

# STARS AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Marines: Troubled Hornet fleet must go

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Marine Corps will replace its aging fleet of F/A-18 Hornet aircraft with F-35 Lightning IIs more quickly than planned because of continued struggles to keep the legacy combat jets airworthy, service leaders said Wednesday.

The Marine Corps planned to field F-35s to squadrons now flying Hornets and AV-8B Harrier aircraft on similar timetables, but instead it will focus on replacing just its F/A-18s, William E. Taylor, the assistant deputy commandant for aviation, told members of the House Armed Services' Readiness Subcommittee.

"The real answer is to get out of legacy Hornet business as fast as possible and transition to the F-35," Taylor said.

Three squadrons now flying Hornets will transition to F-35s during the next three years. It will be at least four years before a Harrier squadron receives the fifth-generation fighters, though it could be even longer.

Taylor said the Marine Corps is considering a transition of at least five Hornet squadrons to F-35s before replacing any Harrier units. There are 12 tactical fighter squadrons flying Hornets, five flying Harriers and two flying F-35s.

The Hornets' troubles have been well documented. The Marines lost five of the aircraft to crashes last year that killed three pilots — Maj. Richard Norton, 36, Capt. Jake Frederick, 32, and Capt. Jeff Kuss, 32. Nearly two dozen previously retired Hornets have been pulled from the Boneyard at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona to be returned to the fleet.

Taylor said the Marines soon will launch an independent readiness assessment of its Hornet fleet, which under the service's current plan would not be entirely replaced by F-35s until 2030.

When the jets — the Marine Corps' Hornets are up to 28 years old — are taken to maintenance depots, some of them are found to be too damaged to be repaired.

"The fundamental material condition of the aircraft is almost unmanageable at this point," Taylor told the lawmakers. "We send them to the depot, they peel back a panel and they find corrosion ... There's been at least half a dozen F-18s recently that were inducted to the depot only to be stricken halfway through when they realized it wasn't even salvageable."

The Marines' AV-8B Harrier fleet, on the other hand, has proven resilient. It is scheduled to remain in the fleet through 2031.

The Marines would like to field F-35s

faster than the Pentagon's current budget allows. Marine Lt. Gen. Jon Davis, the deputy commandant for aviation, told lawmakers last week speeding up the F-35 procurement process could save taxpayers \$1 billion in maintenance and operations costs to keep the F/A-18s flying.

"The No. 1 thing I could ask from this committee is to keep recapitalization on track — to get us into those next-generation strike fighters as soon as we can," the general told the House Armed Services Tactical Air and Land subcommittee on March 28.

He called for increasing acquisition rate from the current plans to purchase 16, 20, 20, 20, and 21 F-35s each year from 2017 to 2021 to 19, 23, 23, 23 and 30 in that same time.

Another top Marine general warned lawmakers that failure to solve the service's aviation problems have broader impacts than just on the aviation community.

Lack of available fighter aircraft also impacts the readiness of Marines preparing to fight on the ground, said Lt. Gen. Ronald L. Bailey, the deputy commandant for plans, policies and operations.

"I need those aircraft to train," he told lawmakers Wednesday.

## Officials: Budget woes to hamper military family moves

BY ERIK SLAVIN

*Stars and Stripes*

Military families are already faced with less time to move to their next assignments and may see movements delayed if Congress does not take action, service officials told Stars and Stripes this week.

Each service is facing budgetary pressure under the continuing resolution, a stopgap measure passed by Congress that functions in lieu of a budget for the current fiscal year.

Navy families are now averaging less than 2½ months of notice before changing duty stations, giving them less time than usual to complete the ample paperwork, appointments and household demands often associated with such moves.

"If held to a year-long [continuing resolution] or if additional funding is not received by 28 April 2017, the Navy will be forced to take significant action, including delaying orders before individuals transfer, resulting in undue family stress and separations," Navy spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Nathan Christensen said in an email.

The Air Force is facing similar stresses, according to testimony during a House Armed Services Committee meeting on Wednesday.

Five months of a continuing resolution will delay 13,000 family moves, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein said during testimony.

"Of those families that have children in school, think of all the issues that will go on now to have to delay all of those moves into

the fall cycle after they've started school," Goldfein said. "That puts a stress on our families that actually can't be quantified."

New assignments may be delayed and lead time between receiving orders and reporting to a new location also could shrink, Air Force spokesman Maj. Bryan Lewis said in an email Thursday.

A spokeswoman with the Army's Human Resources Command said she was not aware of delays at this time, while the Marine Corps did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

However, the chiefs of both services testified on Wednesday that extending the continuing resolution would adversely affect personnel readiness and daily combat operations.

## Turkey: Autopsies show sarin used in Syria attack

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Turkey said Thursday that autopsies of Syrian victims from this week's assault on Khan Sheikhoun in Syria's Idlib province show they were subjected to chemical weapons, as France's foreign minister called for the prosecution of President Bashar Assad's government amid growing international outrage over the assault that activists say killed 86 people.

Syria maintains it didn't use chemical weapons, instead blaming the rebels for stockpiling the deadly substance.

In Turkey, state-run Anadolu and the private DHA news agencies quoted Justice Minister Bekir Bozdog as saying that "it was determined after the autopsy that a chemical weapon was used."

