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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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100 US troops deployed to Lashkar Gah

By TARA COPP

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — About 100 American troops have deployed to Lashkar Gah to assist Afghan forces who are trying to keep the city from falling to the Taliban, U.S. defense officials said Monday.

Lashkar Gah is the capital of Afghanistan's southeast Helmand province, where there has been a resurgence of Taliban activity. In early August, the Afghan army began deploying additional forces to the city to protect it.

The U.S. troops sent to Lashkar Gah were already in Afghanistan as part of the American contribution to NATO's Resolute Support mission in the country, the officials said. Some of the troops will advise and assist local police and the remainder will provide force protection for the train-

ers, the officials said.

The officials said the U.S. forces will not be in Lashkar Gah in a combat role.

Col. Michael Lawhorn, a Kabul-based spokesman for Resolute Support, said the advisers would assist the Afghan forces' 505th police zone, which is headquartered in Lashkar Gah.

On Monday, Brig. Gen. Charles Cleveland briefed reporters in Kabul on the deployment, saying the troops would provide a "new presence," according to The Associated Press.

Helmand province is protected by the Afghan Army's 215th Corps, which has received much of the U.S. focus during the last year to improve its ability to repel Taliban advances.

As recently as July 28, Gen. John Nicholson, commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, told reporters at the Pentagon

that Afghan forces had largely cleared out of the areas around Lashkar Gah and that fighting there had dwindled.

"Generally speaking, the Afghan Security Forces have accomplished their objectives in Helmand thus far, securing the major population centers. The enemy was active earlier in the year, attacking isolated check points," Nicholson said July 28. "Frankly, in the last two weeks, the enemy activity has dropped off to a much lower level."

Since early August, however, a resurgence of Taliban violence has pushed civilians to retreat into Lashkar Gah from its surrounding areas, according to news reports.

The head of Helmand's provincial council, Kareem Atal, told the AP that battles were underway "on several fronts" in the province, closing off roads and highways.

"Around 80 percent of the

province is under the control of the insurgents," he said. "There are a number of districts that the government claims are under their control, but the government is only present in the district administrative center and all around are under the control of the insurgents."

Helmand's annual \$3 billion opium crop produces most of the world's heroin and is used to fund the insurgency. Its population is mainly Pashtun, the ethnic group from which the Taliban derives most of its support, and the province borders Kandahar, where the Taliban's government was based from 1996 until the U.S.-led invasion in 2001.

The insurgents have stepped up attacks in other parts of the country as well, taking advantage of the warm weather to wage war against the Kabul government.

Judge won't consider prior Bergdahl exploits

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

FORT BRAGG, N.C. — Accused deserter Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl's attempt to join the French Foreign Legion and his time on a weapons range prior to enlisting cannot be used in his court-martial as evidence of his pursuits of adventure, an Army judge ruled Monday.

Those past experiences and stints working on fishing boats in the years before 2006 when Bergdahl enlisted in the Army are irrelevant to proving that he deserted his post, Col. Jeffery R. Nance, the military judge, said during a pretrial motions hearing Monday at Fort Bragg in North Carolina.

Nance said introducing those

acts as evidence would waste time during a court-martial already expected to last up to two weeks.

Last year, the Army charged Bergdahl, 30, with desertion and misbehavior before the enemy after he spent five years in Taliban captivity. The more serious misbehavior charge could send the soldier to prison for the rest of his life. His court-martial is scheduled for February.

In the years before he enlisted, Bergdahl traveled to France in an unsuccessful bid to join the French Foreign Legion, worked on a Texas weapons range that trains special operations forces and worked on fishing boats in Alaska and on a trip between New York and Seattle.

Maj. Jerrod Fussnecker, an

Army prosecutor, argued Monday that those events showed Bergdahl's intent to constantly "seek adventure," saying the soldier retained the same mindset to "show he was a super soldier ... like Jason Bourne" when he walked off Observation Post Mest in eastern Afghanistan in 2009. Bergdahl was captured by Taliban fighters shortly after he left the post.

Nance called the prosecutors' argument a "big logical leap" and added they do not need to prove his motive for leaving.

"You just have to prove he went absent without authority," the judge said.

Bergdahl has admitted to Army investigators that he willingly left the post before he was captured, but he said he did

not intend to desert the Army. Instead, he said he wanted to cause a disturbance that would place him in front of military brass to file complaints about his chain of command.

He was freed from captivity in May 2014 in an exchange for five senior Taliban leaders who had been held at the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

Bergdahl remains on active duty in a desk job at Joint Base San Antonio. He was arraigned on charges of "misbehavior before the enemy by endangering the safety of a command, unit or place" and "desertion with intent to shirk important or hazardous duty" in December, but he has yet to enter a plea.

