scope of this fight against terrorism on this new irregular battlefield?"



A member of a civil society group holds an anti-Taliban placard to condemn Tuesday's Pakistani Taliban attack on a military-run school in Peshawar, as members of multiple groups join a demonstration Wednesday in Islamabad, Pakistan. More than 140 people, most of them children, were killed in the massacre in the country's northwest.

he asked, "The response of terrorists to conventional fighting will be more of these sorts of attacks. This is how they've decided to fight us and to them, these attacks are a measure of success simply due to the propaganda value they receive."

Inside the Obama administration, officials have been divided between those who believe that the TTP represents primarily a threat to Pakistan and those who believe

Lawmakers in both parties have been fed up for years by what many in Washington see as a two-faced approach by Pakistan, fighting some militants while ignoring or even supporting others.

the TTP escalates and the implications for the entire country's future become more pronounced.

"For the U.S., it's yet another example of how much space the Pakistani state has lost to militant power. It's yet another example of how bad and extreme the situation has got in terms of internal stability," Chaudhary said. "U.S. policy makers are going to be very worried about it."

If and when the Obama administration does decide to increase its material and financial support for the Pakistani government, it will face an uphill climb on Capitol Hill. Lawmakers in both parties have been fed up for years by what many in Washington see as a two-faced approach by Pakistan, fighting some militants while ignoring or even supporting others.

Congress has put a series of conditions on the large U.S. assistance programs for Pakistan in legislation, most of which the Pakistani government has no chance of meeting. For example, in the omnibus spending bill that Congress passed last week, Pakistan is required to combat all militant groups operating inside its bor-

ders and make broad reforms of its political, diplomatic and legal systems before receiving U.S. aid.

The president can and typically does invoke a national security waiver provided by Congress to nullify such restrictions. But going forward, if the U.S. does ramp up its involvement in Pakistan's war against the Taliban, members of Congress are going to demand Pakistan live up to its long unfulfilled promises to go after the militant groups that threaten the stability of Afghanistan as well.

"The question the U.S. will be asking the Pakistani military is, if we increase our support, where does that put the Afghan Taliban? Are you going to show us concrete results against them?" said Shuja Nawaz, distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council. "The army chief has been saying we are not discriminating, but the evidence will need to be shown to support that. This is an opportunity for them to get their act together, and if they do the U.S. and other allies could be quite happy to provide assistance."

A big part of that will depend on the Pakistani and Afghan governments continuing down the road of reconciliation, capitalizing on the exit of former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who had a terrible relationship with both Pakistani and American leaders. Without Afghan buy in, the TTP can just move its operations over the border and find a safe haven where the Pakistani military can't touch them.

In the end, there is a recognition in Washington that the U.S. has no choice but to continue giving military assistance to Pakistan, whether the Pakistani military lives up to its promises or not. And as the war between the Pakistani government and the TTP ramps up, the U.S. will feel compelled to ramp up its involvement, despite the budget crisis, the war weariness of the populace, and Obama's desire to exit the U.S. from military involvement in the region.

"We're going to have to continue with a lot of military and counterterrorism funding for Pakistan for the foreseeable future," said Jonah Blank, a Pakistan expert at the Rand Corp. "Every time you want to get out, they pull you back in."

Josh Rogin and Ell Lake are Bloomberg View columnists who write about national security and foreign affairs.

OPINION

What newspapers are saying at home

The following editorial excerpts are selected from a cross section of newspapers throughout the United States. The editors are provided by the Associated Press and other statewide syndicates.

Afghan troops trained by best Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer

The long war in Afghanistan is winding down, with American forces gradually pulling out and turning over control of security to Afghan forces.

Green Berets from Fort Bragg have seen other conflicts reach this point, only for reversals to erase those gains. But they and their commanders believe what they have accomplished in Afghanistan is unprecedented and can endure. ...

Through years of cooperation and trust, the U.S. special and conventional forces have forged bonds with the new Afghan military that will persist after most Americans have gone home.

U.S. forces continue to advise, but they've trained the Afghan instructors who prepare new Afghan commands. Afghan Special Mission Wing units have also been deployed to help them to conduct their own insertions into difficult terrain and their own remote aerial surveillance.

The Green Berets and other special operations forces are justly proud of these achievements. No other foreign force working with Americans has been trained to this level. These Afghan special forces are being compared, not to those of other small countries but to the elite forces of the world's top militaries.

Just as Americans' hopes have been with U.S. troops, they will now focus on those who continue their work.

Sydney suffered lunatic's wrath (Savannah, Ga.) Morning News

Experts seemed divided about whether the Islamic "shekhi" who was killed Monday in a standoff with police in Sydney, was a nutcase or a terrorist who was acting alone.

It doesn't matter. Both are essentially the same thing.

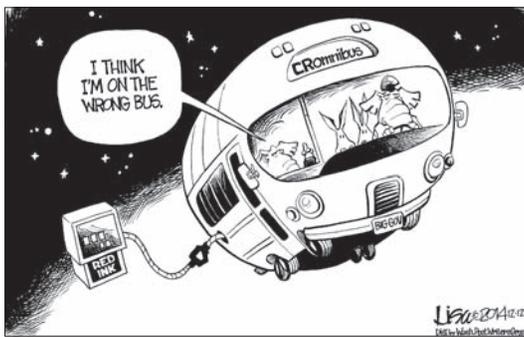
What matters is that citizens in America and other countries targeted by Muslim fanatics keep their guards up. Intelligence is vital. Individuals with a history of violent acts and links to terrorism must be monitored. While that's tough to do within the confines of existing laws, local and national authorities must not forget that America is in the cross hairs. It takes just one lunatic to cause havoc.

Man Haron Monis, 50, who was identified by Australian media as the gunman behind a tense 16-hour standoff inside a Sydney coffee shop, fits that bill. Monis was born in Iran, then migrated to Australia in 1996. He pleaded guilty last year to several letters of fallacious Australian servicemen in which he called them "murderers" and child-killers. This creep was sentenced to community service but appealed that ruling — an appeal that was denied Dec. 12, which may have triggered the hostage-taking.

Monis also has been linked to other crimes and violence. He had been charged in connection with the death of his ex-wife, who had been stabbed 18 times and set on fire. He was charged with more than 50 allegations of indecent and sexual assault related to a time when he worked as a self-proclaimed "sex therapist."

Sadly, 20 innocent people were killed during the rescue operation. Their deaths are tragic reminders of what's at stake in the battle against terror.

But in describing Monis, don't call him a "lone wolf." That's an insult to wolves. That was the crux of the San Antonio Express-News' "Twice Betrayed" series,



Obama meek amid mayhem Boston Herald

The loss of life at a Pakistani school is unthinkably — at least 141 dead, 132 of them children.

What kind of monsters target children? The same kind who two years ago would target a Pakistani schoolgirl named Malala Yousafzai, now a Nobel Prize laureate.

The Taliban — whose name President Barack Obama somehow chose to omit from his prepared response to the attack — seems fixated on targeting the innocent. This school in the northwestern city of Peshawar was part of a network of schools run by the military. Its students in grades 1 through 10 were the children of military personnel and civilians. Most of the students at this school were from civilian families. ...

The seven gunmen who attacked the school, all now dead, were equipped with explosive vests — determined to kill the maximum number of children one way or another.

"By targeting students and teachers in this heinous attack, terrorists have once again shown their depravity," Obama said in a one-paragraph statement that praised Pakistan's efforts against these terrorists. He refused to name — although the Taliban were quick to claim responsibility.

Perhaps to name the terrorists is also to draw attention to the similar horrific reality in neighboring Afghanistan from which the president has been eager to extricate U.S. troops. To name the terrorists is to bring to mind memories of how the Taliban provided safe haven and training camps for al-Qaida, for Osama bin Laden, for those who claimed 3,000 lives on our own shores.

No, we cannot be policeman to the world or attempt to settle age-old grudges halfway around the globe. But neither can we be as inattentive to the consequences of a global retreat as the Obama administration has been. To do so is to invite more mayhem and more killing.

Shame is a second assault (San Antonio) Express-News

There are many potential tragedies tied to Rolling Stone's recent reporting debacle, a shocking rape account at the University of Virginia in which key details have not held up under scrutiny.

It would be tragic if that story, with so much blowback about the woman who made the claims, kept sexual assault survivors from sharing their own stories. If we are to meaningfully address sexual assault on college campuses, military institutions or any other setting, we need survivors to report their assaults. ...

Already, too many pressures keep sexual assault survivors from reporting their attacks and speaking up: shame, humiliation and, yes, fear of retribution.

That was the crux of the San Antonio Express-News' "Twice Betrayed" series,

in which women in the military reported being sexually assaulted, only to be doubted and punished by commanders. Following intense media coverage about this dynamic, reports of sexual assault in the military increased by 50 percent. And yet the military has acknowledged the issue is still dramatically underreported because victims struggle with coming forward.

It would also be tragic, then, if this article becomes fodder to undercut other allegations of rape and sexual assault, particularly on college campuses. It might make for an easy citation to inject doubt in other cases, but it is very much an outlier. ...

Congress would do well to pass the bipartisan Campus Accountability and Safety Act, which would require colleges and universities to provide confidential advisers to guide sexual assault victims through services and law enforcement. It would help improve incident reporting and compel authorities to investigate allegations.

The sad reality is we live in a world where sexual assault, especially against women, is prevalent. It would be doubly tragic to use one high-profile case of bad journalism to cast doubt on so many truthful survivors.

Jeb Bush can stick to his guns The Wall Street Journal

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush announced Tuesday that he will "actively explore" a presidential run, and his entry would strengthen a GOP field that already looks like it will be far better than it was in 2012. This means there will be no coronations, and already the media are asking if Bush is conservative enough to win the party nomination.

This is an odd question considering Bush's success as a notably conservative governor in the polyglot Sunshine State from 1999-2007. He cut taxes many times and was a leader in K-12 reform, including pushing school choice for public and private schools. He was also popular, which we'd like to look is still a political asset.

The again, Bush hinted at a concern himself this month at The Wall Street Journal CEO Council, noting that "I kind of know how a Republican can win, whether it's me or somebody else — and it has to be much more uplifting, much more positive, much more willing to be, 'lose the primary to win the general' without violating your principles. It's not an easy task, to be honest with you."

One of his likely competitors, Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, jumped on that remark to suggest that Bush thinks he has to run against the GOP base to win. And to our mind, the wisest strategy — and a guaranteed loser — is to run as an ostentatious moder-

ate opposed to the GOP base. John McCain tried that in 2000 and so did Jon Huntsman in 2012. They were the media favorites but lost because conservatives won't nominate someone who lectures them about ideological shortcomings. They want a champion for their principles even if they disagree with the nominee on some issues.

Bush's two main political liabilities in the primaries are said to be his support for immigration and for Common Core education standards. Neither is an insuperable barrier to the nomination. ...

Our own concerns with Bush are less about policy than what he's been doing since he became the governor and how much he really wants to be president. Bush has sometimes seemed diffident about running, and a half-hearted campaign won't work against Paul, Ted Cruz and Scott Walker, much less the Clinton tong. ...

Bush's name and experience are formidable enough that his entry in the race would cause other potentially appealing candidates to stay out of the field. All the more reason to be sure he's in for the rough and tumble.

Spending-bill secrecy shameful The Kansas City (Mo.) Star

Last week Congress rushed to pass the awkwardly named "cromnibus." It was more than just a mashup of a continuing resolution (the "cr," that is) and omnibus spending bill. Lawmakers — primarily Republicans — inserted inappropriate pet causes, pork and pandering to special interests.

Because lawmakers again waited until the eve of a government shutdown to act, they have insisted on doing harm by inserting policy and spending priorities where they don't belong. Many Democrats served as their enablers, supporting the cromnibus with the thin rationale that it could have been worse.

Not content to do no good, the GOP-controlled House insisted on doing harm by inserting policy and spending priorities where they don't belong. Many Democrats served as their enablers, supporting the cromnibus with the thin rationale that it could have been worse.

On the spending front, millions of dollars will buy fighter jets that the Pentagon had not even asked for. Someone's district will score big.

Meanwhile, Congress cut \$93 million from the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. WIC helps low-income mothers buy food for their children. It also cut funds for two major Republican bogeymen — the Environmental Protection Agency and the Internal Revenue Service.

Policy riders in the bill were even worse. ... At the request of big banks, Republicans unid part of the Dodd-Frank financial reform enacted after the collapse of the financial industry. It's an arcane change, but the bottom line is that Washington no longer will forbid big banks from engaging in some of the practices that led to the financial crisis. If things go south again, taxpayers could be on the hook for another round of bailouts.

