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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Marines investigate 130 after photo scandal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More than a year after a nude photo-sharing scandal rocked the Marine Corps, the service has investigated about 130 individuals for online misconduct, ranging from sexual harassment and bullying to revenge porn. Nearly 60 faced some type of punishment.

Marine Commandant Gen. Robert Neller told reporters Wednesday that he's trying to create a cultural change in the Corps, but he acknowledged the challenge.

"Are we where we want to be? No," Neller said. "It's been a year. We're trying to change a culture that didn't start a year ago."

Neller's comments came on the heels of a Pentagon report that said sexual assaults across the Marine Corps increased by nearly 15 percent last year compared with 2016.

He noted that many believe that increased reporting shows confidence in the chain of command and a belief that there is less of a chance of retribution for a complaint.

But, he added, "If that number continues to go up ... we have to decide if that's because we still can't improve our behavior

and our discipline."

As of April 18, the Marine Corps has investigated 108 Marines and 22 civilians for online misconduct. Some cases were related to the online nude photo-sharing scandal and others were not. So far, seven people were convicted in court-martial proceedings, 16 faced nonjudicial punishments, 28 faced other administrative actions and seven were discharged from the Marine Corps.

The photo-sharing scandal came to light early last year when nude photographs of female Marines, veterans from across the military and other women were shared on the Facebook page Marines United. Comments and posts under some photos included obscene and threatening comments.

An investigation by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service determined that the overwhelming majority of the photos were selfies or were posed for and then voluntarily shared, which is not illegal even under military code. As a result, only a small number of military members faced charges or discipline for their participation on the website. The scandal, however, prompted the military services to revise and more strongly enforce online behavior, including on social media websites.

Neller said the discipline isn't about "hanging scalps" but rather about teaching Marines that they are held to a higher standard of behavior.

But he flatly rejected any changes in how the Marines keep male and female recruits separate for portions of their boot camp.

The segregation has faced criticism and calls for change from members of Congress who say the recruits should be integrated, as they are in the other services.

The Marines assign female recruits to their own platoon and argue that keeping them separate, particularly for the first three weeks of training, better enables them to become more competitive.

Neller said that the male and female platoons do 65 to 70 percent of their training together, including rifle training, swim qualifying, fitness tests and battle skills training.

"This is the way we believe is the most effective way to make a Marine. We don't do it for any other reason. We don't do it to disadvantage women. Quite frankly, we do it to advantage women. We want them focused on learning how to be a Marine," Neller said.

"Am I considering any changes right now? No."

Navy: Uptick in aviation mishaps an indicator of problem

The Washington Post

Navy Secretary Richard Spencer said Wednesday that an increase in nonfatal aviation mishaps is a "leading indicator" of the problems the military should examine, after a year in which many U.S. troops were killed at home and abroad in crashes.

Spencer spoke before reporters at the Pentagon alongside the top officers in the Navy and the Marine Corps. Navy Adm. John Richardson and Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Robert Neller both said most of the incidents were "minor," but Neller described the Marine Corps' recent overall track re-

cord in stark terms.

"So last year, we had a horrible year. We had a horrible year," Neller said. "And my heart goes out to the families that lost a ... Marine, or in one case we had a sailor and 15 Marines on a C-130."

The comments came after a five-year period in which at least 133 U.S. servicemembers have been killed in crashes. An investigation by the Military Times newspaper chain recently found that the number of incidents involving manned aircraft jumped almost 40 percent between 2013 and the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2017, with a 108 percent increase in accidents involving one kind

of fighter jet, the F/A-18 Super Hornet.

The scrutiny comes after nearly 17 years at war in Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries following the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, with an air campaign against the Islamic State group since 2014 taxing aircraft and maintenance crews.

The military officials noted Wednesday that the overall increase in crashes can be attributed largely to a rise in so-called "Class C mishaps," which cause between \$50,000 and \$500,000 in damage to the aircraft but no deaths. More serious Class A mishaps result in fatalities or at least \$2 million in damage, while Class B mis-

haps cause between \$500,000 and \$2 million in damage or lead to the hospitalization of three people or a debilitating injury for one.

Richardson rejected any notion that the Navy is sending pilots into the air who are not ready to fly or have dangerous aircraft. But he and Neller acknowledged that after years of congressionally mandated budget cuts known as sequestration, pilots have less experience than they once did. A pilot with several years of experience in the military 20 years ago would have had probably 1,200 to 1,500 hours in a cockpit, but now gets closer to 800, Neller said.

USS Reagan pilots kick off landing practice

BY JAMES BOLINGER
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — Navy pilots are honing carrier-landing skills ahead of their next deployment on the USS Ronald Reagan.

Carrier Air Wing 5, which is assigned to the Yokosuka, Japan-based aircraft carrier, kicked off training Thursday that aims to get the fixed-wing pilots to maximum proficiency for carrier operations.

“The most important aspect of this training is getting our pilots back in the mindset of operating off of a carrier over open ocean,” Lt. Cmdr. Matt Knight, a Task Force 70 spokesman, told Stars and Stripes in an email this week.

Aircraft involved include F/A-18E and F/A-18F Super Hornet strike jets, EA-18G Growler electronic warfare planes, E-2D Advanced Hawkeye early warning aircraft and C-2A Greyhound transports.

“The refresher training prior to deployment exercises the full spectrum of skills from the basics of carrier operations to the more advanced aspects of landing on a carrier at sea,” Knight said.