NIH: Zika virus could spread and persist

The Washington Post

The National Institutes of Health's Anthony Fauci warned that Texas and Louisiana could be next for Zika.

In the weeks since mosquitoes carrying the virus hit U.S. borders, they have already spread from a small suburban community in South Florida to Miami's most popular tourist spot, South Beach.

Fauci, director of the Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said the situation is likely to get worse soon.

"I would not be surprised if

we see cases in Texas and Louisiana, particularly now where you have the situation with flooding in Louisiana," he said. "There are going to be a lot of problems getting rid of standing water."

Over the past year, infections from the virus have reached epidemic proportions in parts of the world. More than 50 countries have been affected, with Brazil being the epicenter.

The U.S. had been mostly spared until now, but officials had said that the arrival of Zika was inevitable because of

the way the mosquitoes travel northward during the summer months.

This month, federal researchers announced that they had begun their first clinical trial of a vaccine in humans. It will involve at least 80 healthy volunteers.

But even in the best-case scenario, it could be a long time before an effective vaccine is available to the public. According to the most optimistic timeline, larger-scale trials could begin in early 2017 with the vaccine. After that, the researchers

would have to go through the Food and Drug Administration approval process and then manufacture and distribute the vaccine.

There had been concern that athletes and tourists returning home after the Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro could accelerate the spread of the virus. According to U.S. health officials, that risk is low other than for four countries: Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea and Yemen.

Still, many countries, including the U.S., are monitoring athletes for signs of Zika.

China stages war games in Sea of Japan

Associated Press

BEIJING — Chinese planes and ships held war games in the Sea of Japan last week, the military said, during which Beijing displayed its latest-generation frigate at a time of bitter territorial disputes with Asian neighbors.

The Defense Ministry said in a statement on its website that the long-range exercises staged Friday pitted a red army against a blue one in a simulated bomber attack on a naval task force.

It quoted the commander of an unidentified flight wing under the East Sea Fleet, Zhang Wenzhong, as saying the planes found, identified and struck their targets in a "radically short time."

The statement made no mention of what sort of conflict the exercise was intended as a response to, prospective foes or why the Sea of Japan was

chosen as the location of the drills.

However, China has grown increasingly assertive over its claim to a chain of uninhabited islands controlled by Japan, recently dispatching more than a dozen coast guard vessels as Chinese fishing vessels swarmed the surrounding waters.

The ministry said the main ships involved in the exercise were the Jingzhou, a latest-generation type 054A class stealth frigate of which China is planning to deploy more than two dozen, and the type 052C destroyer Xi'an.

China also is involved in an intense rivalry with the U.S. over military dominance in the region.

Tensions in the South China Sea have also risen after China refused to accept an international arbitration panel's ruling invalidating its claim to virtually the entire water body.

Japan's first lady visits Pearl Harbor

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan's first lady has visited Pearl Harbor in Hawaii for the first time to pay tribute to the victims of the Japanese attack 75 years ago.

Akie Abe said in a Facebook entry Monday that she laid flowers and prayed at the USS Arizona Memorial.

In a photo posted on Facebook, Abe posed with a U.S. veteran who survived the attack.

Speculation about a visit by Prime Minister Abe to Pearl Harbor has grown since President Barack Obama paid tribute in May to the victims of the U.S. atomic bombing in Hiroshima.

No serving Japanese prime minister has visited Pearl Harbor.

"I've come to Hawaii many times, but I've never visited Pearl Harbor," Akie Abe was quoted as saying in an online "Gendai Business" magazine article linked to her Facebook entry. "As I think about the past war more often over the past year as we mark 70 years since the end of the war, I've felt strongly about visiting the site. I wanted to see the site myself and offer a prayer for those who died."

Judge blocks order on transgender students

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — A federal judge in Texas blocked the Obama administration's order requiring public schools let transgender students use bathrooms and locker rooms consistent with their gender identity.

U.S. District Judge Reed O'Connor ruled that federal education law "is not ambiguous" about sex being defined as "the biological and anatomical differences between male and female students as determined at their birth."

The judge said his order, which applies nationwide, was not about the policy issues of transgender rights but his conclusion that federal officials simply did not follow the rules.

The ruling was the second recent setback for transgender advocates. Earlier this month, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a Virginia school board can block for now a transgender male from using the boys' restroom while justices decide whether to fully intervene.

Texas and 12 other states challenged the White House di-

rective as unconstitutional.

The judge also sided with Republican state leaders who argued that schools should have been allowed to weigh in before the White House directive was announced in May. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton had argued that halting the Obama order before school began was necessary because districts risked losing federal education dollars if they did not comply.

