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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US conducts 3rd day of airstrikes in Libya

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — American warplanes attacked Islamic State group fighters in northern Libya on Wednesday, marking a third consecutive day of U.S. airstrikes in the war-torn nation.

The single strike targeted a pickup with a mounted recoilless rifle in the coastal city of Sirte, the militant's main stronghold in Libya, according to information provided by U.S. Africa Command, which is overseeing the operation.

Forces backing Libya's U.N.-recognized Government of National Accord have been battling Islamic State group militants in Sirte for months.

The U.S. military has conducted nine airstrikes against Islamic State group targets since it began its new mission, entitled Operation Odyssey Lightning, this week in support of the GNA.

President Barack Obama approved the airstrikes that began Monday, but he limited them only to targets specifically requested by the GNA in its fight in Sirte. Military officials have said they expect the operation to last several weeks, but there is no specific cutoff date for the airstrikes.

At the beginning of 2016, the Islamic State group was believed to have more than 5,000 fighters in Libya, including more than 1,000 in Sirte.

Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said the group is significantly smaller now, estimating there could be less than 1,000 left.

Obama on Thursday was visiting the Pentagon where a meeting with top national security leadership was expected to focus on the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria. But officials said the terrorist group's smaller affiliates in Libya and Afghanistan would likely be discussed as well.

Davis said the United States is committed long term to backing the GNA, especially in its fight against the Islamic State group, which is present in small numbers in other areas of the country.

GNA forces control most of northern Libya, and they have been largely successful against the Islamic State group in Sirte, Davis said.

They requested American airpower for "help getting across the finish line," he said.

Airstrikes, which have destroyed key Islamic State targets, including a pair of tanks, have been conducted by manned and unmanned aircraft.

Davis declined to say where the U.S. attacks were launched.

On Wednesday, Italy's Defense Minister Roberta Pinotti said her country would allow the United States to launch airstrikes from the air base at Sigonella in Sicily.

Marines order stand-down of F/A-18s

BY TARA COPP

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Marines have ordered a stand-down of all nondeployed jets following a string of crashes that call into question whether their pilots are at greater risk because of less training and available aircraft.

The stand-down will provide "an operational pause for all [Marine Air Wings] not including deployed units," said Capt. Sarah Burns, a spokesman for the Marines.

The pause will last one day and will be taken in the next seven days, Burns said. It will allow units to "discuss best practices and to look at ways to continue to improve," she said.

The stand-down was ordered after another Marine F/A-18C jet crashed Tuesday near Naval Air Station Fallon in Nevada. The Navy pilot ejected prior to

the crash and was transported to a nearby hospital, where he was released with only minor injuries, the Navy reported. The name of the pilot, who was assigned to the Naval Aviation Warfighting Development Center, has not been released.

The crash was the second in a week involving an F/A-18C aircraft belonging to Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232, which is based at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in California.

On July 28, Marine Corps pilot Maj. Richard Norton was killed when the F/A-18C fighter jet that he was flying crashed near Twentynine Palms in California during nighttime training.

In June, a fatal crash of a Hornet during a Blue Angels practice flight killed Marine Capt. Jeff Kuss, and two upgraded Super Hornet variants of the F/A-18 collided in May

during a training mission off the coast of North Carolina.

In all, five F/A-18s have been lost and two pilots killed in four crashes since May. The string of crashes has called into question whether the service is taking too much risk in worn aircraft and nondeployed pilots who are only flight training about 10 hours each month. Pilots are supposed to train in aircraft at least 16 hours monthly.

The crashes and 15 years of war have taken a toll on the Marines' aircraft.

The service has 85 F/A-18s available now for training, but it requires 171, Burns said. The Marines are struggling with all their aircraft, including the MV-22 Osprey and the CH-53E Super Stallion. They have 438 combat-ready aircraft in the service, Burns said, but require 1,065 to conduct all their operations around the globe.

Sailor is 1st enlisted woman set for sub duty

WASHINGTON — For the first time, an enlisted female sailor has earned her submarine qualification, U.S. naval officials said, as she joined the growing number of women who are in the Navy's "silent service."