Pilots will land day and night, with most of the action taking place on Iwo Jima, which is known by the Japanese as Iwo To, a Navy statement said.

After the land-based training, the pilots will conduct day and night landings on the Ronald Reagan, Knight said.

Backup sites for the training include Naval Air Facility Misawa, Yokota Air Base, Naval Air Facility Atsugi and MCAS Iwakuni, the Navy said.

The training will wrap up on May 13.

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Report: Pressure from firing heavy weapons could pose brain risk

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Troops in training or combat who use shoulder-supported heavy weapons are at risk for brain damage from blast pressure, a report commissioned by the Army found.

Servicemembers exposed to high levels of “blast overpressure” from heavy weapons, such as the Carl Gustaf recoilless rifle, have experienced problems with memory loss and decision making, according to the report released this month by the think tank Center for New American Security.

The Defense Department has been tracking and studying traumatic brain injuries since 2000. Such injuries, which have often come from improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, are now well documented. But the effects of pressure blasts from heavy weapons on gunners largely have been ignored.

“We were, quite honestly, shocked to find that there are these negative cognitive effects that are also coming from firing heavy weapons,” said Paul Scharre, a co-author of the report and director of CNAS’s technology and national security program.

The report was part of a larger project for the Army Research Laboratory that looked at emerging technologies to improve soldier protection and survivability, such as body armor and robotics, he said.

A former Army Ranger, Scharre has fired heavy weapons that give off blast pressure, such as AT4 anti-tank guns, the M72 anti-armor LAW and .50-caliber sniper rifles.

“They have quite a punch, and soldiers who have shot them will tell you there’s a big pressure coming off the weapon, but there wasn’t a depth of understanding about some of the cognitive deficits that can come from very small amounts of exposure,” he said.

As the NFL has come to understand, Scharre said, it’s not just the big concussions you need to think about. “It’s the routine hits people are getting that put them at risk.”

A 2008 study published in the *Journal of Neurotrauma* used pigs and rats to measure

the effects of blast overpressure from several shoulder-mounted guns and a howitzer. Small hemorrhages were found in some of the animals’ brains, tears that increased with blast intensity. Damage occurred in some cases after only three shots of the weapon.

“In practice, gunners for these weapons could be exposed to significantly more shots during training, sometimes up to 20 or more shots per day,” the CNAS report said.

It recommends that DOD immediately amend the daily firing limits for servicemembers shooting these heavy weapons to below the threshold that causes cognitive problems.

“Right now, if you’re using these weapons within approved firing limits, you still have some servicemembers who experience cognitive deficit,” Scharre said. “The other thing is that the limits right now apply only to a 24-hour period,” he said. But it takes up to 96 hours after firing the daily approved firing limits for servicemembers to “reset back to baseline,” he said.

In addition, daily maximum limits aren’t cumulative, meaning they do not take into account that multiple heavy weapons systems might be fired in a day, he said.

“They need a comprehensive limit that covers all these heavy weapons,” he said.

The report recommends that DOD also establish annual and lifetime exposure limits for these weapons.

Reliable data on long-term effects of these pressure blasts do not yet exist so the annual and lifetime limits would need to err on the side of being overly conservative, Scharre said.

Users of the weapons routinely should wear blast gauges to record the cumulative amount of pressure over time, which would become part of a servicemember’s service record, the study recommended.

Computer modeling has shown that full-face helmets can reduce blast pressure to the brain by up to 80 percent, Scharre said.

Further research is needed into the best design for such a helmet, the report said.

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New carrier’s structure 75 percent complete

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. — The nation’s next aircraft carrier is now 75 percent structurally complete.

The Virginian-Pilot reported Monday that a 750-metric-ton section was installed on the main deck of the future USS

John F. Kennedy. The ship has been under construction at Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia since 2015.

The ship is being built using modular construction. That means 341 of the Kennedy’s total 447 sections are now in place.

The Kennedy is the second ship in its class. The first was

the USS Gerald R. Ford, which was commissioned during a ceremony at Naval Station Norfolk in July.

The Kennedy is scheduled to be christened in 2019. Delivery to the Navy is expected in 2022.

From The Associated Press

Sailors battle to keep aging LCACs afloat

By JAMES BOLINGER
Stars and Stripes

SASEBO NAVAL BASE, Japan — Mechanics face a daily struggle to keep the Navy's ancient fleet of air-cushioned landing craft afloat until new hovercraft begin arriving next month.

Replacements for the Navy's 72 landing craft air cushions, or LCACs, were supposed to start arriving last year; however, delivery of a new hovercraft — the \$57.7 million-per-unit "Ship-To-Shore Connector" — was delayed by technical challenges.

In the meantime, sailors have ramped up inspections on the old vessels to identify problems when they are small.

Many of the four-engine machines, which made their Navy debut in 1982, were supposed to have retired years ago, but 68 of them have had their service lifespans increased by a decade after improvements to power, command, control, communications, computer and navigational systems, the Navy said.

For now, sailors from Naval Beach Unit

7 at Sasebo Naval Base, Japan, are winning the battle against time.

In the past year, they've increased the readiness rate for their seven LCACs from less than 55 percent to nearly 70 percent, said Cmdr. Bob Jones, the unit's leader.

To keep the them running, mechanics focus on things such as electronics that are susceptible to corrosion, he said.