Later on Thursday, the Turk-

ish Health Ministry issued a statement saying that "according to the results of the first analysis, there were findings suggesting that the patients were exposed to chemical substance (sarin)." The statement also said the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons would also test the samples.

Tuesday's attack happened just 60 miles from the Turkish border, and the Turkish government — a close ally of Syrian rebels — set up a decontamination center at a border crossing in the province of Hatay, where the victims initially were treated before being moved to hospitals.

Russia's Defense Ministry said the toxic agents were released when a Syrian airstrike hit a rebel chemical weapons arsenal and munitions factory on the town's eastern outskirts.

## House intel panel chief Nunes recuses self from Russia probe

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes, R-Calif., temporarily recused himself Thursday from all matters related to the committee's ongoing probe into Russia's interference in the presidential election as House investigators look into ethics allegations against him.

Nunes said in a statement that he decided to recuse himself after "several leftwing activist groups" filed complaints with the Office of Congressional Ethics about his leadership. Nunes called the charges "entirely false and politically motivated," but said his recusal would be in effect while the House Ethics Committee looks into the matter.

The House Ethics Committee released a statement Thursday saying it had "determined to investigate" allegations that "Nunes may have made unauthorized disclosures of classified information, in violation of

House Rules, law, regulations, or other standards of conduct."

Nunes said in his statement that he has requested to speak to the House Ethics Committee "at the earliest possible opportunity in order to expedite the dismissal of these false claims." In the meantime, Nunes said, Rep. Michael Conaway, R-Texas, will take the lead on the Russia investigation, with assistance from Reps. Trey Gowdy, R-S.C., and Tom Rooney, R-Fla.

Nunes has come under fire in recent weeks for going to the White House grounds to meet with a secret source and to view documents he said suggest that President Donald Trump and his transition team members' identities may have been improperly revealed in surveillance reports of foreign targets. Nunes, who served on Trump's transition team, did not alert his colleagues on the Intelligence Committee before making the trip, nor before briefing the press and Trump the next day.

## Senate GOP OKs 'nuclear option' in court pick fight

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans invoked the "nuclear option" in the Senate on Thursday, unilaterally rewriting the chamber's rules to allow President Donald Trump's nominee to ascend to the Supreme Court.

Furious Democrats objected until the end, but their efforts to block Judge Neil Gorsuch failed as expected. Lawmakers of both parties bemoaned the long-term implications for the Senate, the court and the country.

"We will sadly point to today as a turning point in the history of the Senate and the Supreme Court," said Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York.

The maneuvering played out in an atmosphere of tension in the Senate chamber with most senators in their seats, a rare and theatrical occurrence.

First, Democrats mounted a filibuster in an effort to block Gorsuch by denying him the 60 votes needed to advance to a final vote. Then Republican Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky raised a point of order, suggesting that Supreme Court nominees should not be subjected to a 60-vote threshold but instead a simple majority in the 100-member Senate.

McConnell was overruled, but appealed the ruling. And on that he prevailed on a 52-48 party-line vote. The 60-vote filibuster requirement on Supreme Court nominees was effectively gone, and with it the last vestige of bipartisanship on presidential nominees in an increasingly polarized Senate.

A final confirmation vote on Gorsuch is expected Friday and he then could be sworn in in time to take his seat on the court later this month and to hear the final cases of the term.

The maneuvering played out

with much hand-wringing from all sides about the future of the Senate, as well as unusually bitter accusations and counteraccusations as each side blamed the other. The rules change is known as the "nuclear option" because of its far-reaching implications.

McConnell accused Democrats of forcing his hand by trying to filibuster a highly qualified nominee in Gorsuch, 49, a 10-year veteran of the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver with a consistently conservative record. McConnell vowed that the rules change would block the Gorsuch filibuster, and all future ones, a change many lawmakers lamented could lead to an even more polarized Senate, court and country.

"This will be the first, and last, partisan filibuster of a Supreme Court nominee," McConnell declared. "This is the latest escalation in the left's never-ending judicial war, the most audacious yet, and it cannot and will not stand."

Supreme Court filibusters have been nearly unheard of in the Senate, but the confrontation is playing out amid an explosive political atmosphere with liberal Democrats furious over the Trump presidency and Republicans desperate to get a win after months of chaos from Trump.

Democrats also remain livid over McConnell's decision last year to deny consideration to then-President Barack Obama's Supreme Court nominee, Judge Merrick Garland, who was ignored for the better part of a year by Senate Republicans after the death of Justice Antonin Scalia.

## Ospreys to join Marines in Australia

By **SETH ROBSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft are heading Down Under to help move Marines around the Outback during their annual deployment to Australia.

The aircraft will help 1,250 California-based Marines traverse the Northern Territory.

“The Northern Territory will be a great environment for [the Osprey] because of its speed and the distance it can operate in,” said Lt. Col. Matthew Emborsky, the officer in charge of the forward coordination for Marine Rotational Force — Darwin.

The Marine Corps has been deploying annually to Darwin on six-month rotations since 2012. The number of troops going south is the same as last year; however, there will be more aircraft supporting them, including four MV-22 Ospreys, five AH-1W Super Cobras and four UH-1Y Venoms out of Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, Emborsky said. Last year, the Marines were supported by just four Huey helicopters.