Chief Petty Officer Dominique Saavedra received her silver dolphin pin in a ceremony Tuesday at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Wash. She will be deploying on a nuclear-powered guided missile sub, the USS Michigan.

The first female enlisted sailors began training for submarine duty about a year ago. In addition to Saavedra, there are about three dozen other enlisted women assigned to subs, working to get their qualifications. To become qualified, Saavedra, who is a cook, had to show proficiency and knowledge about all aspects of sub systems.

From The Associated Press

DC officer charged in probe of terrorism

Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — For years, authorities had concerns about Metro Transit Police Officer Nicholas Young. He traveled to Libya and boasted of joining rebel groups there, and he even described his collection of Nazi memorabilia to law enforcement, according to court documents. But until last month, authorities said, he hadn't committed a crime.

Now Young, 36, of Fairfax, Va., is the first law enforcement officer in the U.S. to be charged with a terrorism-related crime after prosecutors say he bought about \$250 worth of gift cards in an FBI sting for someone he thought was working with the Islamic State group.

Young was arrested Wednesday at Metro Transit Police headquarters in Washington and was charged with a single count of attempting to provide material support to a terrorist group. According to an FBI affidavit, Young bought the gift cards last month intending that they be used by the Islamic State group to purchase mobile messaging apps. But the person he gave the cards to was actually an undercover FBI officer, the affidavit said.

Young made a brief court appearance Wednesday afternoon, wearing a T-shirt and what appeared to be his uniform slacks.

David Smith, who was appointed to represent Young after the hearing, said he could not comment because he had not been able to research the details of the case. A status hearing was scheduled for Thursday afternoon.

If convicted, Young could face up to 20 years in prison.

Young had been under surveillance since 2010, and he traveled at least once in 2011 to Libya, where he said he joined rebel forces seeking to oust dictator Moammar Gadhafi, the affidavit said.

Hornet pilot makes his 1,000th landing on an aircraft carrier

By AARON KIDD
Stars and Stripes

Cmdr. Jeffrey Farmer has touched down on an aircraft carrier for the 1,000th time, joining an elite group of pilots to reach that mark.

The commanding officer of Strike Fighter Squadron 131 out of Naval Station Oceana, Va., made his landmark arresting-gear landing July 23 aboard the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower in the Arabian Gulf.

"This is an enormous milestone in any aviator's career," the F/A-18C Hornet pilot said in a Navy statement. "Early on, I wasn't even sure if I could be a jet pilot, but I gave it my all and never stopped working hard."

During arresting-gear landings, a system of flight-deck cables, steam engines and sheave dampers is used to quickly decelerate an aircraft. Pilots must make several split-second maneuvers before touching down.

"You lose your focus for a second and you can hurt yourself or someone else," Farmer said.

In March, an arresting cable broke as an E-2C Hawkeye attempted to land on the Eisenhower's flight deck, injuring eight sailors. In 2005, a Super Hornet coming in for a landing snapped a cable on the USS Kitty Hawk in two places, sending the jet tumbling overboard and injuring six on the deck, two seriously.

In 2003, eight people were hurt when a cable snapped as a Hornet landed on the USS George Washington. A flight-deck coordinator was struck in the legs with the cable, and the jet plunged into the Atlantic.

Farmer credited his fellow servicemembers for his accomplishment.

"Squadrons don't live and die by pilots," he said. "These jets don't fix, build or maintain themselves. There's so much that goes into putting one guy in a cockpit for one trap."

"I appreciate everyone who's helped me in each and every landing. They've allowed me to fly in the finest machines in the world."

Critics: Fuel tanks threaten Hawaii aquifer

Associated Press

AIEA, Hawaii — Anthony DeLuze keeps his ancestors' traditions alive in 21st century Hawaii by growing the staple crop taro on a suburban plot sandwiched between wings of a sprawling shopping mall.

But the aquifer that hydrates his starchy vegetables sits under 20 enormous underground tanks the Navy uses to store fuel for military ships and aircraft. One tank leaked tens of thousands of gallons of jet fuel into the ground in 2014, worrying DeLuze the tanks are a threat to his farm's natural springs and well.

The aquifer also supplies a quarter of the water consumed in urban Honolulu, which includes the tourist mecca Waikiki.