Salt water gets everywhere when a landing craft is underway, with plenty of sea spray at speeds of up to 45 knots, or nearly 52 mph. During a recent firefighting drill, crewmembers pumped water out of the ocean onto an engine.

To minimize corrosion, each landing craft is washed twice with fresh water after it returns from a voyage. Sailors also keep a close eye on the vessels' \$300,000 fiberglass propellers.

"If anything hits them, they will fly into pieces," said Petty Officer 1st Class Christopher Marcial, a navigator.

Gas turbine systems mechanics like Petty Officer 3rd Class Jasmin Thapa are charged with inspecting the propellers.

The job involves examining the blades to look for holes and chips and making sure edge guards haven't come loose, she said.

It's also important to make sure the propellers are balanced so the craft will hover smoothly, Thapa said.

"We measure the vibration of the blade while it's spinning," she said.

Sailors also are doing more inspections on the air-filled cushions that the hovercraft ride on. Each has a dozen that cost between \$60,000 and \$80,000 to replace and are supposed to last six years, Jones said.

The extra inspections come on top of a 180-hour annual hull inspection and engine checks based on hours of operation, he said.

The Sasebo-based hovercraft unit is a one-of-a-kind unit in the Navy. Its sailors also operate Landing Craft Utility boats that can deliver heavy-duty machinery and hundreds of Marines from ship to beach in support of Task Force 76, the Navy's amphibious task force in the Pacific.

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New ship to honor WWII MOH recipient

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

The Navy is naming its newest amphibious transport dock ship after a Medal of Honor recipient who helped save a kamikaze-attacked vessel during World War II.

The soon-to-be-built USS Richard M. McCool will honor Capt. Richard M. McCool Jr., who served aboard Landing Craft Support ship 122 off the coast of Okinawa during the war, the service announced Wednesday.

On June 11, 1945, McCool's ship was attacked by three kamikaze aircraft near Okinawa. He was temporarily knocked unconscious but awoke in time to lead his fellow sailors in saving the ship and rescuing its injured sailors, the Navy said.

It is unclear when the new vessel will be completed.

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Navy's top NCO touts leadership initiative

By MARCUS FICHTL
Stars and Stripes

CHINHAE NAVAL BASE, South Korea — Certified instructors and a refocusing on character are part of a new leadership program launched by the Navy's top enlisted sailor during a tour of 7th Fleet bases in the Indo-Pacific region.

The initiative, dubbed "Laying the Keel: Developing the Backbone of our Navy," marks the first significant change since 2011 to how the service trains its enlisted leaders.

"We started to realize ... this character piece in developing leaders wasn't as robust," said Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Steven Giordano during a recent all-hands call at Chinhae Naval Base.

A Navy white paper followed by a year of surveys and focus groups found that competency and job knowledge were acceptable, but there was a problem with how young sailors were being taught to lead, Giordano said.

He said the program was born out of sailors' wants, not

his office.

"This is the U.S. Navy enlisted sailor's initiative that they have proposed forward," he said.

Currently, training courses for petty officers — the middle ranks of the Navy's enlisted — are done in-house without certified instructors. That's changing.

"The critical piece in it all is you've got to have somebody — up in front of you — in that room who can actually facilitate the curriculum," Giordano said during a stop in Chinhae as part of an 18-day tour that began April 24 on Guam.

Navy officials said a pilot program is underway and the new curriculum should be online by January.

Giordano said they are also reimagining the final push to the vaunted Navy chief petty officer rank by revamping the leadership training events and seminars continuously hosted by local commands.

The new version — called Sailor 360 — will also be rolled out in "Laying the Keel." It replaces CPO 365.

"Sailor 360, to be honest with you, is really the vision that was intended for CPO 365," he said.

The leadership and scenario-based training typically had been dominated by chiefs and senior petty officers but ignored the more junior ranks, Giordano said.

He said all ranks — officer and enlisted — will be invited to participate in Sailor 360.

Giordano told Stars and Stripes after the all-hands call that he hopes an ethos of ownership will come from this program and take over the Navy.

"Too often, we look to the external to find the answer first when it's much easier to find the answer when you look into the internal first," he said.

He hopes those answers will be found once the new leadership programs hit full steam.

"I'm looking forward to how they will own this Sailor 360 process, what initiatives they will put forward and the impact it will have," he said.

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C-130 crashed on way to Air Force 'Boneyard'

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — An old cargo plane used by the Puerto Rico Air National Guard was on its way to an aircraft graveyard in Arizona when it crashed Wednesday near Savannah, Ga., killing all nine servicemembers aboard, military officials said Thursday.

The C-130 Hercules crashed shortly after taking off from Savannah-Hilton Head International Airport about 11:30 a.m. on a flight to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base's 309th Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Center, said Army Maj. Paul Dahlen, a spokesman for the Puerto Rico National Guard. Known as "The Boneyard," the facility stores decommissioned aircraft, which are sometimes later returned to service.

All nine killed in the crash were members of the Puerto Rico Air National Guard's 156th Airlift Wing. They included five crewmembers and four other service-

members, including maintenance specialists, Dahlen said. The Air Force was withholding releasing their names Thursday until 24 hours after next-of-kin notification, which is Pentagon policy.

However, a friend of one of the aircraft's pilots said Maj. Jose Rafael Roman was among the dead.

Jose Sanchez, the mayor of Roman's hometown of Manati, told The Associated Press that his fallen friend left behind two sons and a five-months-pregnant wife.