The financial industry's generous political contributions no doubt helped it win that concession. ... Starting next year, they and other big donors can give even more because Republicans eased campaign-finance rules. ... But the omnibus political parties, if only those hungry WIC mothers and children had millions they could give to politicians. ...

Both Democrats and Republicans have used the budget bill to accomplish policy goals in the past. It was never a particularly wise practice, but the omnibus constrained timeline made the practice particularly odious this time. ...

Exploiting the budget process to practice public scrutiny and democratic debate only reinforces the overwhelming American consensus that, despite faint appearances of bipartisanship, Congress truly is broken.

Frazz



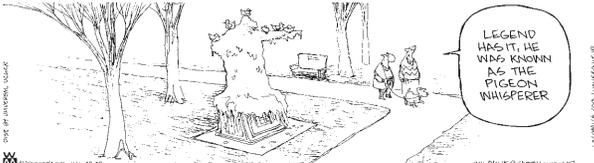
Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



Candorville



Get Fuzzy



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6		7	8	9	10	11		
12				13				14						
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						45				46		47		
48	49	50	51									52		
53								54				55		
56								57				58		

ACROSS

- 1 Lingerie item
- 4 Tavern
- 7 Swap
- 12 Young fellow
- 13 Rage
- 14 "Die Lorelei" poet
- 15 Multipurpose truck
- 16 Big church
- 18 "A pox upon thee!"
- 19 Scoundrel
- 20 Road divergence
- 22 Dos Passos trilogy
- 23 Garbage barge
- 27 Tummy muscles
- 29 Old name for China
- 31 Speechify
- 34 Hotel accommodation
- 35 "My Antonia" writer
- 37 Cudgel
- 38 Yon folks
- 39 Bullring bravo
- 41 Tubular pasta
- 45 Shows patience
- 47 Crib
- 48 Causing release
- 52 "Erie Canal" mule
- 53 Elevator stop
- 54 Japanese veggie
- 55 Mound stat
- 56 Bonnie's partner

DOWN

- 1 Texas Hold 'Em tactic
- 2 Proportion
- 3 "Doe, ..."
- 4 Choose
- 5 Faraway orb
- 6 Greek consonants
- 7 Quaker address
- 8 Roulette bet
- 9 Atmosphere
- 10 "CSI" evidence
- 11 Slithery swimmer
- 17 Indoor climate-control tech.
- 21 Comic Griffin
- 23 Bearcat maker
- 24 Actor McBride
- 25 Feedbag morsel
- 26 Ex follower
- 28 Spelldown
- 30 Smile center
- 31 Autumn abbr.
- 32 Cheery sound?
- 33 Corroded
- 36 Bellow
- 37 Happen to
- 40 Brightened
- 42 "A Doll's House" playwright
- 43 Miss America's bling
- 44 Some dental work
- 45 Kind of house
- 46 Highlander
- 48 Refrigerant inits.
- 49 Everything
- 50 Plaything
- 51 Coal carrier

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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

12-19

CRYPTOQUIP

RJVXTWQQ NYD-WQEJGOWAWQX

YZWQXR DTJ YGW WKOWNWQX

YX JGOTWRXGYXBQZ AVRBO:

XTW XWKYR YGGYQZWGR.
 Yesterday's Cryptquip: EIGHT LARGE, MEAN PARROTS ESCAPED THEIR OWNER'S HOME. THEY WERE DEFINITELY MACAWS FOR ALARM.
 Today's Cryptquip Clue: Y equals A

Frazz



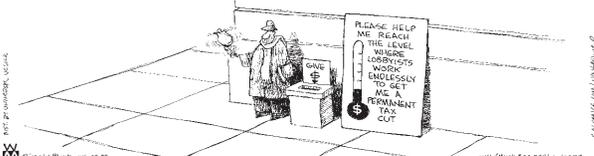
Dilbert



Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



Candorville



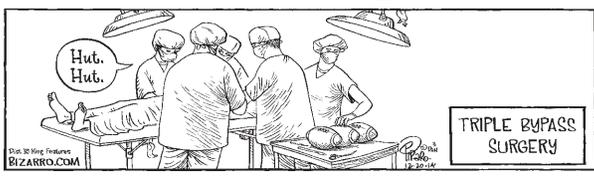
Get Fuzzy



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10	11	
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45									46			47	
48									49			50	
51									52			53	

- ACROSS**
- 1 "Dancing With the Stars" network
 - 4 Lions : pride :: — : parliament
 - 8 Zinger
 - 12 Writer Buscaglia
 - 13 Source
 - 14 Mississippi tributary
 - 15 Standard
 - 16 TV chef Cat
 - 17 "Wow!"
 - 18 Supreme Court justice
 - 21 Melody
 - 22 Troubadour's song
 - 23 Duel tool
 - 26 Plead
 - 27 "Mayday!"
 - 30 Remark from 27-Down
 - 31 Clear the tables
 - 32 Filly's brother
 - 33 Conk out
 - 34 Lustrous black
 - 35 Boisterous
 - 36 State of matter
 - 37 Lubricant
 - 38 Supreme Court justice
 - 45 Poi base
 - 46 Social appointment
 - 47 A billion years
 - 48 Newspaper pg.
- DOWN**
- 1 European range
 - 2 Defeat
 - 3 Heart
 - 4 Corsage bloom
 - 5 Hand seeker?
 - 6 Forsaken, poetically
 - 7 Belmont areas
 - 8 Birdie's opposite
 - 9 "Hi, sailor"
 - 10 Stand
 - 11 Physicist Niels
 - 19 Take a space
 - 20 Tatter
 - 23 Lay down the lawn
 - 24 Nintendo console
 - 25 Inseparable
 - 26 Nevertheless
 - 27 Boar's mate
 - 28 Antiquated
 - 29 Farm structure
 - 31 Furthermore
 - 32 Pop flavor
 - 34 One of the Brady bunch
 - 35 Kitchen gizmos
 - 36 Merchandise
 - 37 Tiber port
 - 38 Teeny bit
 - 39 California wine valley
 - 40 Deuce topper
 - 41 Driver's license datum
 - 42 Bound
 - 43 Waterloo's home
 - 44 Freshly

Answer to Previous Puzzle

B	R	A	P	U	B	T	R	A	D	E
L	A	D	I	R	E	H	E	I	N	E
U	T	E	C	A	T	H	E	D	R	A
F	I	E	K	N	A	V	E			
F	O	R	K	U	S	A	S	C	O	W
		A	B	S	C	A	T	H	A	Y
O	R	A	T	E	S	S	U	I	T	E
C	A	T	H	E	R	B	A	T		
T	H	E	Y	O	L	E	Z	I	T	I
C	A	T	H	A	R	T	I	C	S	A
F	L	O	O	R	U	D	O	E	R	A
C	L	O	Y	D	E	P	E	T	N	A

12-20 CRYPTOQUIP

JRG UWBAEWBJN TBGX DGA
 FENKO RXMG X FEKO EA SKN.
 RG'T O GKUMGAUVP KEJT ES
 ESS - JRG - FENPR AGWXADT.
 Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SOUTHERN LAW-
 ENFORCEMENT AGENTS WHO ARE EXCELLENT
 AT ORCHESTRATING MUSIC: THE TEXAS
 ARRANGERS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals F

FAITH



“The people who come in here are wonderful — you can’t judge people. You have to remember that any of us could be in their shoes. All I know is that everyone here has been good to me and they loved my wife.”

By COLETTE M. JENKINS
Akron Beacon Journal

Angelo Antognoli’s heart for people is shown in his concern for the hundreds of people who come to the Gennesaret Family Nutritional Center twice a week for hot meals.

“To be honest, it benefits me more than the people I’m serving. I don’t know what I would do with myself, if I didn’t have this,” said Antognoli, 83. “The people who come in here are wonderful — you can’t judge people. You have to remember that any of us could be in their shoes. All I know is that everyone here has been good to me and they loved my wife.”

Antognoli and his late wife, Sally, began volunteering at the soup kitchen more than 20 years ago. When she died in January, he decided to continue the mission they started together at Gennesaret: showing the love of Christ by serving people in need.

Gennesaret, an all-volunteer charity that is managed by a board of directors, provides long-term housing for homeless two-parent families in Summit County, Ohio, and free hot meals and groceries every Tuesday and Saturday to needy families and individuals at its nutritional center in Akron.

The center, formerly an automotive shop, was renovated four years ago through a \$350,000 donation in labor and materials from Testa Cos. and several of its subcontractors. Antognoli, whose late son, Anthony, worked for Testa, was instrumental in connecting Testa and the nonprofit

Joe Payne, left, Joel Testa and Paul Testa of Testa Builders serve food at the Gennesaret Family Nutritional Center. The Testas have donated generously to the center, which serves needy families and individuals.

Upper left: Angelo Antognoli of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, holds an apron signed by people he has served at the Gennesaret Family Nutritional Center in November in Akron, Ohio. He has volunteered at the center for several years.

PHOTOS BY KAREN SCHEILEY, AKRON BEACON JOURNAL/TNS

A mission to serve

Spirit of compassion fills automotive-shop-turned-soup-kitchen

Gennesaret.
“I had known [CEO] Paul [Testa] for years. I met him years ago when working construction. He was just starting out as a builder,” Antognoli said. “Because I knew he was a man who likes to give back, I told Tony to ask him if he would help. The building was a mess. It was a major undertaking.”
When asked, Testa agreed to help because he was inspired by Gennesaret’s mission and the fact that the nonprofit is funded entirely through grants and individual donations. At the root of his altruism is his Christian faith. His real estate, construction and development company added a philanthropic arm in 1996 called “Operation Dreams Come True” to help families and organizations in need.
“God has been good to us, and we want to make a difference. When

you’re blessed, you want to be a blessing to others,” Paul Testa said. “I’m a sinner, and I want to do what I can to make up for it. And, fortunately, we work with some subcontractors who like to give back to the community, too. Getting this place renovated was a team effort.”
The renovation, practically a complete interior rebuild, was finished just before Gennesaret’s annual “Home Run for the Homeless” in 2010. The annual race, which attracts thousands of runners and walkers on Thanksgiving morning, is the sole fundraiser to benefit Gennesaret’s mission throughout the year.
“We’re just people trying to help people. We appreciate everything that anyone can do to help us meet the needs of the homeless in our community. It’s people like Angelo and the Testas

that make what we do possible,” said Bob Dirgo, president of Gennesaret’s board. “I can’t say enough about the humility of the people who volunteer. They don’t look for credit; they do it because they care about people and they do it quietly. It’s so inspiring.”
Dirgo and his wife, Mary, founded Gennesaret in 1986.
The couple, along with more than 300 volunteers that include daughters Swati, 13, and Kajal, 11, work year-round to provide a safe place that is responsive to the needs of the area’s homeless.
“It’s all about treating people the way you want to be treated,” said Antognoli. “People deserve to be treated with respect no matter where they are in life. That’s what happens here; we all respect each other and care for each other.”



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STARS AND STRIPES

NBA

Hawks eager to prove strong start is no fluke

Upcoming week's games will put Atlanta's versatile roster to the test

By PAUL NEWBERRY

The Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Atlanta Hawks know it's going to take more than a couple of strong months to prove this NBA franchise has really turned things around after so many dashed hopes.

The next week or so could be very telling.

After a tumultuous summer, the Hawks are off to a promising start with a roster that's short on megastars but deep in versatility. Already, they've strung together a nine-game winning streak — the team's longest in 17 years — and pushed themselves near to the top of the Eastern Conference.

"Are we surprised?" forward Paul Millsap said, repeating a frequently asked question. "No. We felt like we had a pretty good team last year, but we weren't healthy the whole year. We felt like if we were healthy, we could really do something special."

Not surprisingly, there are still doubts about whether a team that went 38-44 last season, fortuitously sneaking into the playoffs, is really as good as its 17-7 record. Only two of those victories have been against teams with a winning record, the latest coming late Monday when the Hawks knocked off Chicago 92-86.

Over the next week, the Hawks will face Cleveland, Houston and Dallas on the road, before returning home to face the Los Angeles Clippers. The combined record of those teams going into Wednesday's game was 67-29.

"We didn't play the high-talent, high-win teams yet," said 35-year-old Elton Brand, the senior member of the Hawks. "So this

week's the barometer."