DeLuze and Honolulu water utility officials want the Navy to move the World War II-era tanks away from the aquifer. But the Navy views them as a vital strategic asset that

would be difficult to replicate elsewhere.

Plus, the Navy says the water is safe.

"It makes no sense to me that one of the biggest aquifers on this island has fuel sitting on top of it," DeLuze said. "Anything can happen — could have an earthquake, could be a disaster, and we're screwed."

Each of the underground fuel tanks is about 25 stories tall. The tanks sit in two rows of 10 inside a hill about 3 miles from Pearl Harbor. They hold a total of about 187 million gallons of fuel, providing the military with a vital fuel reserve in the Pacific. Two are currently out of service.

Navy Region Hawaii commander Rear Adm. John Fuller said the tanks are the last fully U.S.-owned fuel stop for forces en route from the West Coast and Hawaii to Asia and the Middle East.

"If we don't have the fuel to operate the forces, then we can't be present. We can't help

our friends," Fuller said.

The Navy is working on a 20-year plan, codified in a signed agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state Health Department, to upgrade the 70-year-old tanks and to better prevent and detect leaks.

As part of the deal, the Navy is building four new wells to monitor groundwater for contaminants by the end of the year. That will add to the 10 monitoring wells it already has. The Navy conducts quarterly and monthly testing at those wells, said Capt. Dean Tufts, commanding officer of Naval Facilities and Engineering Command, Hawaii.

Officials with the Honolulu Board of Water Supply, the city's water utility, say its water is safe to drink. But they point to Navy studies from the 1980s through the late '90s showing petroleum hydrocarbon in the rocks underneath the tanks as a sign of the tanks' risks.

US women start strong in quest for gold

Associated Press

BELO HORIZONTE, Brazil — Carli Lloyd and Alex Morgan each scored as the U.S. women's soccer team defeated New Zealand 2-0 in its debut at the Rio Games on Wednesday, getting off to a solid start in its attempt to win a fourth straight Olympic gold medal.

Lloyd put the Americans ahead with a header in the ninth minute and Morgan added to the lead with a low shot from inside the area less than a minute into the second

half at the Mineirao Stadium in Belo Horizonte.

"That was the best way we could have started," said Tobin Heath, who made the cross that led to Lloyd's goal. "We came out with a lot of energy and a lot of determination. I think in that regards we put our best foot forward and got that goal and I think that helped propel us throughout the game."

The U.S. dominated from the start to earn the convincing victory and remain unbeaten in 2016, with 14 shutouts and only one draw in 16 games.

"I was really pleased that we got the clean sheet," U.S. coach Jill Ellis said. "I thought we moved the ball against a very determined team."

Near the end of the game, many of the nearly 10,000 fans at the stadium chanted "Zika, Zika" at goalkeeper Hope Solo, who before coming to the Olympics upset some Brazilians by tweeting a photo of herself wearing a hat with mosquito netting in a reference to the virus. The chants were repeated after the final whistle.

"I'm glad the fans had fun,"

Solo said. "And if they had fun at my expense, more power to them."

The Americans are trying to become the first team to win the Olympics after succeeding at the World Cup. The Olympic tournament is the first major competition for the U.S. since the retirement of key players such as Abby Wambach and Lauren Holiday following last year's world title in Canada.

The revamped Americans next play France on Saturday, again at the Mineirao.

5 sports will be added for Tokyo Olympics

Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO — Baseball and softball are returning to the Olympics in 2020, while skateboarding, surfing, karate and sport climbing are joining the games for the first time.

The IOC approved the addition of the sports Wednesday for the Tokyo Games, calling it an "innovative" mix of traditional and youth-oriented events that will attract global fans.

The five, including a combined baseball-softball bid, were put forward for inclusion last year by Tokyo organizers. Under new IOC rules, host cities can propose additional sports for their own games.

IOC members voted unanimously to accept the five sports as a package. The approval was for the Tokyo Games only.

The new sports will add 18 events and 474 athletes to the program. The Tokyo Games will now feature 33 sports and about 11,000 athletes, compared to the usual number of 28 sports and 10,500 athletes.

While men's baseball and women's softball — both highly

popular in Japan — will be returning after a 12-year absence, the other sports will be making their Olympic debuts.