"The town is in mourning," he said.

Before leaving on the doomed flight, the crew had spent several days in Savannah for standard preventive aircraft maintenance, Dahlen said. The Savannah airport, in an industrial area just north of the coastal city, is home to the Georgia Air National Guard's 165th Airlift Wing, which flies and maintains C-130s.

It is not clear what caused the plane to go down just moments after takeoff. Video of the crash captured by a nearby security camera and shared on social media shows

the plane flying low, turning its wings, before suddenly diving toward the ground behind a line of trees. A moment later, a fireball can be seen rising into the sky followed by a cloud of thick, black smoke.

The C-130's pilot radioed a distress call and indicated he planned to return the plane to the airport just before the crash, an emergency response official said on the condition of anonymity because the official was not authorized to release the information publicly.

The Air Force has launched an investigation into the crash that left a debris field over some 600 feet in Port Wentworth, a town just north of Savannah, mere miles from the airport, said Air Force Col. Pete Boone, the vice wing commander of the 165th Airlift Wing.

He expressed condolences to family members who lost loved ones in the crash.

"We are a close-knit family and when a tragedy like this occurs every member of the United States Armed Forces feels it," Boone said.

Trump admits he repaid lawyer for 'Stormy' money

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump acknowledged Thursday he repaid his personal lawyer for hush money given to porn actress Stormy Daniels after claiming previously he didn't know about the payments. But the money, paid just before the 2016 election to stifle her claims of an affair, "had nothing to do with the campaign," the president tweeted.

Trump said his attorney Michael Cohen received a monthly retainer, which he used to pay the actress to sign an agreement not to talk about her allegations and thus "stop the false and extortionist accusations made by her about an affair."

Trump's tweets outlining the arrangement came after Rudy Giuliani, one of his attorneys, said Wednesday that Trump reimbursed Cohen for \$130,000 paid to Daniels. During an appearance on Fox News Channel's "Hannity," Giuliani said the money to repay Cohen had been "funneled ... through the law firm and the president repaid it."

Asked if Trump knew about the arrangement, Giuliani said:

Giuliani offers new explanation for Comey firing

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's explanation for why he fired FBI Director James Comey has shifted again.

Rudy Giuliani, Trump's new attorney, said in an interview on Fox News that Trump fired Comey last year "because Comey would not, among other things, say that he wasn't a target"

of the special counsel's Russia investigation.

The explanation foreshadows a likely defense to the May 2017 dismissal, but it was at least the third offered by Trump and his advisers.

It also comes as the president's legal team is debating whether to allow Trump to be interviewed by special counsel Robert Mueller's team.

"He didn't know about the specifics of it, as far as I know. But he did know about the general arrangement, that Michael would take care of things like this, like I take care of things like this for my clients. I don't burden them with every single thing that comes along. These are busy people."

Speaking on "Fox & Friends" Thursday, Giuliani said Trump didn't know all the details until "maybe 10 days ago." While stressing that Trump denies the relationship, he said Cohen may have seen \$130,000 as "cheap."

"They said it wasn't true," Giuliani said. "However, imagine if that came out on October 15, 2016, in the middle of the last de-

bate with Hillary Clinton. Cohen didn't even ask. Cohen made it go away. He did his job."

The comments appeared to contradict statements made by Trump several weeks ago, when he said he didn't know about the payment to Daniels. Giuliani later suggested to The Wall Street Journal that while Trump had repaid the \$130,000, Cohen had settled the payment to Daniels without Trump's knowledge at the time.

Giuliani's revelation was hardly a shock in the West Wing, where many aides assumed the president at least had knowledge of Cohen's work on his behalf. In briefings and media appearances, however, White House aides

have sought to avoid staking out a clear position on the matter, directing reporters to Trump's own comments. Still, the way Giuliani announced it — on live television and imprecisely — surprised Trump staffers and raised fresh worries about the president's uneven legal team.

Law firms advance expenses for clients as a matter of course, so there's nothing inherently improper about a lawyer covering a particular payment and then being reimbursed for it. In this case, though, the client who apparently reimbursed the expense was running for president and the money was paid just days before the election.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Creamery concocts pork roll ice cream

NJ FREDON TOWNSHIP — A New Jersey dairy farm said it hopes customers will like its new ice cream flavor incorporating another regional favorite food — pork roll.

Windy Brow Farms in Fredon Township said it has introduced the state's first "Taylor ham ice cream," referring to the specific brand of pork roll famous to New Jersey residents. The specialty dessert mixes in French toast with actual pieces of pork roll.

Windy Brow Managing Partner Jake Hunt noted that a pork-only ice cream would be "gross," so he added the maple and French toast element to give it a sweet and salty balance.

Print in Play-Doh leads to suspect

MA LEICESTER — A Massachusetts police department said a fingerprint left in a hunk of Play-Doh led them to a shoplifting suspect.

Leicester police responded to Walmart on Dec. 11 after an employee found several electronic anti-theft devices that had been covered in the malleable clay-like toy in an apparent attempt to neutralize them.

The attempt to disable the spider-wrap devices failed, and the suspect had fled. He did, however, leave a fingerprint impression in the Play-Doh.

Police charged Dennis Jackson, 55, with unlawful removal of an anti-theft device.

Man shoots smoke detector to silence it

VT BARTON — A Vermont man is facing charges that he used a shotgun to silence a smoke detector in the kitchen of his apartment.