With second-year coach Mike Budenholzer installing a system that's been described as San Antonio East, the Hawks do a lot of things right. Start with the ball movement that he demands from the offense, which has resulted in at least 20 assists in all but two of Atlanta's games. Even more impressive, the Hawks lead the league with 67.4 percent of their baskets set up by an assist.

The Hawks haven't had a truly major star since Dominique Wilkins 20 years ago, but they've received significant minutes from a dozen players. Budenholzer generally uses a 10-man rotation, which allows Atlanta to spread the scoring wealth.

Jeff Teague (16.8) is the team leader, with an average that would be pacing only seven other teams. All five Atlanta starters are averaging at least 11.4 per game.

The Hawks have long been a team that draws little notice around the NBA — never good enough to get past the second round of the playoffs, rarely bad enough to land an elite player in the draft. Atlanta has traditionally ranked near the bottom of the league in attendance, and even when it draws a sellout crowd it's often because of a visiting star such as LeBron James or Kobe

Elton Brand
Hawks forward

“We didn't play the high-talent, high-win teams yet. So this week's the barometer.”



CURTIS COMPTON, ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION/AP

Hawks center Al Horford, right, defends against Chicago Bulls forward Pau Gasol on Dec. 15. Horford's return to the team this year after missing most of last season has been a boost.

Bryant. The team did make headlines during the last offseason, but for all the wrong reasons. Owner Bruce Levenson was forced to sell his share of the team after emails came to light showing him complaining about having too many African-American fans. Not long after, general manager Danny Ferry went on an indefinite leave of absence when it was revealed that he, too, had made racially charged comments when discussing a possible free-agent signee.

There's been no word on a new owner, or whether Ferry will ever return to his job. In the meantime, Budenholzer is handling both the coaching and personnel decisions.

If the unusual arrangement is a distraction, it hasn't shown on the court.

The return of center Al Horford, who missed most of last season with a torn pectoral muscle, has been a huge boost. Millsap, an All-Star a year ago, is having another solid season. Teague continues to develop into one of the league's better point guards. Kyle Korver stretches the court with his three-point range, while DeMarre Carroll is capable of stepping up when needed.

It remains to be seen if the Hawks have the sort of go-to scorer every team needs in the playoffs. That weakness showed up last year, when they squandered a chance to knock off top-seeded Indiana in the opening round.

"There are still times," Korver said, "when you've got to get the ball to someone and say, 'Make a play for us.' That absolutely happens, especially in the playoffs."

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Toronto	20	6	.769	—
Brooklyn	10	14	.417	9
Boston	5	22	.182	19½
New York	5	22	.182	19½
Philadelphia	2	22	.083	17

Southeast Division

Washington	18	6	.750	—
Atlanta	18	7	.720	½
Miami	12	14	.462	7
Orlando	10	18	.357	10
Charlotte	6	19	.240	12½

Central Division

Chicago	15	6	.625	—
Cleveland	14	10	.583	1
Milwaukee	13	13	.500	3
Indiana	8	18	.308	8
Detroit	5	21	.192	11

Western Conference

Southwest Division

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	19	4	.840	—
Houston	19	5	.792	½
Dallas	19	8	.704	3
San Antonio	17	9	.654	4½
New Orleans	12	12	.500	8½

Northwest Division

Portland	5	19	.208	14
Oklahoma City	12	13	.480	7½
Denver	10	15	.400	9½
Utah	7	19	.269	13
Minnesota	5	19	.208	14

Pacific Division

Golden State	21	3	.875	—
L.A. Clippers	18	7	.720	3½
Phoenix	13	14	.481	9½
Sacramento	11	14	.440	10½
L.A. Lakers	8	17	.320	13½

Tuesday's games

Washington 109, Minnesota 95
Miami 95, Brooklyn 91
New Orleans 119, Utah 111
Memphis 105, Golden State 98
Dallas 107, New York 87
Oklahoma City 104, Sacramento 92

Wednesday's games

Phoenix 111, Charlotte 106
Atlanta 127, Cleveland 98
Utah 105, Miami 87
Dallas 117, Detroit 106
Boston 109, Orlando 92
Toronto 105, Brooklyn 88
Memphis 117, San Antonio 116.3OT
Portland 104, Milwaukee 97
L.A. Clippers 102, Indiana 100
Houston 115, Denver 111. OT

Thursday's games

New Orleans at Houston
New York Knicks at Sacramento
Oklahoma City at Golden State

Friday's games

Charlotte at Philadelphia
Atlanta at Orlando
Washington at Miami
Toronto at Detroit
Minnesota at Boston
Brooklyn at Cleveland
Chicago at Memphis
Portland at San Antonio
L.A. Clippers at Denver
Oklahoma City at L.A. Lakers

Saturday's games

Phoenix at New York
Portland at New Orleans
Utah at Charlotte
Atlanta at Houston
San Antonio at Dallas
Indiana at Denver
Milwaukee at L.A. Clippers
Golden State at Chicago
New York Knicks at Toronto
Memphis at Cleveland
L.A. Lakers at Sacramento
Detroit at Brooklyn
Philadelphia at Orlando
Phoenix at Washington
Indiana at Minnesota
New Orleans at Oklahoma City

Sunday's games

Denver at Charlotte
Atlanta at Chicago
Portland at Houston
Utah at Memphis
Atlanta at Dallas
L.A. Clippers at San Antonio
Sacramento at Golden State

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STARS AND STRIPES

COLLEGE FOOTBALL



David Tulis/AP

Georgia coach Mark Richt paces the sideline during the game against Georgia Tech last month. The Bulldogs went from possibly playing for an SEC title to closing the season in the Belk Bowl.

Georgia fighting off letdown

Belk Bowl was not what Bulldogs envisioned late in the season

By PAUL NEWBERRY
The Associated Press

ATHENS, Ga. — Going into the final week of the regular season, the Georgia Bulldogs had hopes of playing for a Southeastern Conference title, maybe even claiming a spot in the four-team national playoff.

Instead, they'll close the year in a bowl sponsored by a department store.

Talk about a letdown. No. 13 Georgia (9-3) returned to practice Wednesday to begin preparations for the Dec. 30 Belk Bowl against No. 20 Louisville (9-3).

It's an intriguing matchup, pitting the high-scoring Bulldogs against their former defensive coordinator (Todd Grantham) in one of just four bowls outside the majors to feature a pair of teams ranked in The Associated Press Top 25.

That said, Georgia was hoping for so much more heading into its last game against Georgia Tech.

"We made our bed," cornerback Damian Swann said. "Now we've got to lay in it."

Based on recent history, coach Mark Richt will be on the lookout for any signs that his team isn't ready to compete against the Cardinals, a team that has a lot more to gain than the Bulldogs. Georgia has lost three of its last four bowls and looked thoroughly uninspired a year ago in a Gator

Bowl loss to Nebraska after a disappointing season.

"That's where we've got to coach, and where the players have got to decide to compete," Richt said. "We've got a chance to win 10 games. ... We've got a realistic chance to finish in the Top 10 when things are all said and done."

Georgia will long lament those Southeastern Conference losses to South Carolina and Florida, teams with a combined record of 12-11. Even so, they had a shot to make the SEC championship game until Missouri rallied to beat Arkansas the day after Thanksgiving, less than 24 hours before the Bulldogs hosted their state rival.

After being knocked out of a shot at a league title, the Bulldogs were still in the driver's seat for a major bowl bid. But Georgia Tech improbably rallied in the final 18 seconds of regulation to tie the game, then preserved a wild overtime victory by picking off Hutson Mason's pass from the 9-yard line.

"You've got to have a short memory," receiver Chris Conley said. "You've got to do that, you realize you've got one more game to play. For the seniors, it's the last game wearing the red and black. For the younger guys, it's a way for them to jump-start next season. You go into spring practice based on what you did in bowl practice. So it's very important for them in

terms of playing time next year." Linebacker Leonard Floyd, who led the team with six sacks, would not play in Charlotte after undergoing shoulder surgery.

But there has been some good news since the loss to Georgia Tech. Floyd was among four key players — along with linebacker Jordan Jenkins, receiver Malcolm Mitchell and offensive lineman John Theus — who told Richt they plan to return for their senior seasons rather than entering the NFL Draft.

"Things can always change, but that's where we're at right now," Richt said. "Those guys are highly productive and worked hard, and the younger guys look up to them, too."

Mason will be playing his final college game, his lone year as the starter not quite living up his goal of going out with a championship. But the Bulldogs are averaging nearly 42 points a game, which could go down as the highest-scoring season in school history.

"This is where we're at," said Mason, a fifth-year senior. "Let's go 10-3, not 9-4, and finish this thing off right. It's been a heck of a season for the offense. Those are things when you're looking back — even though you didn't accomplish the goals you wanted to accomplish — no one can take away that you were part of the best offense in Georgia history."

Scoreboard

Bowl glance	Tuesday, Dec. 30
Saturday, Dec. 20	Music City Bowl
New Orleans Bowl	At Nashville, Tenn.
Nevada (7-5) vs. La. Lafayette (8-4)	Notre Dame (7-5) vs. LSU (8-4)
New Mexico Bowl	Bell Bowl
At Albuquerque	At Charlotte, N.C.
UTEP (7-5) vs. Utah State (9-4)	Louisville (9-3) vs. Georgia (9-3)
Las Vegas Bowl	Fosters Farm Bowl
Colorado State (10-2) vs. Utah (8-4)	At Santa Clara, Calif.
Famous Idaho Potato Bowl	Stanford (7-5) vs. Maryland (7-5)
At Boise	Wednesday, Dec. 31
W. Michigan (8-4) vs. Air Force (9-3)	Gator Bowl
Camella Bowl	At Atlanta
At Montgomery, Ala.	Mississippi (9-3)
Bowling Green (7-6) vs. South Alabama (6-6)	Fiesta Bowl
Monday, Dec. 22	At Glendale, Ariz.
Miami Beach Bowl	Boise State (11-2) vs. Arizona (10-3)
BYU (8-4) vs. Memphis (9-3)	Orange Bowl
Tuesday, Dec. 23	At Miami
Boca Raton (Fla.) Bowl	Mississippi State (10-2) vs. Georgia Tech (10-3)
Marshall (12-1) vs. N. Illinois (11-2)	Thursday, Jan. 1
Poinsettia Bowl	Outback Bowl
At San Diego	At Tampa, Fla.
Navy (6-5) vs. San Diego State (7-5)	Wisconsin (10-3) vs. Auburn (8-4)
Wednesday, Dec. 24	Carson Bowl Classic
Bahamas Bowl	At Arlington, Texas
At Nassau	Michigan State (10-2) vs. Baylor (11-1)
Western Kentucky (7-5) vs. Central Michigan (9-3)	At Orlando, Fla.
Hawaii Bowl	Minnesota (8-4) vs. Missouri (10-3)
At Honolulu	Rose Bowl
Rice (7-5) vs. Fresno State (6-7)	At Pasadena, Calif.
Friday, Dec. 26	Playoff semifinal: Oregon (12-1) vs. Florida State (13-0)
Heart of Dallas Bowl	Sugar Bowl
Illinois (6-6) vs. Louisiana Tech (8-4)	At New Orleans
Quick Lane Bowl	Playoff semifinal: Alabama (12-1) vs. Ohio State (12-1)
At Detroit	Friday, Jan. 2
Rutgers (7-5) vs. North Carolina (6-6)	Armed Forces Bowl
St. Petersburg (Fla.) Bowl	At Fort Worth, Texas
UCF (9-3) vs. N.C. State (7-5)	Pittsburgh (6-5) vs. Houston (7-5)
Saturday, Dec. 27	TaxSlayer Bowl
Military Bowl	At Jacksonville, Fla.
At Annapolis, Md.	Iowa (7-5) vs. Tennessee (6-6)
Virginia Tech (5-6) vs. Cincinnati (9-3)	Alamo Bowl
Sun Bowl	At San Antonio
Duke (9-3) vs. Oklahoma State (9-3)	UCLA (9-3) vs. Kansas State (9-3)
Independence Bowl	Cactus Bowl
At Shreveport, La.	At Tempe, Ariz.
Miami (6-6) vs. South Carolina (6-6)	Oklahoma State (6-6) vs. Washington (8-5)
Pinstripe Bowl	Saturday, Jan. 3
At Bronx, N.Y.	Birmingham (Ala.) Bowl
Boston College (7-5) vs. Penn State (6-6)	Florida (6-5) vs. East Carolina (8-4)
Holiday Bowl	Gaduday Bowl
At San Diego	At Mobile, Ala.
Nebraska (9-3) vs. Southern Cal (8-4)	Toledo (8-4) vs. Arkansas State (7-5)
Monday, Dec. 29	Medal of Honor Bowl
Liberty Bowl	At Charleston, S.C.
W. Virginia (7-5) vs. Texas A&M (7-5)	American vs. National
Russell Athletic Bowl	Monday, Jan. 12
At Orlando, Fla.	College Football Championship
Clemson (9-3) vs. Oklahoma (8-4)	At Arlington, Texas
Texas Bowl	Sugar Bowl winner vs. Rose Bowl winner
At Houston	
Texas (6-6) vs. Arkansas (6-6)	



JOHN LOCHER/AP

Utah head coach Kyle Whittingham speaks with his team during practice on Wednesday in Las Vegas. The Utes play Colorado State in the Las Vegas Bowl on Saturday.