Ospreys have gone to Australia for past Talisman Saber drills, but this is the first time they have joined the annual Marine rotation. They will be based at Royal Australian Air Force Base Darwin.

The aircraft, which are flying to Australia via Wake Island and Guam with the help of KC-130 refuelers, are well suited for operations in the Outback, Emborsky said.

Bradshaw Field Training Area, where the Marines drill, is an eight-hour drive from Darwin.

“The Osprey can get there in an hour,” Emborsky said.

The Marines heading to Darwin are from 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment out of Twentynine Palms, Calif. They will be supported by Marines from the 7th Engineer Support Battalion out of Camp Pendleton, Calif., he said.

# GAO questions Marines' planning for move to Guam

By **WYATT OLSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Marine Corps does not yet have a reliable schedule for relocating troops from Okinawa to Guam, despite years of planning and infrastructure improvements underway on the U.S. territory, a government watchdog says.

In particular, Marine Corps planning lacks a contingency for delays caused by labor shortages and endangered-species protection in the dozens of construction projects required on Guam during the next five years, the Government Accountability Office said in a report released Wednesday.

“If [the Defense Department] does not have a reliable schedule or has not completed risk planning for Guam, it may not have complete information to identify and address risks that may result in cost overruns and schedule delays,” the agency said in the redacted public report.

The DOD has spent years planning to move about 4,100 Marines from Okinawa to Guam, 2,700 to Hawaii and 800 to the U.S. mainland. Another 1,300 Marines from Okinawa would be part of a 2,500-person rotational presence in Australia. The relocation plans were the result of sustained public pressure by Okinawans on U.S. and Japanese officials to lessen the American military presence on the small island.

Plans call for Marines to relocate to Guam between 2022 and 2026. Construction is underway in the northern part of the island on and near Andersen Air Force Base. Training ranges are planned on Tinian and Pagan islands in the nearby Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, but those proposals have local opposition.

The DOD estimates construction costs on Guam and the CNMI islands to be \$8.7 billion in fiscal year 2012 dollars, the GAO said. Japan will pay

## Visa denials spur territory's governor to oppose move

By **MATTHEW M. BURKE**  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Gov. Eddie Calvo said Guam will no longer support a planned U.S. military buildup critical to realignment plans in the Asia-Pacific region, unless the federal government allows more foreign workers to come to the island.

The Thursday afternoon announcement came following a Government Accountability Office report — released Wednesday — that said the Marine Corps has neither a reliable schedule for moving 4,100 Marines from Okinawa to the tiny Western Pacific territory, nor a plan to address delays caused by labor shortages and endangered-species protections.

“When the Department of Defense signed a programmatic agreement, we agreed to a mutually beneficial buildup — the idea being what’s good for inside the fence is good for outside the fence. It was the One Guam approach,” Calvo said in a statement. “But the federal government hasn’t kept up with its part of the bargain. There has been a breach in the agreement that was

made to ensure Guam is not negatively impacted by the shift in military forces.”

Calvo said the Obama administration adopted “a new interpretation of labor policies” in 2016 that caused a drastic reduction in approvals for H-2B temporary work visa requests, despite the federal government’s acknowledgement of the need for foreign laborers to supplement local workers. He said that led to delays, either because contractors refused to take jobs they didn’t think they could finish or because competition for labor inflated job costs.

“We watched as we went from a nearly 100 percent approval rate [of the visas] to a nearly 100 percent rejection,” said Oyaol Ngirairikl, Calvo’s director of communications.

The Guam Contractors Association filed suit last year seeking an end to the visa rejections.

The Department of Justice responded in a November court brief that the contractors cannot “simply abuse this system to fulfill a permanent need for workers who perform the same labor or services year round, for an indefinite period of time.”

roughly \$3.1 billion of that.

The GAO report found that Marine Corps officials have not thoroughly completed a risk-management plan to address construction risks that could affect the cost and scheduling for overall infrastructure improvements on Guam. The Marine Corps will have 15 active construction projects on Guam

by 2018, with 43 projects expected to be ongoing by 2021.

While the Marine Corps has analyzed risks on a project-by-project basis, it “has not identified its strategy for the collective impact of risks to infrastructure resulting from an increase in construction projects,” the report said.

# USMC to prosecute 2 drill instructors

*The Washington Post*

The Marine Corps moved forward Wednesday with the prosecution of two drill instructors accused of hazing and abusing recruits, including one who allegedly put a recruit in an industrial-size clothes dryer and turned it on repeatedly.

Gunnery Sgt. Joseph Felix and Sgt. Michael Eldridge will be arraigned at Camp Lejeune, N.C., at a date that has not yet been determined, the service said a statement. Both Marines trained recruits at the service's installation at Parris Island, S.C., and face charges of cruelty and maltreatment, being drunk and disorderly, failing to obey a lawful order and making

false official statements. Felix also is accused of obstruction of justice.

Attempts to reach both Marines were unsuccessful Wednesday night. Felix, reached by cellphone last year, declined to comment on the case.

Felix is accused of calling a Muslim recruit a terrorist before putting him in a dryer one night in July 2015, according to documents previously released by the service. His name is redacted from them, but two U.S. officials with knowledge of the case identified Felix as the Marine involved.