Police said two shots fired Monday afternoon from the 20-gauge shotgun owned by Leroy Mason, 68, of Barton, hit the adjoining wall of an occupied apartment.

Police said Mason has complained about frequent false alarms from his smoke detector, and he was upset fire crews wouldn't relocate it so he "took it upon himself to relocate the smoke detector, and shot it with the shotgun."

Emergency personnel said they took the shotgun from Mason, who then allegedly pointed a handgun at them while demanding his shotgun. Emergency crews disarmed Mason.

Man accused in attack and underwear theft

AL TUSCALOOSA — Police said a University of Alabama student pulled down a woman's pants while she was jogging near the campus and later broke into a nearby home and stole women's underwear.

Tuscaloosa police Capt. Brad Mason told news outlets the woman struggled with the man Monday and was able to escape.

Mason said another woman chased the man from her home Tuesday after he took underwear. Police arrested John Everett Threadgill.

Mason said Threadgill, 19, admitted to both crimes during an interview with officers.

Armored truck dumps cash onto highway

IN INDIANAPOLIS — State Police said the back doors of a Brinks armored truck swung open along a highway in Indianapolis, sending hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash falling onto the highway's lanes.

Sgt. John Perrine said the truck lost some of its cargo along Interstate 70 on Wednes-

day when the truck's back doors opened up. Officers remained at the scene about 90 minutes later collecting the money along I-70.

The Indianapolis Star reported state troopers are investigating the incident and also looking into tips about motorists who stopped along the highway to pick up some of the cash.

Perrine said anyone who picked up some of the money can be charged with theft.

Naked Bike Ride to feature body-painting

PA PHILADELPHIA — The City of Brotherly Love apparently loves getting naked.

The annual ride of naked bicyclists through Philadelphia's streets has been so popular organizers are teaming up with the artist behind New York City's Bodypainting Day to launch another body-painting event. Philly Bodypainting Day will debut Sept. 8, the day of the 10th Philly Naked Bike Ride.

The ride protests dependence on fossil fuels, advocates for bike safety and promotes positive body image.

Police 'pawfficer' gets name, rank on force

MI TROY — A suburban Detroit police department has created a new rank of "pawfficer" for the cat that has joined the force.

The Troy police department announced Tuesday the kitty will be named Badges. That was the winning name from a Twitter poll, narrowly beating out Donut.

The department added the cat to its ranks last month after auditioning five felines from the Michigan Humane Society.

Badges will be used for therapeutic purposes and make public appearances.

Jersey gives student a geography lesson

MA BOSTON — An American college student who didn't know the difference between the U.S. state of New Jersey and the British Channel Island of Jersey is clear about the distinction now.

Joe Hill, of Plymouth, Mass., returned Sunday from a vacation on the island off the coast of France that was paid for by Jersey residents.

The Boston Globe reported it started when Hill joined a Facebook group called "Good or Bad Jersey Businesses" he assumed was about the U.S. state.

He posted a comment on the page that garnered 1,500 likes.

Jersey resident Alex Dolan saw it and launched a crowdfunding effort that raised enough money to send Hill and his girlfriend to the island.

Ramps return to Capitol for ducklings

DC WASHINGTON — Two ramps made to keep ducklings from drowning at the Capitol Reflecting Pool in Washington were brought back this spring.

City Wildlife President Anne Lewis said minor issues with the ramps have been worked out. Sides to the ramps were added to keep the ducklings from falling over, and more traction has been added to the surface to keep them from slipping.

WTOP-FM reported that City Wildlife worked with Architect of the Capitol to come up with the ramp after getting complaints from the public of seeing ducklings in trouble and drowning.

From wire reports

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Baffert favored again at Kentucky Derby

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Bob Baffert is back at the Kentucky Derby with early favorite Justify after watching the race from his sofa in Southern California last year.

The Hall of Fame trainer's ability to produce Derby contenders year after year is an enviable feat and why his absence a year ago stood out. It was just his second since 2009 and occurred because his lone candidate got hurt.

Baffert will saddle Justify and 30-1 shot Solomini in Saturday's Derby.

Justify is one of the greenest colts Baffert has brought to Churchill Downs. He's won all three of his starts by a combined 19 lengths. If Justify wins, he'd be the first to do so since Apollo in 1882 without racing as a 2-year-old.

"The thing about the Kentucky Derby, you have to have the right horse. It just happens. You can't force it," Baffert said. "All of a sudden, you have good horses and you're there. So I've been really fortunate to have some really good horses."

Baffert's four victories are tied for second-most in the race's 143-year history. He's finished second three times, too, including in 2012 with

Bodemeister, also the last time he had two starters in the same year.

Like Justify, Bodemeister didn't race as a 2-year-old. He set a blistering pace and led the Derby until the final 150 yards when I'll Have Another overtook him to win by 1½ lengths.

Magnum Moon, the 6-1 third choice, also is unbeaten and didn't run as a 2-year-old.

"It's going to happen," Baffert said, referring to the curse being broken. "Whether it happens this year or whatever, but it will happen because Bodemeister almost got away with it. But I don't really worry about that."

Baffert almost had a third starter this year until McKinzie developed a hind end

issue that knocked him off the Derby trail.

"When McKinzie got hurt, I wanted to throw up," he said. "I really think McKinzie would probably be second choice here. We'd really have a 1-2 here."