The ruling does not prohibit schools that allow transgender students to use the facilities of their choice from doing so.

Ramirez's HR rallies Indians

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Cleveland Indians manager Terry Francona was relieved following Sunday's 3-2 victory over the Toronto Blue Jays.

Jose Ramirez hit a two-run homer off Brett Cecil in the eighth inning and the Indians rallied to win the series between AL division leaders.

"We won two out of three, and I think we had the lead for like 10 minutes," Francona said.

The series featured three one-run games, large crowds and a playoff-like atmosphere.

"There's no feeling that I can think of like that," Francona said. "Your heart is in your throat but you like it. It's agony, but it's also awesome. That's why we do this."

Tyler Naquin's game-ending, inside-the-park home run gave Cleveland a 3-2 victory Friday, and the Blue Jays won 6-5 Saturday.

Rockies 11, Cubs 4: Nolan Arenado broke out of a slump in a big way, hitting two homers and driving in six runs Sunday to boost host Colorado past Chicago.

Dodgers 4, Reds 0: Chase Utley homered on the fourth pitch of the game, 20-year-old Julio Urias won his third straight decision and Los Angeles beat host Cincinnati to end a

three-game losing streak.

Mets 2, Giants 0: Noah Syndergaard and Jeurys Familia combined on a three-hitter and Yoenis Cespedes homered off Jeff Samardzija, leading visiting New York past San Francisco.

Royals 2, Twins 1: Danny Duffy won his 10th straight decision, Eric Hosmer doubled in the go-ahead run and host Kansas City beat Minnesota for its eighth consecutive win.

Cardinals 9, Phillies 0: Mike Leake pitched seven strong innings and hit a two-run single and St. Louis homered four times to rout host Philadelphia.

Braves 7, Nationals 6 (10): Jace Peterson hit a tiebreaking homer in the 10th inning off Shawn Kelley to lift Atlanta past visiting Washington in a game delayed 1 hour, 4 minutes in the bottom of the eighth.

Astros 5, Orioles 3: Dallas Keuchel was solid through eight innings, Yulieski Gurriel got a hit in his major league debut and Houston beat host Baltimore in a rain-delayed game.

Marlins 3, Pirates 2: Christian Yelich homered in the first inning, Miami added a pair of unearned runs and the Marlins rallied past host Pittsburgh to complete a three-game sweep.

Tigers 10, Red Sox 5: Jus-

tin Upton hit two three-run homers and struggling Detroit finished its homestand with victory over Boston and fill-in starter Henry Owen.

Angels 2, Yankees 0: Albert Pujols had three hits and scored twice on singles by Andrelton Simmons, leading host Los Angeles past New York.

White Sox 4, Athletics 2: Jose Quintana pitched into the eighth innings for his career-best 10th win and Jose Abreu homered for the second straight game to lead host Chicago past Oakland.

Rays 8, Rangers 4: Logan Forsythe homered after missing four games because of back spasms, and Tampa Bay beat visiting Texas to take two of three from the AL West-leading Rangers.

Brewers 7, Mariners 6: Keon Broxton and Chris Carter homered and Scooter Gennett had an RBI single during a four-run ninth inning, and Milwaukee beat host Seattle to end a six-game losing streak.

Padres 9, Diamondbacks 1: Luis Perdomo ended a three-start losing streak, Travis Jankowski and Alex Dickerson homered, and host San Diego beat Arizona.

Tide top preseason AP poll

Associated Press

A few plays are often the difference between a truly successful season at Alabama and one that leaves the Crimson Tide feeling unfulfilled. The finest line separates a championship team and one that comes up just short.

By thinking beyond the slimmest margins that separate winning and losing, Alabama coach Nick Saban has built one of the greatest dynasties in college football history.

The defending national champion Crimson Tide is the No. 1 team in The Associated Press preseason Top 25 for the third time under Saban and the fifth time in the history of the program.

The Tide received 33 of 61 first-place votes from the media panel and 1,469 points in the poll released Sunday. No. 2 Clemson, which lost the College Football Playoff championship game to Alabama in January, received 16 first-place votes and 1,443 points.

Oklahoma is No. 3 in the preseason poll and received four first-place votes. No. 4 Florida State had five first-place votes. No. 5 LSU, No. 6 Ohio State and No. 7 Michigan all received one first-place vote.

Alabama has won an unprecedented four national championships in the last seven seasons, but none has come when the Tide started No. 1 (2010 and 2013). That's one of a couple of trends Alabama will be trying to buck this season. The last preseason No. 1 to win the national championship was Southern California in 2004.