Felix also is accused of hazing another Muslim recruit, Pvt. Raheel Siddiqui, after

Marine officials allowed Felix to continue training recruits. Siddiqui, 20, fell about 40 feet to his death March 18, 2016, after running away from Felix and careening over a railing, a Marine Corps investigation found last year. His death was ruled a suicide, but his family has contested that.

The Marine Corps did not specify Wednesday whether Eldridge is involved in the same case but announced in the same statement identifying Felix that Eldridge will be arraigned.

The Siddiqui case opened a window into maltreatment by numerous drill instructors at Parris Island, one of two training centers the Marine Corps runs for enlisted recruits. Hun-

dreds of hazing and abuse cases have been investigated there in the past few years alone, and a third of them have been substantiated, according to Marine Corps documents. Most of those cases have not received any attention outside the service, and Marine officials have released details about only a few of them.

Marine officials said last fall that up to 20 officers and enlisted Marines could face some form of discipline in connection with the Siddiqui case. At least two officers and a senior enlisted Marine were removed from their jobs at Parris Island last year.

## SOUTHCOM, NORTHCOM warn of threats to homeland

BY ALEX HORTON

*Stars and Stripes*

Commanders overseeing defense in the western hemisphere warned lawmakers Thursday about threats ranging from Islamic State radicalization and Russian influence to resource problems affecting the fight against drug smuggling.

Navy Adm. Kurt Tidd, who heads U.S. Southern Command, described a growing threat of complex networks in Latin America during testimony in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee. He testified alongside his Northern Command counterpart, Air Force Gen. Lori Robinson, in a rare joint appearance of combatant commanders whose areas of responsibilities often overlap.

Robinson and Tidd described heightened concern about state powers like Russia, China and North Korea eroding U.S. influence and provoking defensive postures in the region, along with terror groups like ISIS and Hezbollah, who leverage security shortfalls in Latin America to recruit and generate funds for operations overseas.

Tidd, responsible for operations from Central America

down the tip of South America and the Caribbean, said other nations in the region are concerned about Islamic radicalization and foreign fighters who return from Iraq and Syria battle-hardened to poor nations without advanced surveillance and monitoring capabilities. Trinidad and Tobago produced up to 130 fighters in Syria out of a population the size of San Diego, making it the largest per capita contributor of foreign fighters in the hemisphere, according to former U.S. Ambassador John L. Estrada.

"There is a tendency to think of ISIS as only present in the Middle East and North Africa. The reality is they are present in this theater," Tidd said.

Robinson, whose area of operation stretches from Alaska and Canada into Mexico and the Bahamas, stressed that terrorist groups do not appear to be working directly with cartels or gangs in the region.

"What concerns me more are the ways the transnational terrorists may be able to leverage the pathways established by threat networks, especially as their capabilities are diminished from operational setbacks overseas," she said.

## Officer's comments about Merkel are under review

BY DAN STOUTAMIRE  
AND MARCUS KLOECKNER

*Stars and Stripes*

WIESBADEN, Germany — U.S. Army Europe is reviewing derogatory comments by a U.S. officer assigned to a German Army tank division about German chancellor Angela Merkel on his personal Facebook page.

Col. Ciro Stefano, who currently serves as the chief of operations for the Bundeswehr's 10th Panzer Division under the Army's Personnel Exchange Program, openly criticized Merkel's refugee policy in a social media posting.

"Thanks Mrs. Merkel for ruining Germany" Stefano wrote in a December posting.

The German newspaper Main Post captured the posting, which Stefano has since deleted. Stefano also has made his profile private. The paper reported that Stefano also shared and commented on several other anti-refugee pages and stories in December and January.

U.S. Army Europe said in a statement that it was looking into the proper measures, if any, to take against Stefano.

"We were made aware of the

news article and our leadership began gathering facts surrounding the article's assertions to determine a course of action," the statement said. "The German-American partnership remains strong and steadfast."

Stefano remains in his position with the 10th Panzer Division of the German armed forces, which is based near Wuerzburg. Stefano's unique role as a U.S. officer within a German unit gives the issue added sensitivity, as does his relatively high rank. He is one of just 56 U.S. Army officers and noncommissioned officers currently seconded to foreign armies worldwide in the exchange program.

Despite the political embarrassment caused by the post, it seems unlikely that further action under the Uniform Code of Military Justice will be taken against Stefano because the comment and other activity criticizing German policies were posted on his personal page. A Defense Department directive from 2008 allows servicemembers to "express a personal opinion on political candidates and issues, but not as a representative of the Armed Forces."

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Romeo and Juliette debut at same hospital

**FL** LEESBURG — Two sets of new parents were surprised to learn that their babies were part of a Shakespearean connection at a Florida hospital.

The Orlando Sentinel reported Juliette Crouch was born March 31 at Leesburg Regional Medical Center. Hours later, Romeo Kidd made his debut down the hallway.

Hospital privacy laws almost kept the drama from playing out. A nurse asked Carolyn Kidd her baby's name and said a Juliette was born the same day. But she couldn't tell them where Juliette's parents were.

But the two families began searching for each other. They finally got together, shared laughs and exchanged contact information, unlike in "Romeo & Juliet," in which the families were mortal enemies.

### Groomer's account of dog's death disputed

**RI** MIDDLETOWN — A Rhode Island woman whose daughter's dog died while being groomed at a pet store is disputing a store spokeswoman's suggestion that the 5-year-old pug could have died from an upper airway syndrome.