Justify cleared the biggest pre-Derby hurdle by drawing the No. 7 post. Jockey Mike Smith can use the colt's early speed to position him well for the long run to the chaotic first turn. Solomini ended up in the No. 17 post; no horse has ever won from there.

Baffert turned 65 in January, making him eligible for Medicare and retirement at most other jobs. However, he entertains no such thoughts.

"I work hard at it. I just don't give up," the white-haired trainer said. "After 25 years, I'm finally getting horses that I don't have to buy. The big guys are sending me horses."

None was bigger than American Pharoah in 2015. The colt swept the Derby, Preakness and Belmont to become racing's first Triple Crown winner in 37 years.

Baffert has compared Justify to American Pharoah, citing the colt's imposing physical presence and big stride. Still, Justify has yet to encounter the kind of traffic the Derby's 20-horse stampede creates and the talent he'll run against on Saturday.

"I'd rather have a really talented horse than one who's seasoned and just on par with the rest of them," Baffert said.

Early on, Baffert knew Justify had the goods.

"The first time I worked him at Santa Anita, I knew he was a really good horse," he said. "The track was really deep that morning, and he went around there effortlessly. His first race, he ran incredibly and showed how special he was."

That kind of intuition is what separates Baffert from his rivals, fellow Hall of Famer trainer D. Wayne Lukas said.

"Bob's got a great feel for it," he said.

Mitchell, Ingels help Jazz even up series

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Utah had a four-point lead in the fourth quarter on Wednesday night when Donovan Mitchell missed a jumper and sailed above three Houston Rockets to grab the rebound and finish with a nifty one-handed slam.

He did it right near the Jazz bench and his teammates went wild, cheering and pretending to fall backward on each other in awe.

Joe Ingles led the Jazz with a career-high 27 points, but it was the star rookie who provided the highlight of the night as the Jazz evened the Western Conference semifinals 1-1 with a 116-108 win.

Ingles made a career-best seven three-pointers and Mitchell added 17 points and a franchise rookie-record 11 assists for his first game this post-season where he scored fewer than 20 points and didn't lead the team in scoring.

But he certainly provided an emotional boost to his team with his highlight reel-worthy play. He smiled broadly when it was brought up postgame, and said he was just trying to get the rebound on his miss when he made a split-second decision.

"I just happened to be up there," he said. "So I said, 'Why come down with it?'"

The Jazz squandered a huge early lead before using a big fourth quarter to regain control and head home for Game 3 on Friday in Utah with a chance to take a series lead over the top-seeded Rockets.

Houston coach Mike D'Antoni said Mitchell was the key to the win even though he didn't lead the team in scoring.

"He was breaking us down," D'Antoni said. "He was getting in there and was finding guys in the corner. He's a handful whether he's finishing or not."

The Jazz were behind by two with eight minutes left before using a 16-2 run to pull away.

After trailing by 25 points at halftime of the 110-96 loss in the series opener, the Jazz

jumped out to an early lead in this one and led by as many as 19 in the first half.

"Last game, we came out completely opposite. Tonight, they kind of caught us off-guard," Houston's James Harden said. "We adjusted to it in that second quarter, but we can't get down 19 no matter who we're playing."

Houston regained the lead in the third quarter but couldn't keep pace with the Jazz in the fourth as their normally potent offense went cold.

Harden had 32 points and 11 assists, and Chris Paul added 23 points as Houston fell to the Jazz for the first time this season after winning the first five meetings.

Jazz coach Quin Snyder was pleased at his team's balanced scoring effort on a night six players finished in double figures, and he raved about the contribution of Ingles.

"Every time Joe has needed to step up his game, he has been able to," Snyder said. "He's committed to that. He knew tonight he would need to make some shots and he was able to do it."

They said it: The notoriously low-key Harden, when told by a reporter that he looked irritated by Utah's defense on Wednesday: "I look like that all the time. That's just my facial expression."

Tip-ins

Jazz: Snyder said before the game that he didn't know when point guard Ricky Rubio would return. ... Utah assistant Igor Kokoskov was hired as head coach of the Phoenix Suns on Wednesday. ... Ingles got a technical in the second quarter for arguing with Paul.

Rockets: Luc Mbah a Moute had four points and four rebounds in his second game back after missing the first series after dislocating his right shoulder on April 10. ... Paul also received a technical for barking at Ingles. ... Clint Capela finished with 21 points and 11 rebounds.

Betts boosts Boston with three bombs

Associated Press

BOSTON — Mookie Betts heard the name Ted Williams, and that was enough for him.

Betts belted three solo homers and J.D. Martinez also went deep, powering the Boston Red Sox to a 5-4 victory over the Kansas City Royals on Wednesday.

It was the fourth three-homer game for the 25-year-old Betts, snapping a tie with Williams for most three-homer games in franchise history. Betts broke into the majors with the Red Sox in 2014, so he was well aware of the significance of the connection to the Hall of Famer.

“It’s pretty cool,” Betts said. “He hit .400 in a year and did a whole bunch of things I haven’t done. Just to know my name is amongst his is pretty cool.”

Betts also hit three homers in a 10-1 vic-

tory at the Angels on April 17. He is the first player in major league history with four three-homer games before turning 26, according to STATS.

“We’re trying to shut them down just to get Mookie another at-bat,” Red Sox starter Drew Pomeranz said, smiling. “When he gets going like that, that’s pretty cool.”

AL East-leading Boston won for the third time in four games after losing 7-6 in 13 innings on Tuesday night.