Bowls on AFN



New Orleans Bowl
Nevada vs. Louisiana-Lafayette
AFN-Xtra
1 a.m. Sunday CET
9 a.m. Sunday JKT



New Mexico Bowl
Utah State vs. UTEP
AFN-Xtra
4:20 a.m. Sunday CET
12:20 p.m. Sunday JKT



Las Vegas Bowl
Utah vs. Colorado State
AFN-Atlantic
5:30 a.m. Sunday CET
1:30 p.m. Sunday JKT



Famous Idaho Potato Bowl
Air Force vs. Western Michigan
AFN-Xtra
7:45 a.m. Sunday CET
3:45 p.m. Sunday JKT



Camella Bowl
South Alabama vs. Bowling Green
AFN-Xtra
11:15 a.m. Sunday CET
7:15 p.m. Sunday JKT

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Best of the rest

A breakdown of the top bowls not in the 'New Year's Six'

By STEVE MEGARGEE
The Associated Press



Holiday Bowl

No. 24 Southern California (8-4)
vs. No. 25 Nebraska (9-3)

Date: Dec. 27

Location: San Diego

Notes: This marks only the fifth meeting between these storied programs. USC owns a 3-0-1 edge in the series. The question for Nebraska is how it will respond to interim coach Barney Cotton, who will handle the bowl game assignment following the firing of Bo Pelini.



Texas Bowl

Arkansas (6-6) vs. Texas (6-6)

Date: Dec. 29

Location: Houston

Notes: The revival of an old Southwest Conference rivalry makes this much more interesting than a typical matchup between .500 teams. Texas leads the series 56-21 and won the last meeting 52-10 in 2008. The only other time they met in a bowl game, Arkansas won 27-6 in the 2000 Cotton Bowl. Even though neither team has a winning record, both showed signs of progress late in the season.



Music City Bowl

No. 22 LSU (8-4)
vs. Notre Dame (7-5)

Date: Dec. 30

Location: Nashville, Tennessee

Notes: This game between these big-name schools has grown even more intriguing because of Notre Dame's quarterback uncertainty. Irish coach Brian Kelly has said he's opening up the quarterback competition and giving Malik Zaire an opportunity to win the job. Everett Golson has started every game for the Irish.

With nearly 40 bowl games looming, it can be difficult finding those postseason gems.

The Rose Bowl and Sugar Bowl semifinals in the College Football Playoff are no-brainers. And the other matchups in the "New Year's Six" — which includes the Peach, Orange, Cotton and Fiesta — also should garner lots of attention.

But the entire postseason schedule features 39 bowls, including the playoff championship game.

To help sort through the clutter, here's a look at some of the more intriguing matchups that aren't part of the "New Year's Six."



UCLA quarterback Brett Hundley holds the school record for career touchdown passes.

RAY CHAVEZ, BAY AREA NEWS GROUP/TNS



Belk Bowl

No. 13 Georgia (9-3)
vs. No. 10 Louisville (9-3)

Date: Dec. 30

Location: Charlotte, N.C.

Notes: Louisville defensive coordinator Todd Grantham's connection to both schools gives this matchup an unusual twist. Grantham was Georgia's defensive coordinator from 2010-13 before heading to Louisville. Louisville's Gerod Holliman has 14 interceptions this season.



Outback Bowl

No. 19 Auburn (8-4)
vs. No. 17 Wisconsin (10-3)

Date: Jan. 1

Location: Tampa, Fla.

Notes: Although the Outback takes place on New Year's Day, it's not part of the "New Year's Six." Wisconsin ranks fourth nationally in rushing with 314 yards per game. Auburn is 12th with 258.5. Wisconsin averages 6.3 yards per carry, while Auburn averages 5.5. Wisconsin will be looking for redemption after being embarrassed in the Big Ten championship game.



Alamo Bowl

No. 11 Kansas State (9-3)
vs. No. 14 UCLA (9-3)

Date: Jan. 2

Location: San Antonio

Notes: Kansas State has one of the nation's top receivers in Tyler Lockett, who has caught 93 passes for 1,351 yards and nine touchdowns this season. UCLA boasts quarterback Brett Hundley, who has set school records for career touchdown passes with 74 and total offense this season with 4,095 yards.

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MLB

Changes in Cuba will take time

Re-established diplomatic relations could ease obstacles to playing in US

By RONALD BLUM
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Fred Claire can see the day when Major League Baseball teams open academies for prospects in Cuba.

"It's absolutely a natural, just as the Dominican was and Venezuela. You go to where the talents," the former Los Angeles Dodgers general manager said Wednesday. "The high talent level for Cuban players is still there."

That talent has faced obstacles getting to the U.S. since 1961, when the United States terminated diplomatic relations with Cuba. President Barack Obama said Wednesday that the two nations were re-establishing relations.

The path to the major leagues for Cuban players has often involved smugglers who bring them out of the island nation for a price. It's hard to foresee exactly how that will change in the short-term, or whether MLB teams will be allowed to invest resources in the communist country.

"While there are not sufficient details to make a realistic evaluation, we will continue to track this significant issue, and we will keep our clubs informed if this different direction may impact the manner in which they conduct business on issues related to Cuba," MLB said in a statement.



Twenty-five Cuban-born players appeared in the major leagues this year, a group that includes outfielders Yasiel Puig and Yoenis Cespedes, and hard-throwing reliever Aroldis Chapman. There have been 59 since 1995, according to STATs.

Many have received large contracts, topped by a \$72.5 million, seven-year agreement in August between outfielder Rusney Castillo and the Boston Red Sox. Chicago White Sox first baseman Jose Abreu was voted AL Rookie of the Year this season after agreeing to a \$68 million, six-year deal with the Chicago White Sox. Yasmany Tomas, an outfielder who may be shifted to third base, signed a \$68.5 million, six-year contract with the Arizona Diamondbacks



AP file photo

Twenty-five Cuban-born players, including the Dodgers' Yasiel Puig (above) and the Tigers' Yoenis Cespedes (left) appeared in the major leagues this year. Former Dodgers general manager Fred Claire can see the day when Major League Baseball teams open academies for prospects in Cuba.

this month.

Because of the American trade embargo, a player who defects from Cuba has to obtain a license from the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control to "unblock" him before he can sign with a major league organization. It would take congressional action to lift the embargo.

"We remain hopeful that today's announcement will lead to further positive developments," the Major League Baseball Players Association said in a statement.

The Cuban government has approved a policy allowing athletes to sign in foreign leagues and pay tax on their earnings, but the U.S. embargo prevents American teams from employing Cuban residents. Well regarded outfielder Alfredo

Despaigne agreed this year to a contract with the Chiba Lotte Marines of Japan's Pacific League.

Defecting players have established residency outside the U.S. in order to become free agents and not be subject to MLB's amateur draft. But free-agent riches could come to an end in 2017, when MLB teams hope to start an international draft.

Under MLB's collective bargaining agreement with the players' association that runs until December 2016, Cubans and others who reside outside the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico are included in each MLB team's international signing pool unless they are 23 or older and have played as a professional in a professional league for at least five

seasons.

MLB and the union instituted similar signing pools in 2012 for players covered by the amateur draft each June. But Cuban defectors remain exempt from those limits for now.

"Frankly, American players, many of them have a lesser standard than what's offered in international players," said agent Scott Boras, who has criticized restraints on contracts for players in American high schools and colleges. "We've really got to re-evaluate what we're doing with our draft and our international players to really say what we do with the Cubans. Maybe it will prompt a broader discussion to revamp the entirety of the system."

Commentary

Thaw in relations will hopefully eliminate danger

By JIM LITKE
The Associated Press

If one ripple from the thaw in U.S.-Cuba relations means baseball prospects get off the island and into the major leagues without payoffs to smugglers and threats from kidnappers, it's hard to see the downside.

Just don't expect too much, too soon. Barely two hours after President Barack Obama's dramatic announcement Wednesday in Washington, both MLB and its players' union acknowledged as much in statements.

"We will keep our clubs informed if this different direction may impact the manner in which they conduct business on issues related to Cuba," MLB said.

"We remain hopeful that today's announcement will lead to further positive developments," the union said.

Let's hope so, considering how few positive developments have occurred before now. There were 25 Cuban-born players in the big leagues this past season, the best of which is arguably Los Angeles Dodgers star Yasiel Puig. The story of how he got there, after four failed attempts to leave Cuba, involved a boat trip, a detour

where he was held hostage in a Mexican motel room, repeated extortion threats and crossing the U.S. border illegally.

On Tuesday, South Florida businessman Gilberto Suarez pleaded guilty for his role in the conspiracy to smuggle Puig in return for a sizable cut of his multimillion-dollar salary.

Suarez was the second man this year to enter a guilty plea related to the smuggling of a Cuban baseball player into the U.S. Last month, 41-year-old Eliezer Lazo was sentenced to 14 years in federal prison for conspiring to smuggle 1,000 Cubans, among them Texas Rangers outfielder Leonys Martin. Sadly, stories like Puig's differ from so many others only in the details.

Cuba has been turning out world-class athletes — and not just ballplayers — for more than a century. But since the 1959 revolution, most have stayed put.

Track stars and multiple medalists such as Alberto Juantorena and Javier Sotomayor, or tank star turns on the Olympic stage, but never reaped rewards that were commensurate with their talents. So, too, did heavyweights Teofilo Stevenson and Felix Savon, two of only three boxers to win gold medals at three Olympics and considered among the greatest amateurs ever. But nei-

ther turned pro.

Stevenson was so smooth that a fight against Muhammad Ali was often hyped and loudly debated when ages were near their prime, but never came off. And some boxing observers think Savon, who succeeded Stevenson, was definitely the better of the two.

Baseball was the stage where Cuba's athletes shined brightest. Its version of the Big Red Machine dominated the international scene from the 1940s on, even as team officials thinned out the ranks for potential defectors and conducted bed checks with a zealotism the Cuban army would have admired.

But after back-to-back gold medals in Barcelona (1992) and Atlanta (1996) the cupboard was nearly empty. The team Cuba brought to Sydney for the 2000 Games was largely the same it had sent to the previous two Olympics, as well as every important international competition in between. It was old by any measure and only three players on the squad were under 25 at the time — young enough to make the risk seem worthwhile. Around the same time, half-brothers and defectors Livan and Orlando "El Duque" Hernandez were pitching for the Giants and Yankees

in preparation for the major league playoffs a month down the road.

That Cuban team lost the gold-medal game 4-0 to a U.S. team composed largely of young pro prospects and aging castoffs, and only so much has changed since. Many of the best players, such as Puig, Jose Fernandez and Jose Abreu, still find ways to escape. Most of those establish residency outside the U.S. in order to become free agents not covered by MLB's amateur draft. While that ruse often results in big deals, MLB is already hatching plans to get rid of the exemption and make such players part of an international draft by 2017.

Making the flow of ballplayers more orderly and less dangerous would benefit just about everyone in the game. There's even talk at the moment of MLB teams opening baseball academies in Cuba modeled on similar programs already up and running in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, two nations that are providing a big infusion of talent. Until the leaders of two nations that have spent more than a half-century trying to torment one another prove they can cooperate as well, talk is all it is.

Jim Litke is a national sports columnist for The Associated Press. Write to him at jlitke@ap.org and follow him at [Twitter.com/JimLitke](https://twitter.com/JimLitke).

NFL

Ravens have favorable path to playoffs

Baltimore can clinch with wins over struggling Texans, Browns

By DAVID GINSBURG
The Associated Press

OWINGS MILLS, Md. — During a season filled with unexpected obstacles and aggravating injuries, the Baltimore Ravens appear to be finally catching a break in their effort to earn a playoff berth.