Jane Sherman told The Newport Daily News that her veterinarian said the syndrome could not kill the dog, Ollie. The dog died at a Middletown Petco March 23 after being dropped off to get its nails trimmed.

Petco spokeswoman Stephanie Wilson said Friday that necropsy results showed Ollie did not die from head or neck trauma, and the tests appeared to clear a store technician of any wrongdoing.

Wilson said Ollie had brachy-

cephalic syndrome, a condition in dogs in which they have a longer-than-normal soft palate that can make breathing difficult.

### Monk seal moved over concerns about safety

**HI** HONOLULU — State and federal officials have moved a Hawaiian monk seal on Kauai due to concerns for the animal's safety.

The officials determined the 10-month-old monk seal was at risk living in the Lihi canal in Kapaa, which is on the eastern side of the island where two other juvenile seals died in 2014 and 2016.

Necropsies conducted on those seals determined they drowned and that fishing gear was the most likely cause, KHON-TV reported.

The monk seal that was moved was fitted with a tracking device before being released.

### Police raid home, seize meth worth over \$1M

**ND** WAHPETON — A suspect was arrested after authorities raided a Wahpeton home and found methamphetamine with an estimated street value of more than \$1 million.

The Southeast Multi-County Agency Drug Task Force says agents entered the home with a search warrant on March 31 and found about 13 pounds of meth. Agents also seized drug paraphernalia, two handguns and an assault rifle.

KFGO-AM reported a 29-year-old man was arrested. He was in the Richland County jail facing possible charges of possession of controlled substance with intent to distribute and possession of drug paraphernalia. His bond was set at \$50,000 cash only.

### Student accused of selling pot cookies

**OH** ONTARIO — A high school student accused of selling cookies sprinkled with marijuana was charged with a misdemeanor in northern Ohio.

The Mansfield News-Journal reported that an Ontario police report says the 18-year-old woman told police and school administrators she made the cookies, sprinkled them with marijuana and sold them at school to fellow students.

The Ontario High School student is charged in Ontario Mayor's Court with a first-degree misdemeanor relating to putting harmful substances in food.

Police said the teen said she brought the cookies to school two days in March and sold two bags of them for \$5 each to two other students.

### Man accused of aiming gun at a firefighter

**SC** ANDERSON — Authorities say a South Carolina man pointed a gun at a firefighter called to help stamp out a grass fire.

The Anderson County Sheriff's Office said Roger Wood, 64, was arrested. No injuries were reported.

Deputies said when a volunteer firefighter arrived at the scene in his personal truck Saturday evening, he parked on the edge of a driveway, which is part of the county's right-of-way property. The Rock Springs firefighter got out of the truck to extinguish the grass fire.

Anderson County Sheriff's deputies said Wood was upset about the parked truck's location, and when the firefighter returned to his truck Wood pointed a gun at him.

### Man sought in car theft at gas station

**MA** TEWKSBURY — Authorities are seeking a suspect who stole a woman's car while she was pumping gas in Tewksbury.

Surveillance video shows the woman sprayed the suspect with gas and struggled with him before he drove away and dragged her a short distance at a Circle K convenience store on Saturday night. Officers later found the car abandoned in Lowell.

The woman was taken to a hospital as a precaution. Police said her injuries appeared to be minor.

Police with dogs searched the area where the car was found but couldn't find the suspect, who is described only as a man wearing a dark jacket with a hood and jeans.

### Assault weapon seized after family dispute

**NJ** PATERSON — Police in Paterson say they have seized an assault weapon from a man who was using it to threaten a family member.

Public Police Director Jerry Speziale said officers responded to a report Saturday afternoon of a suspicious man with a weapon. They found the man on the street holding a duffel bag.

During a chase that led police over a fence and onto a roof, he dropped the bag and an AK-style .39 mm rifle loaded with a high-capacity magazine was recovered.

The suspect, Angel Green-Valentin, of Paterson, faces charges including making terroristic threats and weapons offenses.

From wire reports

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# Palmer tribute kicks off Masters

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — The Masters began Thursday with two ceremonial tee shots and one empty chair.

In a somber tribute to Arnold Palmer, who died in September, Augusta National chairman Billy Payne escorted Palmer's widow to the first tee for the honorary start. Payne also carried Palmer's green jacket and draped it over a chair where Palmer had sat last April.

This is the first Masters without the King since 1954.

"The almost unbearable sadness we feel at the passing of Arnold is surpassed only by the love and affection for him that will always reside in our heart," Payne said as thousands crammed around the first tee on a crisp morning full of sunshine and wind.

Every fan through the gate received a button that said, "I am a member of Arnie's Army."

Payne asked for a moment of silence so everyone could remember their own experience with Palmer — did anyone in golf have more friends? — and then turned it over to Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player for the ceremonial tee shots.

Player, who jokingly asked for a mulligan at age 81, drilled one down the middle. Nicklaus got him by about 5 yards, though Player was quick to announce it as a tie.

That's how it was among the "Big Three" — Palmer, Nicklaus and Player, whose 34 majors among them included one stretch in the 1960s in which they combined to win the Masters seven straight times. They were best of friends off the course and hated losing to one another on the course.

Palmer had been part of the honorary

## Injury forces Johnson out

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Dustin Johnson has withdrawn from the Masters after injuring his lower back in a fall at the home he was renting for the week.