Cheslor Cuthbert homered for Kansas City, and Drew Butera had a two-run double. The Royals were trying for consecutive wins for just the second time this season.

Danny Duffy (0-4) was tagged for five runs and 10 hits in 6²/₃ innings.

Pomeranz (1-1) worked six innings, giving up all three of his runs in the first two frames. Craig Kimbrel struck out the side in the ninth for his eighth save and 299th

of his career a day after his first blown opportunity this season.

Unlike most of the early-season games in Fenway Park, there was a summer-like feel with a game-time temperature of 86 degrees under bright-blue skies.

Betts led off the fourth with a drive to center for his ninth homer of the season. Hanley Ramirez walked with one out and Martinez followed with a drive to center, tying it at 3.

“I see Mookie Betts six times a year,” Royals manager Ned Yost said. “Going on a six-game look, a special player.”

Betts connected again in the fifth, sending a drive just inside the left-field foul pole into the Green Monster seats. His third homer of the game also came against Duffy, driving a 1-2 pitch over the wall in center in the seventh.

MLB roundup

Pujols, Upton, Trout power Angels to win

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Albert Pujols is closing in fast on his 3,000th hit, and his fellow Los Angeles Angels are gathering momentum right along with him.

Pujols reached 2,998 career hits with a home run and a double, and Justin Upton hit a three-run homer in the fifth inning of the Angels’ 10-7 victory over the Baltimore Orioles on Wednesday night.

Mike Trout and Pujols both homered in the first, and Upton drove in four runs while the Angels earned their second straight win following a 3-9 skid.

Pujols followed Trout’s tape-measure shot with his 620th career homer, off Dylan Bundy (1-4) into the bullpens beyond left field. Pujols then got a standing ovation when he legged out a double in the fifth, sliding into second base with seldom-seen spryness.

While Pujols is likely to become the 32nd member of the 3,000-hit club quite soon, he will need two knocks on Thursday if he hopes to do it at Angel Stadium before the club heads

to Seattle to begin a five-game road trip.

“It would be nice to do it in front of the fans that support you every day, but I can’t focus on that,” Pujols said. “If it doesn’t happen [Thursday], it’s going to happen soon. We just need to concentrate on getting better and winning like we’ve been doing this week.”

Trout and Pujols homered in the same first inning for the eighth time, setting a major league record for teammates.

Shortly after Baltimore took a 1-0 lead on Manny Machado’s sacrifice fly, Trout hit his 11th homer deep into the left-field stands. The two-time AL MVP sent it so long and so far down the line that Statcast couldn’t accurately measure the distance.

“I saw 524 feet, but I’m not going to calculate the distance,” Angels starter Andrew Heaney said. “Yeah, 524 seems generous, but he’s a strong dude, and he got all of it, so ...”

Yankees 4, Astros 0: Luis Severino pitched a five-hitter and struck out 10 for his first career complete game while Giancarlo Stanton homered twice and drove in all four runs

for visiting New York.

Athletics 3, Mariners 2: James Paxton struck out a major league-high 16 in seven dominant innings, but the Seattle bullpen blew a late lead in a loss to visiting Oakland.

Indians 12, Rangers 4: Edwin Encarnacion homered three times and drove in six runs, helping host Cleveland to the runaway win.

Braves 7, Mets 0: New York right-hander Jacob deGrom was pulled after four dominant innings with a hyperextended right elbow, and visiting Atlanta broke out against the bullpen to back a stellar start by Sean Newcomb.

Dodgers 2, Diamondbacks 1: Los Angeles pitcher Hyun-Jin Ryu was forced to leave in the second inning of the win against host Arizona with a strained groin, and manager Dave Roberts indicated the starter could be out a while.

Nationals 9, Pirates 3: Bryce Harper hit a leadoff homer and drove in three runs, Stephen Strasburg struck out 11 and host Washington earned its fourth straight win.

Rockies 11, Cubs 2: Nolan Arenado hit two of his team’s

four homers and drove in five runs, lifting Colorado to the road win.

Cardinals 3, White Sox 2: St. Louis ace Carlos Martinez hit his first major league home run and threw 7¹/₃ effective innings against visiting Chicago.

Brewers 3, Reds 1: Christian Yelich homered, Wade Miley pitched six effective innings in his debut with Milwaukee and helped his team sweep sloppy Cincinnati.

Twins 4, Blue Jays 0: Fernando Romero pitched four-hit ball into the sixth inning in his major league debut, giving host Minnesota a badly needed boost.

Tigers 3, Rays 2: JaCoby Jones led off the 12th inning with a triple and scored on John Hicks’ bunt single, lifting host Detroit over Tampa Bay.

Phillies 6, Marlins 0: Aaron Nola allowed four hits in 7¹/₃ innings, helping visiting Philadelphia stop a four-game slide.

Giants 9, Padres 4: Nick Hundley matched his career high with four hits, Brandon Crawford broke out of a lengthy slump with three RBIs and host San Francisco beat San Diego.

Sharks shut out Knights, even series

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Marcus Sorensen and Joonas Donskoi delivered the fast start San Jose coach Peter DeBoer wanted and Martin Jones did the rest to help the Sharks tie their playoff series with Vegas at two games apiece.

Sorensen and Donskoi scored in the first period and Jones made 34 saves for his sixth career postseason shutout as the Sharks bounced back from an overtime loss to beat the Golden Knights 4-0 in Game 4 on Wednesday night.