After squeezing past struggling Jacksonville 20-12 on Sunday, Baltimore (9-5) moved into the AFC's second wild-card slot and remained tied with Pittsburgh in the AFC North, a half-game behind Cincinnati (8-4-1).

It's come down to this: Baltimore will clinch a postseason berth — its sixth in the past seven years — with victories in its last two games.

"Two games left, two wins needed," coach John Harbaugh said Monday. "That's probably what I'll be saying to the guys tomorrow."

The schedule appears favorable. This week's opponent, Houston, lost two quarterbacks to injury in a 17-10 defeat in Indianapolis on Sunday.

Baltimore then wraps up the regular season at home against fading Cleveland, which lost 30-0 to Cincinnati on Sunday.

Even better for the Ravens: Pittsburgh and Cincinnati are looking at a potentially rough home stretch. The Steelers (9-5) host Kansas City (8-6) on Sunday and Cincinnati takes on Denver (11-3). Then, Cincinnati and Pittsburgh square off in the season finale Dec. 28.

Harbaugh is concerned only about Baltimore, and he isn't tak-



PATRICK SEMANSKI/AP

Jaguars quarterback Blake Bortles, left, is sacked by Ravens linebacker C.J. Mosley and outside linebacker Terrell Suggs on Sunday.

ing anything for granted — even though Houston (7-7) will likely start either Thaddeus Lewis or Case Keenum at quarterback. Lewis joined the team last month and Keenum was signed Monday after being cut in the preseason.

The Ravens can't be overconfident, though, not after their uneven performance against the Jaguars (2-12).

"We didn't play as well as we hoped or as we planned for," Harbaugh acknowledged. "We anticipated a tough game. Anybody that

would anticipate a blowout in this league is a fool."

The Ravens won the game but lost two more defensive backs. Cornerback Asa Jackson and safety Terrence Brooks sustained season-ending knee injuries and will join cornerbacks Jimmy Smith, Danny Gorrer, Aaron Ross and Trammie Jacobs on injured reserve.

Baltimore is also playing without suspended defensive tackle Haloti Ngata, the second player on the team to be suspended by

the NFL this season (along with Ray Rice).

In spite of it all, the Ravens are right where they want to be with two weeks to go.

"I'm excited about our team. I like where we're at," Harbaugh said. "I think we're getting stronger and I also think there's room for improvement, which gives me a lot of encouragement and excitement."

There's also something to be said for a team that wins when it doesn't play particularly well. Bal-

timore's offense produced only one touchdown and trailed at halftime before rallying past the Jaguars.

"It would have [stunk] if we lost," said Terrell Suggs, who had 2½ of Baltimore's eight sacks. "But you've got to commend this whole team, offense and defense alike for putting it away this time. Last time we were here, and we couldn't close it out. Good teams, they don't make the same mistake twice and we did a good job of finishing in the fourth quarter."

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NFL

Redskins face worst stretch since the '60s

Washington on track to repeat last year's record

By JOSEPH WHITE
The Associated Press

ASHBURN, Va. — Chris Cooley has been all about the Washington Redskins and no other team in his NFL life. He played nine seasons, went to a couple of Pro Bowls, made his home in the D.C. area and now breaks down game film on the team-affiliated radio station.

And he's doing it during a historically bad time for the once-profound franchise.

"I hate my role right now, because of that," Cooley said. "I want to be honest with our fans, and I don't want to be negative towards our players or coaches or ownership, but I have a hard time being anything besides being honest. It would be so much fun if they would win. It's not fun. It's frustrating."

The Redskins (3-11) are lousy. No other way to say it. They've lost 19 of 22 games, a run of futility unmatched in team lore since the early 1960s. They ended last year with an eight-game losing streak and are on pace to do the same this year. Back-to-back 3-13 seasons would compare only to the 1960-61 years, when they went 1-9-2 and 1-12-1.

In January 2010, not long after George Allen was hired as general manager, he said: "The status quo has to end. We have to change the way we've been doing some business... Last place two years in a row is not Redskins football."

Apparently, it is. Under Allen, the Redskins claimed the cellar



JULIO CORTEZ/AP

Redskins quarterback Robert Griffin III flips the ball back to the referee as he walks to the sidelines during Sunday's 24-13 loss to the New York Giants. Washington's record hasn't been this bad since the 1960-61 years, when it was 1-9-2 and 1-12-1.

of the NFC East in the 2010 and 2011 seasons, and again in 2013 and 2014. Their last-place slot this year was secured with Sunday's loss to the New York Giants.

When Dan Snyder first emerged as a potential buyer for the team in 1999, he told The Washington Post: "I miss winning." It was a fair assessment from a lifelong fan because there had been some lean years since the last of the three Super Bowl trophies was won in the early 1990s.

Snyder bought the team later that year. He's since overseen eight last-place finishes and a 107-147 record, tied for the fifth worst record in the NFL during that span. It would be fair to conclude that he still misses winning.

Some fans, at least the ones who still come to the games, are starting to wear bags on their heads, and they are quick to point out that Snyder is the one constant amid all the losing. There have been isolated moments of success in the last decade — playoffs in 2005, 2007 and 2012 — but expectations aren't what they used to be.

The cumulative effect has worn on the usually even-keeled Santana Moss, the team's longest tenured player. Moss was ejected from Sunday's game when he argued a decision that overturned a touchdown after a replay review. His tirade represented a decade of going-nowhere frustration.

Moss cited entitlement and

inconsistency as two persistent Redskins themes. He said he's seen too many teammates over the years that played ahead of others who "probably were more worthy" — a comment that reinforces the Redskins-Snyder reputation of coddling to marquee names.

Moss has played for four coaches since he arrived in 2005, and with 10 starting quarterbacks. This year, first-year coach Jay Gruden has changed starting QBs five times.

"Coach is trying to win, but it hurts when you don't have a solid guy, and I've been through that all my career," Moss said. "Whenever you have to have that many changes, regardless of what you're trying to do and what you have out

there, there's always going to be a hiccup, there's always going to be a crutch because you can't be successful with that many changes all the time."

Cooley said the culture of change has to, well, change.

"One thing that I think would be great moving forward is just at least for the team to believe in what we have, to have consistency and continuity, and give fans pieces that they can know will be here, and coaches that they know will be here," Cooley said. "And get away from this idea that we're going to fire a guy after one year, or trade a guy or cut a guy after one year, and start building from what we are — which is one of the worst teams in the league."

Luck looking to work out troubles before playoffs

By MICHAEL MAROT
The Associated Press



DARRON CUMMINGS/AP

Colts quarterback Andrew Luck leads the league in TD passes, but is only 1-2 in the playoffs.

INDIANAPOLIS — Andrew Luck is embarking on the most critical part of the season.

He has two games to find solutions to the Colts' problems before the playoffs, and there's still too much at stake for the Colts to go into full tuncup mode. "It's, 'Let's go out and win. We need to win,'" Luck said Wednesday. "There's no holding back, there's no easing off the gas pedal."

In his short NFL career, Luck has learned momentum matters in the postseason.

Indianapolis (10-4) heads to NFC East-leading Dallas (10-4) on Sunday with a four-game winning streak. A win would give Luck the longest winning streak of his career and could keep Indy's fading hopes alive for a first-round bye.

Yet he still has plenty to prove.

Despite leading the NFL with 4,492 yards passing and 38 touchdown passes and wrapping up his second straight AFC South crown, Luck is just 1-2 in the playoffs.

A year ago, Luck's miscues were the

problem. He threw three interceptions in a stunning comeback against the Chiefs and four more in a lopsided loss at New England.

So during the offseason, Luck tried to figure out what went wrong and came back this summer hoping to reduce what he often referred to as "bone-headed" mistakes.

Recently, though, the problems have resurfaced.

Indy has had 29 penalties and 12 turnovers over the past four weeks, with opposing defenses scoring three times off those turnovers. Yet Indy has still won each game.

While the miscues cannot all be blamed on Luck, the Colts quarterback is tied for the league lead with 12 fumbles and six lost and has the third-highest interception total (14) in the NFL.

If that continues, the Colts know the deep playoff try they've been hoping for could be short-lived.

"Obviously we've got things to clean up. We had issues with turnovers, nobody likes that," coach Chuck Pagano said. "We've had issues with penalties. We've left yards out on the field because of penalties. We've stalled drives because of penal-

ties. We've kept (opponents') drives alive because of penalties."

"If we're going to go where we want to go and get to where we want to get to we've got to keep addressing those things and get them cleaned up," he added.

So rather than looking ahead to the postseason, as Colts teams have done in the past, Pagano and Luck are giving full-steam ahead.

While Indy's defense has played well in victories over Jacksonville, Washington, Cleveland and Houston, and the Colts' improved ground game has helped seal three of those victories, Pagano is hoping to see even better results over the final two regular-season games.

Pagano doesn't intend to sit any healthy starters.

And Luck, for one, doesn't want the rest. He'd rather fight through the miscues, find solutions and keep extending the Colts' winning streak.

"We know we've got to keep improving and it starts in practice when it comes to cleaning up the mistakes," Luck said. "We have a chance to go out and play a good football team this Sunday and try and execute. That's huge."

NFL

Pump fake: An old standby for QBs

Time-tested move used to freeze LBs, free receivers

By DAVE CAMPBELL
The Associated Press

Ben Roethlisberger and the Pittsburgh Steelers had first-and-goal at Carolina, poised to break open that September game in the third quarter.

Roethlisberger looked left, cocked his arm and completed his entire throwing motion, luring a Panthers linebacker toward the anticipated trajectory. The ball never came out, but a crowd of defenders gathered in that part of the field.

Big Ben then used another, quicker pump fake to draw the nickel cornerback further away from his favorite target Antonio Brown. Finally, Roethlisberger delivered the ball into the back right corner of the end zone behind the two defenders still close enough to get a hand in the way.

Touchdown.

The NFL's best quarterbacks have become better, post-modern offenses are more complex and the rules against down-field contact have been made stricter. Many times, though, the success of a passing play comes down to a simple old standby tool that's been in the quarterback's belt since the legalization of the forward pass.

The pump fake.

It's just as much Johnny Unitas as it is Andrew Luck.

"You've just got to have great eyes. Don't look at the quarterback. He's like Medusa. He turns you into stone," Minnesota cornerback Captain Munneryn said, using Greek mythology to explain how to avoid getting beat by it.

Easier said than done.

"You're taught to react. So every action is key," Denver cornerback Tony Carter said. "If you're a half-second off, it's enough."

Examples of defensive players frozen by pump fakes in critical situations aren't hard to find. Here are three from this season:

■ Dallas trailed the New York Giants with barely a minute left in November, and the Cowboys' offensive line gave Tony Romo almost 9 seconds to throw a second-and-short pass. Romo wound up with a big fake that sucked a safety into the shallow part of

the field, and Dez Bryant eluded two other defenders on a crossing pattern to grab the go-ahead touchdown.

■ The following week, Green Bay took a 10-point lead on New England late in the first quarter when Aaron Rodgers found Richard Rodgers a step ahead of the safety for a 32-yard scoring pass. How did the rookie tight end get open? Rodgers faked a throw to his right toward Jordy Nelson, prompting the other Patriots safety to head that way.

■ Just last Sunday, Roethlisberger added another clip to his personal fake-throw highlight film, albeit during a less-dramatic 4-yard pass against Atlanta. He pivoted right and found Falcons defensive end Kroy Biermann right in front of him. One pump wasn't enough to get Biermann out of the way, so Roethlisberger raised his arm again as Biermann leapt high in hope of a bat-down.

The ball didn't come out that time, either. Roethlisberger slung a side-arm throw to Brown, who maneuvered for a nominal gain. The Steelers kept that drive going and drained the clock for a seven-point victory.

"Kroy made a great play," Roethlisberger said. "That's the only option: Get it out as fast as you can."

Roethlisberger was being rather modest.

"We know the play is never dead with him," tight end Heath Miller said.

Being 6-foot-5 sure helps.

"It helps when you've got hands like his," Steelers backup Bruce Gradkowski said. "I could never do that. I'd have the ball come out."

Defenses aren't helpless, of course.