The world's No. 1-ranked player arrived at Augusta National on quite a roll, having won his last three starts.

Clearly in pain during a limited warmup session, Johnson still intended to at least try to play Thursday. He walked slowly toward the first hole, where he was paired with two-time Masters champion Bubba Watson and PGA Championship winner Jimmy Walker in the final group.

Then, at the last possible moment, Johnson changed his mind.

While Watson and Walker teed off, Johnson sauntered back to the clubhouse.

Johnson was injured late Wednesday afternoon when he took what his agent described as a "serious" fall on a staircase.

— Associated Press

start since 2007. He was so feeble a year ago that he did not hit a drive, though he still came out to the first tee and watched from a chair.

That's what stood out the most to Player. "Arnold was a great stickler for manners, and I'll never forget, which really reminded me on the first tee this morning," Player said. "Arnold could hardly walk to the first tee and he put his arms like this, and he stood up like this."

To demonstrate, Player placed his hands on the side of his chair and lifted himself up.

"Because he had been taught to stand up," Player said. "And he gave a little wave, and that was very touching to me, and I could see him doing it in that chair today."

Brad Dalke, the U.S. Amateur runner-up, wanted to be sure he was out under the oak tree to see the honorary start. Rickie Fowler and William McGirt were among the players who came out to watch.

"I wouldn't want to miss this," Dalke said.

The "Big Three" has been referenced in recent years whenever three players separate themselves, if only briefly. The original concept had as much to do with marketing because Palmer, Nicklaus and Player were managed by Mark McCormack at IMG and would travel the world competing in exhibitions.

But it was as much about friendship.

"There will be other 'Big Threes,' but I don't know if you'll ever have another 'Big Three' that will live together like we did," Player said. "I was in Jack's home for weeks, and Arnold was in my home and Jack visited my farm time and time again. I was in their airplane. We really lived our life together. ... Now, will that happen again with three guys? Possibly, I don't know."

"It's hard to be highly competitive against people and have a great friendship," Player said. "And yet I sit here today and Jack Nicklaus is my best friend in the world."

# Cavaliers rout Celtics, retake first place

Associated Press

BOSTON — LeBron James had 36 points, 10 rebounds and six assists as the Cleveland Cavaliers ran past the Boston Celtics 114-91 to move back into first place in the Eastern Conference.

The teams had identical records entering their final regular-season matchup, but Cleveland (51-27) now has a one-game lead over Boston (50-28) with only four games to play. Cleveland also holds the tiebreaker with the Celtics for the top seed, if needed.

**Warriors 120, Suns 111:** Stephen Curry scored 42 points as Golden State held off host Phoenix for their season-high 13th straight win, clinching the best record in the NBA for the third straight season.

Golden State became the first team to have the NBA's best record for three consecutive seasons since the Boston Celtics did it in 1983-84, '84-'85 and '85-'86.

**Thunder 103, Grizzlies 100:** Russell Westbrook fell a rebound short of an historic triple-double but scored 45

points, including a late three-pointer that helped seal visiting Oklahoma City's victory over Memphis.

**Clippers 112, Mavericks 101:** Blake Griffin scored 32 points and host Los Angeles led all the way in beating Dallas to move within a half-game of idle Jazz for the No. 4 playoff seed in the West.

**Heat 112, Hornets 99:** Goran Dragic scored 33 points and Miami made 21 three-pointers to beat host Charlotte and pull back into a tie for eighth place in the Eastern

Conference.

**Raptors 105, Pistons 102:** Kyle Lowry had 27 points and 10 assists in his return from a wrist injury to help visiting Toronto rally to beat Detroit.

**Rockets 110, Nuggets 104:** James Harden scored 31 points as host Houston beat Denver to secure the third seed in the Western Conference.

**Lakers 102, Spurs 95:** Tyler Ennis had 19 points in place of injured starter D'Angelo Russell and visiting Los Angeles never trailed against San Antonio.

# Lindor's slam lifts Indians to sweep

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Francisco Lindor's go-ahead grand slam in the ninth inning off suddenly shaky Texas closer Sam Dyson triggered a litany of firsts for Cleveland's budding star shortstop.

And that list of milestones was a lot more fun to talk about than his botched defensive play that jeopardized the Indians' bid at a season-opening sweep.

Lindor atoned for his puzzling miscue with his first career slam and first multi-homer game — along with a career-high five RBIs — and the defending AL champions rallied for a 9-6 win over the Rangers on Wednesday night.

The Rangers went ahead 4-3 in the fifth when Lindor misjudged Joey Gallo's speed, couldn't beat the slugger to second base on an attempted two-out force play and allowed two runs to score on an error when his throw to try to salvage an out surprised

Edwin Encarnacion and skipped off the first baseman's glove.

"I was saying, 'Please, Lord, let us tie this game,'" Lindor said of his reaction after the botched play. "I don't want (Danny) Salazar to lose the game and have to talk to you guys about my error. Let us tie the game, and let's see what happens after that."

Dyson (0-2) loaded the bases and walked in a run before Lindor's homer down the right field line during a five-run Cleveland ninth.

The Indians are 3-0 for the first time since 1998, while the Rangers last started 0-3 in 2007.