The IOC called it "the most comprehensive evolution of the Olympic program in modern history."

"Taken together, the five sports are an innovative combination of established and emerging, youth-focused events that are popular in Japan and will add to the legacy of the Tokyo Games," IOC President Thomas Bach said.

Baseball and softball have been off the Olympic program since the 2008 Beijing Games. The two were rejected in separate bids to return for the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, so they combined forces to put forward a single bid for inclusion in Tokyo.

Men's baseball was a full part of the Olympic program from 1992 to 2008, with women's softball joining in 1996. The IOC voted them both out in 2005.

Baseball will have a six-team tournament, short of the eight-team format sought by officials

from the sport's international federation. Women's softball will also have six teams. The games will be played at a shared venue in Yokohama.

"Today's historic decision by the IOC is a 'home run' for the Olympics, our sport and the Tokyo 2020 Games," said Riccardo Fraccari, president of the World Baseball Softball Confederation.

Before the vote, several IOC members questioned whether baseball would have the world's top players at the games. While pro leagues in Japan and some other countries have agreed to shut down their seasons to send their players to the Olympics, MLB has declined to do so.

Franco Carraro, who chairs the IOC's program commission, said he hopes the international federation can still reach an agreement with MLB, in line with the deals with the NBA and NHL that brought pro basketball and ice hockey players into the Olympics.

If not, Carraro said, said it will be "difficult for baseball to be included in the future" be-

yond the Tokyo Games.

Fraccari said talks with MLB are "very open and going in a very good way."

Skateboarding will have street and park events, and feature 80 athletes — 40 men and 40 women. In climbing, 40 competitors will take part in the disciplines of speed, bouldering and lead (also known as sport). Karate will have 80 athletes competing in men's and women's Kumite and Kata events, while surfing will have two shortboard events for 40 competitors.

The surfing competition will be held on natural waves at a beach location in Chiba prefecture.

"Our Olympic dream has now become a reality," International Surfing Association president Fernando Aguerre said. "This is a game-changing moment for surfing."

Skateboarding and sports climbing events will be held in temporary venues in urban settings in Tokyo, while karate will be contested at the Nippon Budokan in the capital.



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Pujols' walk-off lifts Angels over A's

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — With the score tied in the ninth inning, Albert Pujols simply relied on experience.

Pujols hit a two-run homer in the bottom of the ninth to give the Los Angeles Angels an 8-6 victory over the Oakland Athletics on Wednesday night.

Mike Trout had three hits and reached on a throwing error to start the ninth, diving headlong into first base to avoid a tag. Pujols also finished with three hits to go with three RBIs.

Cubs 5, Marlins 4: Matt Szczur scored on A.J. Ramos' wild pitch with two outs in the ninth inning to give host Chicago a comeback victory.

The Cubs scored three runs in the inning to sweep the three-game series.

Yankees 9, Mets 5: Mark Teixeira hit a tiebreaking, three-run drive off Steven Matz in the second inning for his first home run against a left-hander in more than a year, then got hit by a pitch that sparked a bench-clearing dustup in the Yankees' Subway Series victory.

Chad Green and Matz (8-8) both struggled at the start, and Luis Severino (1-6) came out of the bullpen with 4 1/3 innings of one-hit relief.

Nationals 8, Diamondbacks 3: Max Scherzer struck out 11 in eight innings and had a two-run single in Washington's victory over host Arizona.

Washington earned its fourth

road series sweep of the season and first since May 30-June 1 at Philadelphia. Arizona lost its fourth straight and sixth in seven games.

Rockies 12, Dodgers 2: Carlos Gonzalez homered twice before leaving with an apparent ankle injury in host Colorado's victory over Los Angeles.

Gonzalez had his 19th multi-homer game of his career with Nos. 22 and 23 this season. He left in the bottom of the seventh after he appeared to roll his left ankle at the plate.

Phillies 5, Giants 4 (12): Maikel Franco drove home the winning run with one out in the 12th inning to lift host Philadelphia past struggling San Francisco.

Ryan Howard homered among his three hits and Cameron Rupp also connected for Philadelphia. Franco finished with three RBIs, including one on the unusual play that ended the game.