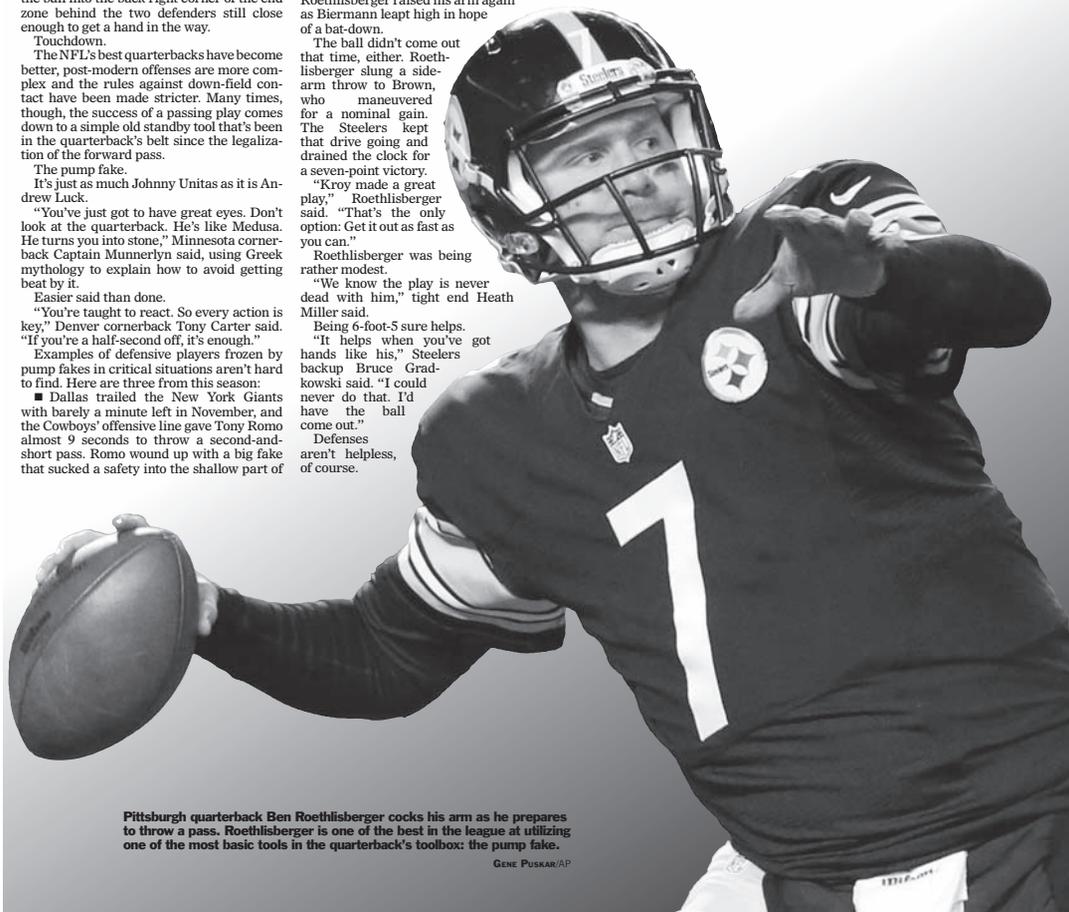
'You've just got to have great eyes. Don't look at the quarterback. He's like Medusa. He turns you into stone.'

Captain Munneryn
Vikings cornerback

Agile ends like Biermann, Houston's J.J. Watt or Denver's DeMarcus Ware are trained to disrupt even the shortest of throws when they're not pursuing a sack against a deeper drop. Creating better passing lanes through the line and linebackers, then, is one reason to use the pump fake.

The other is to clear a safety away down the field. Typically, a receiver on one side will run a predetermined double route — like a slant-and-go — while the guy on the back side of the formation gets free on, say, a move up the seam.

AP Pro Football Writer Arnie Stapleton in Englewood, Colorado, and AP Sports Writer Tim Booth in Renton, Washington, Will Graves in Pittsburgh and Michael Marot in Indianapolis contributed to this report.



Pittsburgh quarterback Ben Roethlisberger cocks his arm as he prepares to throw a pass. Roethlisberger is one of the best in the league at utilizing one of the most basic tools in the quarterback's toolbox: the pump fake.

GENE PUSKAR/AP

NFL

Pats keep eyes on bigger prize

New England focuses on pursuit of another berth in Super Bowl

By HOWARD ULMAN
The Associated Press

The souvenirs from Darrelle Revis' first division title in his brilliant eight-year career were safely stowed in his bag.

For long-time New England players, the T-shirt with the message "PATRIOTS RUN THE EAST" and the championship hat are just the latest in a huge collection — six straight AFC East titles and 11 of the last 12.

Wide receiver Julian Edelman has won it in all six of his NFL seasons. Defensive tackle Vince Wilfork has won 10 in his 11 seasons.

"I'm blessed. I'm lucky. It's all of that," Wilfork said. "What can you say?"

The enthusiasm after the Patriots clinched the division with a 41-13 rout of the Miami Dolphins on Sunday was tempered by their pursuit of greater goals — home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs, a berth in the Super Bowl and another NFL championship. They won three in four seasons but none in the next nine.

Revis did make it to the AFC title game twice, in the 2009 and 2010 seasons. His New York Jets were a wild-card team in 2010 then beat the Patriots in Foxborough 28-21 in a divisional game before losing to Pittsburgh 24-19 in the conference championship game.

Revis wanted to get back there so he chose New England over other options when he became a free agent after one injury-marred season with Tampa Bay.

"Just to win," he said of his motivation in signing with the Patriots.

And the division title?
"It's my first one, so I'm very excited." The five-time Pro Bowl cornerback said. "It took a lot of hard work and I'm just excited. This is my first time so I'm happy to wear the hat and wear the T-shirt. It's pretty awesome."

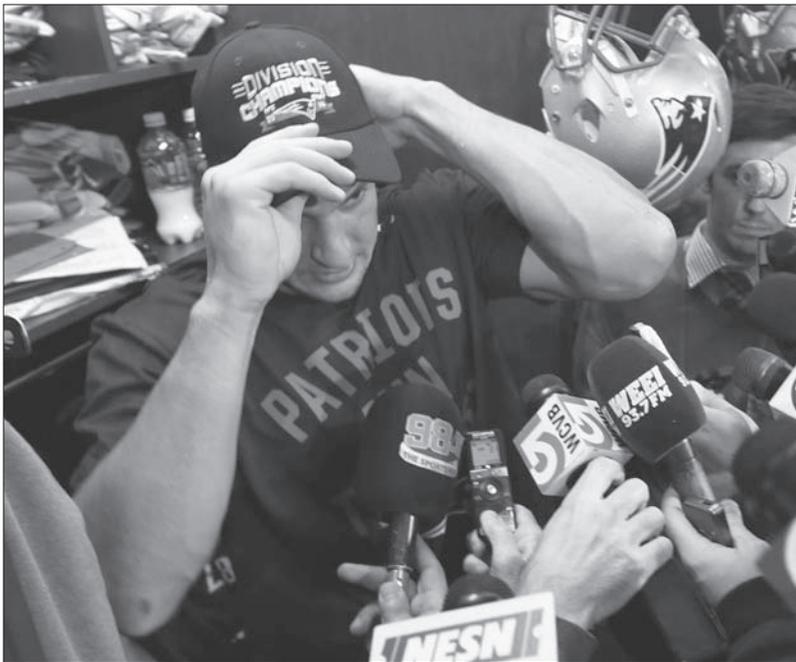
The Patriots can take another step toward their next goal, the top seed in the AFC, by beating Revis' former team. They visit the New York Jets (3-11) on Sunday before finishing the regular season at home against the Buffalo Bills (8-6), a team they beat 37-22 on the road on Oct. 12.

They were criticized prematurely by many when they split their first four games, including a 41-14 loss in Kansas City that left them at 2-2 and tied for the AFC East lead with Buffalo and Miami.

"We really didn't care how people felt about us," Wilfork said in the locker room after Sunday's win. "The one thing we had was the people in here and our fans, our true fans. It always feels good to win the East, I'll tell you that."

Even if the competition within the division has been mediocre throughout the Patriots' domination of more than a decade.

In the 12 seasons starting in 2003, the Patriots are 57-13 against AFC East foes, a



PHOTOS BY CHARLES KRUPA/AP

New England tight end Rob Gronkowski puts on a cap signifying his team's clinching of the AFC East title with a 41-13 win over the Dolphins. The team's enthusiasm over the win was tempered by its pursuit of greater goals, including the Super Bowl.

winning percentage of .814.

Against the rest of the league, they're 92-28 and .766.

They're 21-2 against Buffalo in that stretch with the next meeting on Dec. 28, although the Bills won Sunday against Green Bay, which had beaten New England.

Next Sunday's game at the Jets is another installment in a heated rivalry. New York coach Rex Ryan could have extra incentive to beat the Patriots before his widely expected departure after this season.

The Patriots should be heavily favored in both but always speak highly of their opponents and study and practice hard before each game.

"Every year we have a great opportunity to try to accomplish something," quarterback Tom Brady said. "It doesn't start this morning. It started back in March. It's a lot of hard work that goes into feeling good."

"I don't think you ever take winning for granted."

"I certainly don't because I know how hard it is to win."

No matter how many division championship T-shirts are hanging in your closet.



Patriots outside linebacker Dont'a Hightower, rear, tackles Dolphins quarterback Ryan Tannehill alongside Patriots cornerback Darrelle Revis on Sunday. Revis earned his first division title, part of the reason he chose New England as a free agent.

‘It’s a lot of hard work that goes into it. I don’t think you ever take winning for granted. I certainly don’t because I know how hard it is to win.’

Tom Brady

Patriots quarterback

NFL

Falcons QB downplays showdown with Saints

By GEORGE HENRY
The Associated Press

FLOWERY BRANCH, Ga. — Quarterback Matt Ryan says he and the Atlanta Falcons face no added pressure with everything on the line this week.

In the first season of a six-year, \$103.75 million contract, Ryan was hoping to steer Atlanta back to respectability, but that has not been the case.

The Falcons (5-9) have lost three of four heading into Sunday's game at New Orleans (6-8). They are third in the weak NFC South, but can win the division for the third time in five years if they beat the Saints and close the regular season with a victory over Carolina.

Ryan, though, insists that he's not preparing for the biggest regular-season game of his career.

"I don't know about that," Ryan told The Associated Press. "There's been plenty of big games early on. There's been tons of big ones."

Ryan said he's used this mindset since the Falcons drafted him No. 3 overall in 2008. His first quarterbacks coach, Bill Musgrave, told him that all games count the same.

So regardless if Julio Jones, the NFL's second-leading receiver, is unable to play against the Saints, Ryan disagrees that this game is bigger than others.

"When it comes to the end of the season and we see how things shake out, that's when everybody on the outside starts putting extra weight on it," Ryan said, "but I



DAVID GOLDMAN/AP

Atlanta Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan says Sunday's game at New Orleans is just like any other despite the playoff implications.

think from my perspective it's about preparing the same way every week, making sure that if it's game one against New Orleans or game 15 of the year that you're at your best when Sunday rolls around."

For Ryan, this season has added another unpleasant perspective on his career.

The two-time Pro Bowl QB and former Boston College standout went 55-24 and led the Falcons to four playoff appearances in his first five seasons.

But he and the team are 9-21 since finishing the 2012 season 10 yards shy of the Super Bowl, and it doesn't figure to get any easier this week. Atlanta is 1-5 at the Superdome under coach Mike Smith and 4-9 in the series.

"I think with where we're at and what's on the line, everybody understands what it is," Ryan said. "All that stuff is fun to talk about and fun to write about, but when you get on the field and between the lines, it all

comes down to playing the game and playing it well."

The Falcons are in playoff contention because of a 4-0 record in the NFC South. They beat the Saints 37-34 in Week 1 on Matt Bryant's overtime field goal, swept Tampa Bay and won at Carolina.

Ryan knows he must protect the football this week. Despite 10 touchdown passes in the last four games, Ryan has thrown an interception in each, and Atlanta is 1-3 in that span.

He will need to stay upright and keep drives alive by getting solid protection. New Orleans, which won Monday at Chicago after sacking Jay Cutler seven times, is skilled at mixing up pre-snap looks to confuse the opposition.

"I think it's going to be important for us on the road to be able to communicate very well in terms of our pass protection schemes," Ryan said. Saints defensive coordinator Rob Ryan is "very multiple, changes personnel groupings very well and puts a lot of pressure on your identification and communication. That's an area that we need to be razor sharp this week."

Notes: Jones, who hasn't practiced since setting an Atlanta team record with 259 yards receiving two weeks ago at Green Bay, is still sidelined by an injured hip. Smith would not say whether he thinks Jones will be able to practice this week. ...

Other starters who did not participate in practice included WR Roddy White (knee), WR Harry Douglas (foot), right guard Jon Asamoah (back) and strong safety William Moore (foot).