Dyson blew his first save after giving up three runs in a tie game in an 8-5 loss on Opening Day. The hard-throwing right-hander has allowed eight runs in one inning for the defending AL West champs after throwing six scoreless innings to help the U.S. win the World Baseball Classic.

"This is a guy that ... was really sharp at the WBC," manager Jeff Banister said. "Doesn't seem to be that sharp right now. Sam's got to find a way to figure it out. This is a guy that's been really good for us. Not going to jump off after two games."

The switch-hitting Lindor homered from both sides, pulling a pitch from Cole Hamels into the seats in left field in the sixth — shortly after his miscue — to get Cleveland within 5-4. The decisive shot off Dyson landed about 10 rows deep.

Shawn Armstrong (1-0) struck out the only hitter he faced, Jonathan Lucroy, for his first major league win. Bryan Shaw pitched a perfect ninth for his first save.

Nomar Mazara homered, had three hits and drove in three runs for Texas. Elvis Andrus connected on a solo homer in the seventh.

# Leon, Sale help Red Sox blank Pirates

Associated Press

BOSTON — Sandy Leon prolonged the game with a base-running mistake in the third inning.

When Boston's catcher came up in the 12th, he ended it.

Leon hit a three-run homer — the first walkoff of his career — and Chris Sale pitched seven innings of three-hit ball in his Red Sox debut to lead Boston to a 3-0 victory over the Pittsburgh Pirates on Wednesday night.

"It's nice to get the win. All the better to walk it off. It's special," said Sale, who was Boston's big acquisition of the offseason. "If you told me tonight it was going to be 0-0 in the 12th, I probably would have given you a crazy look."

Leon also doubled in the third inning but got thrown out at the plate after running through third base coach Brian Butterfield's stop sign. It was scoreless into the bottom of the 12th, when Antonio Bastardo (0-1) walked Jackie Bradley Jr. and Pablo Sandoval with one out.

Leon followed with a drive over the Green Monster to end a cold night for the Red Sox,

who also beat Pittsburgh in the season opener on Monday.

"He certainly redeemed himself with the final swing tonight," manager John Farrell said.

Joe Kelly (1-0), the sixth Red Sox pitcher, earned the victory with two innings of one-hit relief as the Red Sox won their seventh straight interleague game at Fenway Park. The Pirates did not get a runner past first base.

Sale, who walked one and struck out seven, was acquired from the Chicago White Sox for a package of minor leaguers that included No. 1 prospect Yoan Moncada. He gave the Red Sox a rotation that included two Cy Young winners and three All-Stars.

"He was nasty," said Leon, who had three hits. "He was mixing his pitches, getting ahead in the count. He was fun to catch."

**Astros 5, Mariners 3 (13):** George Springer hit a three-run homer with two outs in the 13th inning to cap a five-RBI game, lifting host Houston over Seattle.

Springer's shot off Chase De Jong (0-1), who started the inning to make his major league

debut, landed in the first row of the left field Crawford Boxes. Evan Gattis drew a one-out walk and advanced to second on Norichika Aoki's single with two outs.

**Braves 3, Mets 1 (12):** Bartolo Colon drew all sorts of nods, taps and tributes in his return to Citi Field during a sharp debut for Atlanta, and Matt Kemp's third double of the game in the 12th inning led the Braves over New York.

**Orioles 3, Blue Jays 1:** Dylan Bundy struck out eight over seven impressive innings, and Baltimore used home runs by Adam Jones and Chris Davis to beat visiting Toronto.

**Dodgers 3, Padres 1:** Rich Hill pitched five innings of two-hit ball, Yasiel Puig hit his first home run of the season and host Los Angeles beat San Diego.

**Nationals 6, Marlins 4:** Bryce Harper had two RBIs and a nice ninth-inning catch, Ryan Zimmerman homered and Tanner Roark recovered from a shaky start to go six innings, leading host Washington past Miami.

**Reds 2, Phillies 0:** Brandon Finnegan allowed only one hit in seven innings, retiring the last 19 batters he faced, and

Joey Votto homered for his first hit of the season, sending host Cincinnati over Philadelphia.

**Diamondbacks 8, Giants 6:** Chris Owings reached safely four times and stole two bases, and host Arizona scored seven consecutive runs in coming back from a three-run deficit to beat San Francisco.

**Angels 5, Athletics 0:** Garrett Richards pitched beautifully while making his first appearance in 11 months after an elbow injury cut short his 2016 season but left abruptly in the fifth inning with biceps cramping before Los Angeles beat host Oakland.

**Rays 4, Yankees 1:** Corey Dickerson homered and drove in two runs to lead host Tampa Bay over New York.

**Brewers 6, Rockies 1:** Eric Thames, Travis Shaw and Jonathan Villar each homered, Wily Peralta pitched five effective innings and host Milwaukee beat Colorado.

**Twins 9, Royals 1:** Eduardo Escobar homered and drove in four runs and Miguel Sano added a bases-loaded triple to lead host Minnesota over Kansas City.

# Russia wants its players back in KHL

Associated Press

Russia hopes the lure of playing in the Olympics draws some players back home to the Kontinental Hockey League.

The Russian Hockey Federation said Wednesday it will try to keep KHL players from leaving for North America and attempt to bring NHL free agents back this summer. That could include pending free agents such as the Montreal Canadiens' Andrei Markov and Alexander Radulov.