“We’d been chasing the game the whole series,” DeBoer said. “We talked about it, but it’s easier said than done. I think we’ve had chances in the last two games to get out in front, but (Marc-Andre) Fleury has I think been exceptional, especially early in games, in order to keep us off the board. It’s nice that we’ve stuck with it, and hopefully we see some cracks.”

Tomas Hertl added his team-leading fifth goal of the play-

offs and Joe Pavelski scored a power-play goal in the third to set up a best-of-three for a spot in the Western Conference finals.

Game 5 is Friday night in Las Vegas.

Fleury made 30 saves and Vegas failed to convert on all five power-play chances while losing for the second time in eight games this postseason.

“They were a little more competitive than we were tonight,” Golden Knights coach Gerard Gallant said. “We didn’t play a bad game, but we didn’t play well enough to win and they did, and they really did. I think we played well enough to win all of the first three, but tonight? No.”

Jones was a big reason for that, starting with a key save early against Reilly Smith. Jones was helped on a delayed penalty when Brent Burns cleared a puck off the goal line and when James Neal hit the post on a power play in the first period.

But the San Jose goalie also

delivered some big-time saves, including back-to-back stops against William Karlsson and Jonathan Marchessault on a Vegas power play in the final minute of the second. Jones then turned aside Smith on a power play in the third.

Jones tied Evgeni Nabokov’s team record for most saves in a playoff shutout, and the Sharks have turned things around following a 7-0 loss in the opener.

“I thought we probably managed the puck a little bit better for the whole game,” Jones said. “We won battles on the boards, we got pucks out when we needed to and we got pucks in when we needed to. That was big for us tonight.”

Hertl helped give Jones a cushion with his goal early in the second. Logan Couture won an offensive zone faceoff against Erik Haula, and Mikkel Boedker took the puck behind the net for a wraparound attempt. Hertl was in front and knocked in the loose puck to make it 3-0.

Pavelski’s goal on the re-

bound of Couture’s shot sealed the game midway through the third.

The Sharks made some changes from Game 3, with defenseman Joakim Ryan returning to the lineup for the first time since March 16 in place of Paul Martin, and Donskoi getting back in after missing the previous game with a lower-body injury.

After an early giveaway led to a scoring chance for Vegas, Ryan fared well and stripped William Carrier of the puck to thwart a chance for the Golden Knights.

San Jose then scored twice in the final five minutes of the first period. Sorensen struck first, using a pick from linemate Eric Fehr to get loose from the corner and then skate around two defenseman to beat Fleury with his fourth goal of the playoffs.

The Sharks added to the lead with 5.1 seconds to go when Donskoi skated from his own zone and beat Fleury with a wrist shot from the high slot.

Palat scores twice as Lightning top Bruins in Game 3

Associated Press

BOSTON — Between the birth of his first child in Tampa, Fla., and Game 3 of the Eastern Conference semifinals in Boston, Yannick Gourde squeezed in what could be his last nap for a while.

The Lightning forward spent the night with his wife and newborn daughter in the hospital on the off-day and flew to Boston on Wednesday. He missed the morning skate, but was waiting for his teammates at lunch.

He received quite a greeting. “It was like we scored a game-winning goal,” coach Jon Cooper said after Ondrej Palat scored twice and Gourde assisted on Tampa Bay’s third goal in a 4-1 victory over Boston that gave the Lightning a 2-1 lead in the series.

“It’s a team that cares,” Cooper said. “We were so happy for

him.”

Palat scored twice in the first 3:19 of the game, and Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 28 shots to help Tampa Bay to its second win in a row since losing the series opener at home.

Game 4 is Friday night. “Boston came in and took one of our games at home, we had to take one of theirs on the road,” Cooper said. “We did that.”

After Patrice Bergeron made it a one-goal game, Anthony Cirelli scored his first career NHL playoff goal to give the Lightning a 3-1 lead late in the first. Gourde provided an assist, chasing the puck into the zone before finding Cirelli in the slot.

“The last 24 hours have been amazing,” Gourde said. “Obviously, I wanted to be there for my wife and, I think, it ended up it was perfect.”

Tuukka Rask made 33 saves for Boston.

“Playoffs are desperate hockey,” Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy said. “You don’t ever go into any games saying, ‘Oh, we have the luxury of being able to lose this one.’ That’s not how it goes.”

Palat scored just 1:47 in after Boston defenseman Matt Grzelcyk settled the puck with his glove in his own end, then appeared to lose track of it and skated away, leaving the Lightning with an easy 2-on-1 opportunity.

Palat made it 2-0 just 92 seconds later on a shot that deflected off Bruins defenseman Torey Krug and into the net.

“It’s not good, obviously, but we’ve come back a lot,” said Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy, whose team has won 21 games this season in which it gave up

the first goal.

“So this is nothing new,” he said “You’ve still got 50-some minutes left. There’s going to be a lull from the crowd, but you’ve got to get it back. ... The second and third goals, to me, are much worse.”

It stayed 3-1 through the second period and most of the third, until the Lightning picked up a power play in the final two minutes of the game when Krug tripped Cirelli as he chased after the puck with an empty net in front of him.

The Lightning made it 4-1 anyway when Steven Stamkos found the empty net on the power play with 42 seconds left.

Notes: Former Red Sox pitcher Pedro Martinez was the honorary fan banner captain, waving a Bruins flag before the game.