QB: Lindley insists he's not the same player who mopped up in disastrous '12 season

FROM BACK PAGE

When Carson Palmer went down with a season-ending knee injury, the Cardinals signed Lindley off the San Diego practice squad. And when Palmer's replacement, Drew Stanton, sprained his right knee on Dec. 11 in St. Louis, Ariens turned to Lindley rather than Thomas to finish the game.

"He was calm as a cucumber out there," Ariens said before Wednesday's practice.

Largely because the Cardinals are down to a third-string, maybe fourth-string, quarterback, oddsmakers have made Seattle an eight-point favorite on the road.

"I think it's all about money in Vegas," Lindley said. "They're just dealing with facts. They aren't worrying about the people and the intangibles."

Arizona drafted Lindley in the sixth round out of San Diego State in 2012. With the Cardinals' season circling the drain, then-coach Ken Whisenand made the rookie the starter with the team in the midst of losing 11 of its last 12 games.

The results weren't good. Lindley completed 52 percent of his passes for 752 yards and zero touchdowns. He was intercepted seven times. His 181 passes attempted — including 10 last week — are the most in NFL history without a touchdown.

But this is a far better team than the one two years ago, and Lindley insists he's a different quarterback.

"It's night and day," he said.

Steady: Carroll's approach differs from Cardinals' Ariens

FROM BACK PAGE

Clearly what Carroll has implemented has worked. For the fourth time in Carroll's five seasons with Seattle, the Seahawks are in contention for a division title going into the final weeks of the regular season.

But after being in control of home-field advantage and the No. 1 seed for most of last season, this Week 16 showdown with Arizona is significant. A victory by the Cardinals gives them the NFC West title and home-field advantage throughout the playoffs, needing just two wins to play in the Super Bowl on their home field.

For the Seahawks, a victory wouldn't guarantee a playoff spot unless they get some help earlier in the day. But it would potentially leave Seattle needing just a home victory over St. Louis in Week 17 to clinch the division title and home-field advantage.

Two wins would give Seattle the No. 1 seed in the NFC as long as it doesn't finish in a tie at 12-4 with Dallas, in which case the Cowboys would hold the tiebreaker. Seattle would win any two-way tiebreakers with Detroit, Green Bay or Arizona and all three-way tiebreakers go in favor of the Seahawks.

Why is that important for Seattle? Over the past three seasons, playoffs included, the Seahawks are 23-2 at home and have outscored opponents by an average of 14 points per game.

"The amount I've learned and not only grown as a person in two years, but from these guys — B.A. (Ariens), from Carson, from Drew. I'm a totally different person and totally different player from that point."

He said the biggest difference

between now and then is "knowing what's coming."

"Obviously the first time out there before, it's new, and you don't know exactly what's going to happen," Lindley said. "But now, through experience, through seeing how these guys Drew and

"I think it's important that if you're going to play at your best and perform at a very high level you have to be comfortable with the setting, and if you're uncomfortable and unsure it can make a difference and distract you some," Carroll said. "We have that going for us. We feel very good about that. We have been in winning situations in December and it's been the chance for us to do some really good things and we've come through for a good part of that."

While Seattle tries to keep important games on the same level as every other matchup, Arizona coach Bruce Ariens said Wednesday he wants his players to embrace the scope of Sunday's matchup.

"You don't get to play for the damn thing very often so it's not like Seattle's played for it for a hundred damn years. I'm sure they're embracing it also," Ariens said. "So you fight your (rear) off all year to play for this game and sure you embrace it but you don't change how you prepare for it, it's still the same process."

Notes: Seattle C Max Unger (ankle/knee) did not practice Wednesday. Carroll said Unger struggled to recover from his work last week. He's missed the past four games. ... LT Russell Okung (chest) is "still in the mix" for Sunday but was scheduled to have additional exams on Thursday to check his recovery from a bruised lung.

Carson prepare, how Philip (Rivers) prepares out in San Diego, I just feel a lot more ready at this point."

Lindley said it's "50-50" as to whether his playing time in 2012 did more harm than good. "The biggest thing is if you

don't let it affect your confidence too much," he said, "anything's a learning experience."

He said he got through it with the support of his family and his faith.

"It's just trusting in whatever the plan will be," Lindley said. "Just waiting for this opportunity. I feel extremely blessed and excited that it's here."

Ariens dismisses the term "game manager." He said the Cardinals won't scale back their style just because of the quarterback. He has, however, tailored a game plan to Lindley's skills.

"There are some things in the offense he likes to throw," Ariens said. "Each guy's got two or three things that they like a little bit more than the others."

Asked where Lindley concerns him, Ariens responded, "He really doesn't."

"He's a meticulous preparation guy," the coach said. "The dynamics between us — I've bounced things off him. I trust him as far as his mental makeup to the game."

To keep the Seahawks guessing, Ariens has developed a package of "Thomas and says he might use both quarterbacks."

But it's Lindley at center stage, with the support of a coach whose former pupils include Peyton Manning, Andrew Luck and Ben Roethlisberger.

"It's tough to find at this level, a guy that you want to pour it out on the field for," Lindley said, "and B.A. gets his guys to play their best for him."



GAMEDAY

WEEK 16

TELEVISED GAMES



Marquee matchup

Seattle Seahawks (10-4) at Arizona Cardinals (11-3)

AFN-Sports, 2:20 a.m. Monday CET, 10:20 a.m. Monday JKT

Baltimore Ravens (9-5) at Houston Texans (7-7)

AFN-Xtra
7 p.m. Sunday CET
3 a.m. Monday JKT
Series: Ravens lead 6-1.

Last meeting: Baltimore beat visiting Houston 30-9 on Sept. 22, 2012.

Notes: Ravens QB Joe Flacco passed for 221 yards last week and became the first in club history to reach 25,000 (25,024). ... Texans DE J.J. Watt is the first player with 3 offensive TDs (3 receiving) and 2 TDs on takeaways (INT, fumble recovery) in a season since Bill Goldery in 1948.

SERIES RECORD: Cardinals lead 16-15; Seahawks have won seven of their past eight. ... QB Russell Wilson has 34 wins, most by an NFL QB in his first three seasons.

SEAHAWKS OFFENSE: OVERALL (11), RUSH (1), PASS (3).

SEAHAWKS DEFENSE: OVERALL (1), RUSH (5), PASS (1).

CARDINALS OFFENSE: OVERALL (24), RUSH (28), PASS (15).

CARDINALS DEFENSE: OVERALL (14), RUSH (6), PASS (29).

STREAKS, STATS AND NOTES: The Seahawks have won seven of their past eight. ... QB Russell Wilson has 34 wins, most by an NFL QB in his first three seasons. In his last game at Arizona, he passed for 3 TDs and a 122.1 rating. ... RB Marshawn Lynch has 19 TDs (15 rushing, 4 receiving) in his last 18 games, including playoffs. He has 1,000-plus rushing yards and 10-plus rushing TDs for the fourth

consecutive season. ... WR Doug Baldwin leads the team with a career-high 56 catches. WR Jermaine Kearse has set career highs in catches (37) and yards (529). ... CB Richard Sherman has 6 INTs (1 TD) in his past six games against Arizona. Since entering the NFL in 2011, he leads the league with 23 INTs. DT Jordan Hill has 4 sacks in the past four games. ... The Cardinals have clinched a playoff berth, and their 11 victories are tied for the most in franchise history. They are 7-0 at home, their most home wins since 1925. ... QB Ryan Lindley, filling in for injured Drew Stanton (who was filling in for injured Carson Palmer), has four career starts. ... WR Larry Fitzgerald has a catch in 161 consecutive games, the longest active streak in the NFL. Since entering the league in 2004, he leads the NFL with 98 receiving TDs (including playoffs). ... DE Calais Campbell has 11½ sacks in his past 17 home games. Since 2011, CB Patrick Peterson is the only player in the NFL with 15-plus INTs (15 and 5 return TDs (5).



Buffalo Bills (8-6) at Oakland Raiders (2-12)

AFN-Xtra
10:25 p.m. Sunday CET
6:25 a.m. Monday JKT
Series: Raiders lead 19-17.

Last meeting: Buffalo beat visiting Oakland 38-35 on Sept. 18, 2011.

Notes: The Bills lead the NFL with 49 sacks and are the only team to have three players with 9-plus sacks (DE Mario Williams, 13; DT Marcel Dares, 10; and LB Jerry Hughes, 9½). ... Raiders QB Derek Carr (Round 2, No. 36 overall) leads NFL rookies in passing yards (2,898) and TDs (18), both club record.



Kansas City Chiefs (8-6) at Pittsburgh Steelers (9-5)

AFN-Sports
7 p.m. Sunday CET
3 a.m. Monday JKT
Series: Steelers lead 19-9.

Last meeting: Pittsburgh defeated visiting Kansas City 16-13 on Oct. Nov. 12, 2012.

Notes: In the past 12 games, Chiefs QB Alex Smith has 2,497 passing yards and 17 TDs against only 3 INTs for a 100.7 rating. ... Steelers RB Le'Veon Bell leads the AFC and is second in the NFL with 2,043 yards from scrimmage (1,278 rushing, 765 receiving), a single-season Steelers record.

Seattle's Russell Wilson is the most victories by a quarterback in his first three seasons.

ELAINE THOMPSON/AP



Game capsules compiled from nflmedia.com



Indianapolis Colts (10-4) at Dallas Cowboys (10-4)

AFN-Sports
10:25 p.m. Sunday CET
6:25 a.m. Monday JKT
Series: Cowboys lead 9-5.

Last meeting: Dallas beat host Indianapolis 38-25 on Dec. 5, 2010.

Notes: Since entering the NFL in 2012, Colts QB Andrew Luck has 12,688 passing yards, the most of any Super Bowl-era QB in his first three seasons. ... Cowboys QB Tony Romo has a 117.8 rating in the past 11 games (26 TDs, 5 INTs). He's aiming for his fifth straight win against the AFC. ... WR Dez Bryant leads the NFL with 13 receiving TDs.

Capsules for other televised games on Page 63.

EXPANDED STANDINGS

American Conference

	W	L	T	Pct	East			Home	Away	AFC	NFC	Div
					PA	PA	PA					
y-New England	11	3	0	.786	442	280	7-0	4-3-0	8-2-0	3-1-0	3-1-0	
Buffalo	8	6	0	.571	302	254	5-3-0	3-3-0	4-6-0	4-0-0	3-2-0	
Miami	7	7	0	.500	327	301	3-3-0	4-4-0	6-5-0	1-2-0	3-2-0	
N.Y. Jets	3	11	0	.214	211	360	2-5-0	1-6-0	3-7-0	0-4-0	0-4-0	
South												
y-Indianapolis	10	4	0	.714	424	317	6-2-0	4-2-0	8-3-0	2-1-0	5-0-0	
Houston	7	7	0	.500	324	277	3-3-0	4-4-0	6-4-0	1-3-0	3-2-0	
Tennessee	2	12	0	.143	231	390	1-6-0	1-6-0	2-8-0	0-4-0	1-3-0	
Jacksonville	2	12	0	.143	211	376	2-5-0	0-7-0	1-9-0	1-3-0	4-4-0	
North												
Cincinnati	9	4	1	.679	311	289	4-2-1	5-2-0	6-4-0	3-0-1	3-2-0	
Pittsburgh	9	5	0	.643	389	339	4-2-0	5-3-0	7-3-0	2-2-0	3-2-0	
Baltimore	9	5	0	.643	376	267	5-2-0	4-3-0	5-5-0	4-0-0	2-3-0	
Cleveland	7	7	0	.500	276	300	4-4-0	3-3-0	4-7-0	3-0-0	2-3-0	
West												
y-Denver	11	3	0	.786	407	303	7-0-0	4-3-0	9-1-0	2-2-0	5-0-0	
Kansas City	8	6	0	.571	322	254	5-2-0	3-4-0	6-4-0	2-2-0	2-3-0	
San Diego	8	6	0	.571	303	294	5-3-0	3-3-0	6-5-0	2-1-0	2-3-0	
Oakland	2	12	0	.143	213	381	2-5-0	0-7-0	1-9-0	1-3-0	1-4-0	