"In Russia, all the necessary conditions will be created to grow their skill and readiness to play for the national team," board chairman Arkady Rotenberg said in a statement.

Washington Capitals superstar Alex Ovechkin plans to

represent Russia at the 2018 Olympics in South Korea despite the NHL announcing it would not participate. Rotenberg said the federation will help players with legal issues so they can play.

For those without contracts like Markov, Radulov and Buffalo Sabres defenseman Dmitry Kulikov and restricted free agents Washington's Evgeny Kuznetsov and Dmitry Orlov and the Colorado Avalanche's Mikhail Grigorenko, there will be plenty of interest from the KHL. Still, it's unlikely that the Olympics alone would be enough to make top Russian players leave the NHL.

"I don't think it changes the dynamic of who wants to play in the KHL and who wants to

play in the NHL," agent Jay Grossman said.

Kulikov said it could be an option for some players but that he hasn't thought about it.

"I don't think it's going to happen for me," Kulikov said. "It's everyone's personal choice."

It's a personal choice that has to do with money, security and other things beyond just the Olympics.

Dan Milstein, agent for Chicago's Artemi Panarin, Toronto's Nikita Zaitsev and Alexey Marchenko, Montreal's Nikita Nesterov, and Pavel Datsyuk, said he thought it was a "shame" the NHL decided not to let players go to the Olympics.

"The guys I represent really want to go because they want to play for the Russian team, but

I'm advising them not to publicly comment on the matter," Milstein said. "They are all disappointed and hopeful the NHL will re-open talks."

Ovechkin said in September he'd go to Pyeongchang next February regardless of what the NHL decides and stood by that Tuesday.

"Somebody going to tell me, like, don't go, I don't care — I just go," Ovechkin said.

Rotenberg said the decision of any players under contract overseas to attend the Olympics anyway would be worthy of respect. While the Russian Hockey Federation is saying it will help legally, it could also get some help from the NHL Players' Association.

# Capitals blank Rangers, wrap up Presidents' Trophy

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Winning the Presidents' Trophy is becoming old hat for the Washington Capitals, though this time it could be more important than ever.

The Capitals beat the New York Rangers 2-0 on Wednesday night to wrap up their second consecutive regular-season points title, the top seed in the Eastern Conference and Metropolitan Division title. With all those banner additions, the best home team in the NHL will have home-ice advantage throughout the playoffs.

Even though Washington beat an opponent with nothing to play for and six regulars out of the lineup, Alex Ovechkin is rolling and believes he and his teammates are trending positively as they finished atop the league standings for the third time in eight seasons.

"It means we're best team in the season, but the most important season is coming soon," said Ovechkin, whose shot was tipped in by Justin Williams for the game-winner on the power play. "I think everybody fo-

cus, everybody playing the right direction."

Evgeny Kuznetsov also scored and Braden Holtby had a 24-save shutout of the Rangers, who are locked into the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference and will face the Atlantic Division-champion Montreal Canadiens. New York looked to be going through the motions, but Washington coach Barry Trotz said there was "unfinished business," and his players took care of it in a game that had all the intensity of the preseason. The Capitals didn't acknowledge their accomplishment, but they understood what was at stake.

"Some guys gonna say they didn't care, they liar," said Kuznetsov, who scored for the fourth time in 19 games. "It's always nice to win something."

For Washington, Ovechkin getting back on track and Kuznetsov scoring for the fourth time in 19 games made for good signs with a potentially difficult first-round matchup looming against the likes of Boston, Ottawa or Toronto.

Trotz said the Capitals never talked about winning the Presi-

dents' Trophy but rather winning the hypercompetitive Metropolitan Division and giving themselves the all-important home ice in the playoffs.

"It just gives us that opportunity to have the last change in a Game 7 or crowd behind us or whatever," Trotz said. "It's a point of pride that we've been consistent."

Eight of the 30 Presidents' Trophy winners won the Stanley Cup, three lost in the final, six lost in the conference finals, seven lost in the second round and six lost in the first round. In the salary-cap era that began in 2005-06, two of the 11 winners won the Cup, one lost in the final, two lost in the conference finals, two lost in the second round and four lost in the first round.

The Capitals were eliminated by the eventual Cup-champion Pittsburgh Penguins in the second round last year and got knocked out in the first round by the Canadiens in 2010. Only Ovechkin, center Nicklas Backstrom and defensemen Karl Alzner and John Carlson remain from the team that lost Game 7 to Montreal that year.

**Sabres 2, Canadiens 1:** Rasmus Ristolainen and Tyler Ennis scored and Buffalo closed its home schedule by snapping Montreal's five-game winning streak.

Robin Lehner stopped 31 shots in a game the Sabres hung on to win after building a 2-0 lead through two periods.

Tomas Plekanec scored for the Canadiens and Carey Price stopped 28 shots in what was essentially a mean-nothing game between two Atlantic Division rivals.

Buffalo has already been eliminated from playoff contention to extend the franchise's longest postseason drought to six years. The Sabres did hit a milestone by finishing with a 20-15-6 home record to reach the 20-win mark for the first time since a 21-12-8 finish in 2011-12.

Montreal had little left to play for, having already clinched the Atlantic Division title on Monday and being guaranteed the Eastern Conference's second seed when the playoffs begin next week.