Cardinals 5, Reds 4: Brandon Moss singled home two runs in St. Louis' four-run first inning, extending his season-long streak against host Cincinnati.

St. Louis sent nine batters to the plate against Cody Reed (0-6) in the first inning, with Moss and Greg Garcia each driving in a pair of runs with singles.

Orioles 3, Rangers 2: Kevin Gausman outpitched Cole Hamels, and host Baltimore rode a three-run first inning to a victory over Texas.

Matt Wieters had two RBIs for the AL East-leading Orioles, a major league-best 39-16 at home. Baltimore will seek to complete a three-game sweep on Thursday in a series between first-place teams.

Rays 12, Royals 0: Jake Odorizzi had his third consecutive scoreless start, Steven Souza Jr. homered for the first time in two months and host Tampa Bay routed Kansas City.

Brad Miller and Kevin Kiermaier also homered for the Rays.

Mariners 3, Red Sox 1: Nelson Cruz, Mike Zunino and Adam Lind hit solo home runs and host Seattle beat Boston, handing Rick Porcello his first loss since May.

Cruz hit his 27th homer of the season leading off the second inning, Zunino hit his fifth leading off the sixth and Lind capped Seattle's scoring with his 16th of the season with two outs in the seventh.

Twins 13, Indians 5: Joe Mauer had four hits and four RBIs, Brian Dozier hit a three-run homer and visiting Minnesota continued its mastery over Cleveland.

AL Central-leading Cleveland fell to 4-8 against last-place Minnesota. The Indians' lead over Detroit in the AL Central lead has shrunk to two games.

Braves 8, Pirates 4: Ender Inciarte broke a tie with an RBI single in the fifth inning and

offensively challenged host Atlanta had 15 hits in its victory.

Atlanta improved to 17-39 at Turner Field, the worst home record in the majors. Pittsburgh, which began the day two games out of a wild-card spot, has lost four five.

Blue Jays 3, Astros 1: Josh Donaldson hit two home runs, and Marco Estrada threw seven solid innings in Toronto's victory over host Houston.

Jose Bautista hit his second home run in two nights in the sixth as he and Donaldson went back-to-back.

Padres 12, Brewers 3: Edwin Jackson pitched seven scoreless innings and had an RBI double, and Jabari Blash hit his first major league home run to help host San Diego rout Milwaukee.

Jackson (2-2) retired the first 11 batters he faced, and the Brewers didn't put a runner in scoring position until Kirk Nieuwenhuis doubled in the fifth.

Tigers 2, White Sox 1: J.D. Martinez broke an eighth-inning tie with a pinch homer on the first pitch he faced since June and host Detroit beat Chicago for its eighth straight victory.

Playing for the first time since fracturing his elbow June 16, Martinez hit for James McCann leading off the inning and launched Chris Sale's first pitch into the shrubs above the center-field fence.

Westbrook signs a 3-year extension with Thunder

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — A month after Kevin Durant broke Oklahoma City's heart, Russell Westbrook has reaffirmed his desire to stay with the Thunder.

The two sides have agreed on a new three-year contract worth \$85.7 million, according to a person with direct knowledge of the terms. The person spoke to The Associated

Press on condition of anonymity Thursday because the team had not announced the deal. A news conference on a "major announcement" was scheduled for late Thursday afternoon.

The 27-year-old Westbrook is one of the top stars in the NBA and piled up 18 triple-doubles last season, tying Magic Johnson for the most in the last 30 years. The five-time All-Star averaged 23.5 points, 7.8 rebounds and 10.4 assists last

season as the Thunder reached the Western Conference finals, in which they lost in seven games to the Golden State Warriors after jumping to a 3-1 series lead.

For his entire career, Westbrook had been paired with a fellow superstar in Durant and together they turned Oklahoma City into a perennial NBA title contender. The Thunder have reached the conference finals in four of the past six seasons,

but advanced to the NBA Finals only once, falling to the Miami Heat in 2012.

Durant became a free agent at season's end and announced on July 4 that he would sign with Golden State instead of staying with the Thunder and Westbrook.

Westbrook's contract had been set to expire after next season, and after Durant's departure, rumors swirled about Westbrook's future.