National Conference

	W	L	T	Pct	East			Home	Away	NFC	AFC	Div
					PA	PA	PA					
Dallas	10	4	0	.714	381	328	3-4-0	7-0-0	7-4-0	3-0-0	3-2-0	
Philadelphia	9	5	0	.643	416	347	6-2-0	3-3-0	5-5-0	4-0-0	3-1-0	
N.Y. Giants	5	9	0	.357	317	339	3-4-0	2-5-0	3-7-0	2-2-0	2-3-0	
Washington	3	11	0	.214	257	370	2-4-0	1-7-0	1-9-0	2-2-0	1-3-0	
South												
New Orleans	6	8	0	.429	364	374	3-4-0	3-4-0	5-5-0	1-3-0	2-2-0	
Carolina	5	8	1	.393	288	358	3-4-0	2-4-1	5-6-0	0-2-1	3-2-0	
Atlanta	5	9	0	.357	348	369	3-4-0	2-5-0	5-5-0	0-4-0	4-0-0	
Tampa Bay	2	12	0	.143	254	367	0-6-0	2-6-0	1-9-0	1-3-0	0-5-0	
North												
Detroit	10	4	0	.714	281	238	7-1-0	3-3-0	8-2-0	2-2-0	4-0-0	
Green Bay	10	4	0	.714	436	325	7-0-0	3-4-0	7-3-0	3-1-0	4-1-0	
Minnesota	6	8	0	.429	277	297	4-3-0	2-5-0	5-6-0	1-2-0	0-5-0	
Chicago	5	9	0	.357	296	409	2-5-0	3-4-0	4-6-0	1-3-0	1-3-0	
West												
x-Arizona	11	3	0	.786	287	244	7-0-0	4-3-0	8-2-0	3-1-0	3-1-0	
Seattle	10	4	0	.714	339	242	6-1-0	4-3-0	8-2-0	2-2-0	3-1-0	
San Francisco	7	7	0	.500	251	285	3-3-0	4-4-0	6-5-0	1-2-0	1-4-0	
St. Louis	6	8	0	.429	291	297	3-4-0	3-4-0	4-6-0	2-2-0	2-3-0	

REST OF THE SCHEDULE

Atlanta at New Orleans
Minnesota at Miami
Cleveland at Carolina
Green Bay at Tampa Bay
New England at N.Y. Jets
Denver at Cincinnati

NEXT WEEK

Sunday, Dec. 28

Indianapolis at Tennessee
Cleveland at Green Bay
Jacksonville at Houston
San Diego at Kansas City
Chicago at Minnesota
Dallas at Atlanta
Cleveland at Baltimore
Carolina at Washington
N.Y. Jets at Miami
Buffalo at New England
Philadelphia at N.Y. Giants
Cincinnati at Pittsburgh
New Orleans at Tampa Bay
Arizona at San Francisco
St. Louis at Seattle
Oakland at Denver

NFL

Some teams need home field for playoffs

Green Bay has struggled away from Lambeau; Dallas flourished on road

By **BARRY WILNER**
The Associated Press

The Cowboys don't lose on the road, where the Bengals and Colts aren't slouches, either.

The Patriots, Broncos, Packers and Cardinals don't lose at home.

For most of the other playoff contenders, well, it's who knows?

Some teams really could use staying at home beyond the holidays — and deep into January.

Certainly Green Bay showed on Sunday in its defeat at Buffalo just how much different it performs on the road as opposed to the comfortable confines of Lambeau Field.

Dallas, on the other hand, is 7-0 away from Jerry's Place. Come

the postseason, the Cowboys might prefer to be anywhere but at home.

Maybe even come this week: Dallas is just 3-4 as a host, and the Colts are 4-2 on the road.

Dallas coach Jason Garrett believes finding ways to prosper away from home is a learned trait.

"We've played these guys before," he said after Sunday's 38-27 victory at Philadelphia put the Cowboys in position to win the NFC East. "We played a really good game against them up here last year. We played a really close game at the end of the season last year and you try to learn from all those experiences, and you just move forward. I thought our guys did a good job responding."

The Cowboys have toughed well on the road in two tough locales: at Philly and, most notably, at Seattle. They aren't likely to fear heading anywhere in January.

"I think sometimes you find out a lot about your team and your guys just in situations like that. You know, Seattle — they came back, they're on the road. They get in a position that it's hooting and hollering, the place is going crazy," Tony Romo said of his Dallas teammates. "You just put your head down and you go execute. You've got to make some plays. Obviously a couple guys have to set up and do some things that allow you to do that."

"You just don't let the whole environment and the whole thing and the way it's going affect you. You treat it as if it's a tie game and you go out and play."

Some teams while at home do more than play. They intimidate. That sure comes in handy in the playoffs, especially against oppo-



MICHAEL PEREZ/AP

Dallas Cowboys QB Tony Romo celebrates after a 38-27 victory against the Philadelphia Eagles on Sunday in Philadelphia. The Cowboys are 7-0 on the road this season.

nents that have not been through such a wringer.

New England might be the prime example. The Patriots (7-0 at Foxborough this season) are 18-7 in the postseason since 2001, with three NFL championships and two losing trips to the Super Bowl. At home, they are 12-3, with two of the defeats to Baltimore — a team led by Ray Lewis and accustomed to doing the intimidating.

With the exception of 2010, when the Jets somehow won at Gillette Stadium, the Patriots have handled less-experienced opposition with relative ease.

That bodes well for them this winter, particularly because the other three AFC division leaders all have fallen to New England, the Bengals and Broncos getting

routed at Foxborough.

But also bear in mind that after winning their first eight postseason home games with Tom Brady at quarterback, the Patriots are 4-3.

One of the teams the Patriots fell to on the road, the Packers, have looked fragile away from Lambeau, particularly lately in ugly losses at New Orleans and Buffalo, and a tight victory at Minnesota.

The flop against the Bills could be especially costly because now Green Bay isn't even in first place in the NFC North; Detroit has the tiebreaker by virtue of — what else — a home win over the Packers.

Perhaps that makes Green Bay's need to win at Tampa next week, then against the visiting

Lions even more critical for its postseason chances of success.

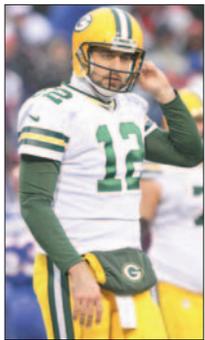
Aaron Rodgers recognizes that.

"This is an important time for us to see what kind of chemistry we have on our team," he said. "If adversity like this tears us apart or if we can stick together."

"If we can stick together, we have a great list of guys, and the opportunity to do something special. But if we let this tear us apart it's going to be something that sticks with us for too long."

One fact that might comfort teams that can't grab home-field advantage for the postseason: only three times since 1993 have both top seeds made it to the Super Bowl.

But one foreboding fact to add: It happened last year.



BILL WIPPERT/AP

Quarterback Aaron Rodgers and the Packers have seemed particularly fragile away from Lambeau Field this year.

Also on AFN:



Philadelphia Eagles (9-5) at Washington Redskins (3-11)

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

Series: Redskins lead 80-73-5, but the Eagles have won the past three.

Last meeting: The host Eagles beat the Redskins 37-34 on Sept. 21.

Notes: Eagles RB LeSean McCoy rushed for 184 yards and a TD in his last game at Washington. ... Redskins QB Robert Griffin III has a 101.4 rating in four starts against Philadelphia, including a 158.3 rating in a 2012 game.



San Diego Chargers (8-6) at San Francisco 49ers (7-7)

AFN-Sports
2 a.m. Sunday CET
10 a.m. Sunday JKT

Series: Teams are tied 6-6, but the Chargers have won the past three.

Last meeting: The Chargers beat the visiting 49ers 34-7 on Dec. 16, 2010.

Notes: In two career meetings, Chargers QB Philip Rivers has completed 48 of 64 passes for 607 yards and 5 TDs. ... 49ers RB Frank Gore has five rushing TDs in the past six games vs. AFC. In three Saturday games, he has rushed for 289 yards.



Detroit Lions (10-4) at Chicago Bears (5-9)

AFN-Atlantic
7 p.m. Sunday CET
3 a.m. Monday JKT

Series: The Bears lead 96-68-5, but the Lions have won the past three.

Last meeting: The host Lions beat the Bears 34-17 on Nov. 27.

Notes: Detroit QB Matt Stafford aims for his fourth win in a row against Chicago. In their Week 13 game, he had 390 yards and 2 TDs. ... In 13 meetings, Bears RB Matt Forte has 1,423 scrimmage yards and nine TDs



New York Giants (5-9) at St. Louis Rams (6-8)

AFN-Atlantic
10 p.m. Sunday CET
6 a.m. Monday JKT

Series: The Rams lead the series 25-14, but the Giants have won the past five games.

Last meeting: The host Giants beat the Rams 28-16 on Sept. 19, 2011.

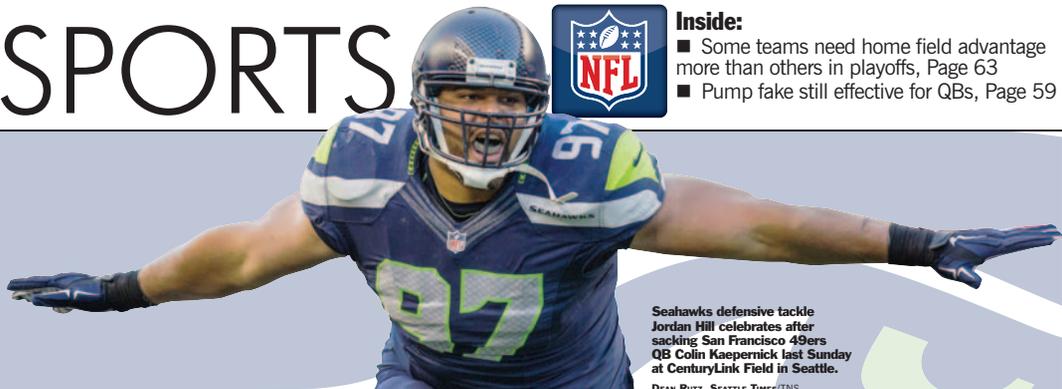
Notes: Giants RB Andre Williams leads NFC rookies with six rushing TDs and is second among rookies with 568 yards rushing. ... Rams RB Tre Mason leads NFC rookies with 661 yards rushing. ... The Rams have not allowed a TD in three consecutive games.

SPORTS



Inside:

- Some teams need home field advantage more than others in playoffs, Page 63
- Pump fake still effective for QBs, Page 59



Seahawks defensive tackle Jordan Hill celebrates after sacking San Francisco 49ers QB Colin Kaepernick last Sunday at CenturyLink Field in Seattle.

DEAN RUTZ, SEATTLE TIMES/TNS

STEADY SEAHAWKS

Defending champions thrive by taking same approach each week

By TIM BOOTH
The Associated Press

A RENTON, Wash. — At some point every week, Pete Carroll will describe the upcoming opponent as a “championship opportunity.” Every week. Without fail. No matter the quality of the competition or the setting of the game. The end goal is that when a big game arrives — like last February’s Super Bowl, or Sunday’s NFC West showdown with Arizona — it’s handled in the same way as any other week.

“We’re not going into this game thinking we’re unfamiliar with it or it’s going to be something we don’t know how to handle or what’s up. We don’t feel like that at all,” Carroll said Wednesday. “That comes from years of experience and being through it and a bunch of young guys now that they’re pretty well experienced at the timing of these kinds of games.”

That attitude and approach took a while to kick in. Richard Sherman first noticed it when Seattle won at Washington in the 2012 NFC playoffs. Cliff Avril and Michael Bennett — newcomers during Seattle’s title run in 2013 — started to understand where Carroll was coming from about midway through the season.

“It’s all about preparing the same, don’t get too high because it’s a Monday night game or because it’s a 1 p.m. game or whatever,” Avril said. “Treat every game the same and you’ll get probably the same results.”

SEE STEADY ON PAGE 61



Seattle Seahawks (10-4)
at Arizona Cardinals (11-3)

AFN-Sports
2:20 a.m. Monday CET
10:20 a.m. Monday JKT

Cardinals turn to little-known QB for biggest game of season

By BOB BAUM
The Associated Press

TEMPE, Ariz. — Arizona coach Bruce Arians cut quarterback Ryan Lindley at the end of the preseason.

Now he’s put the offense in Lindley’s hands in the biggest game of the Cardinals’ season.

Arizona’s
Ryan Lindley

JEFF ROBERSON/AP

The third-year quarterback, who made four unimpressive starts as a rookie, will be thrown into the teeth of the fierce Seattle defense Sunday night.

It’s a tough spot for someone who never took a snap as Arizona’s No. 3 quarterback last year, then was released in favor of rookie Logan Thomas at the end of this preseason.

SEE QB ON PAGE 61