Harvick wins rain-delayed Bristol race

Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Kevin Harvick wasn't worried about his poor qualifying at Bristol Motor Speedway. In fact, starting 24th gave Harvick exactly what he wanted to win at Bristol Motor Speedway.

"It kind of motivates me,"

Harvick said Sunday. "I think it's exciting. I like to pass cars."

Harvick made the biggest pass with 70 laps to go, sweeping by Denny Hamlin and holding on to take the rain-delayed race at the half-mile concrete track.

The victory was Harvick's

second of the season and second at Bristol — his first in 11 years. It also moved him atop the points standings and gave his program a jolt with only three races left until NASCAR's Chase starts.

Ricky Stenhouse Jr. was second, followed by Hamlin, Austin Dillon and Chris Buescher.



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USA dominates medal count

Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO — The U.S. Olympic Team made itself right at home in Rio.

The British, they had a Games to savor as well.

The host Brazilians got soccer gold that they craved, the Russians struggled on the heels of the exposure of a state-sponsored doping program, and the Chinese finished well below expectations.

So went the medal race at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics, where the Americans — with women leading the way — dominated both the gold and overall totals. The U.S. finished with 46 gold medals and 121 medals overall, its 51-total-medal margin over second-place China the largest in a non-boycotted Olympics in nearly a century.

"This experience has been the dream of a lifetime for me," said U.S. gymnast and closing ceremony flagbearer Simone Biles, who won five medals,

four of them gold, in her first Olympics.

For the fourth consecutive games, U.S. swimmer Michael Phelps left with more medals than anyone else. He won six in Rio, while Biles and U.S. swimmer Katie Ledecky each won five to lead a big haul from American women.

U.S. women left Rio with 27 golds — by far the most among any team of female Olympians at these games — and 61 medals total. U.S. track star Allyson Felix, now a six-time gold medalist and a winner of nine medals in all, was particularly delighted to learn that women are bringing more medals home to American than the men.

"Got 'em," Felix said, smiling.

By now, the Americans winning the medal race is almost commonplace. But the significance in Rio were the sheer amounts of hardware.

The previous record for

U.S. medals at a fully attended Olympics was 110, set at Beijing eight years ago. And the margin between first and second in the overall medals race this year tops all others (the boycotted games of 1980 and 1984 excluded) since the Americans won 67 more medals than Italy did at the 1932 Los Angeles Games.

"We weren't sure we were going to have that kind of success coming in," said USOC CEO Scott Blackmun, noting the track and swimming teams had plenty of first-time Olympians.

But Blackmun was thrilled by the results, and he wasn't the only one leaving Rio happy.

Even with far fewer athletes competing in Rio than it had in London four years ago — and no home-field advantage this time, either — Britain got more medals than ever in the modern games. The British won 67 medals in Rio, 27 of them gold

Speedo 1st sponsor to drop Lochte

Associated Press

Ryan Lochte lost his first major sponsor when Speedo USA announced Monday it was dumping the swimmer over a drunken incident during the Rio Olympics that he initially described as an armed robbery.

In a brief statement, Speedo USA said it would donate \$50,000 of Lochte's fee to Save The Children to benefit needy youngsters in Brazil.

"While we have enjoyed a winning relationship with Ryan for over a decade and he has been an important member of the Speedo team, we cannot condone behavior that is counter to the values this brand has long stood for," the swimsuit giant said. "We appreciate his many achievements and hope he moves forward and learns from this experience."

At first, Lochte said he and three swimming teammates were robbed after their taxi was pulled over by armed men posing as police the night after the swimming competition ended in Rio de Janeiro.

He has since apologized for embellishing his version of events.

Speedo's decision is likely to be only the first sanction Lochte faces over a night of partying that ended up tarnishing the reputation of the American team and dominating news away from the stadiums and arenas in the final days of the Rio Games, which ended Sunday night.

The U.S. Olympic Committee and USA Swimming have indicated that Lochte will be punished, perhaps endangering the 32-year-old's hopes of competing in a fifth Olympics at Tokyo in 2020. He could also face the wrath of his other sponsors, including Ralph Lauren and air-weigh premium bedding.

Shields earns another gold

Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO — Claressa Shields had Olympic gold around her neck and a secret keepsake in her warmup jacket pocket. She reached in her pocket, pulled out her first gold from London and slipped the medal over her head.

Two Olympics, two gold medals.

She beamed as she held the medals in her hands for the fans to see — a sparkling reminder that she stood atop the medal stand not only as the best in the world in her class, but as the only American two-time boxing gold medalist.

"I'm going to let the world know and they'll never forget that I have two Olympic gold medals," she said. "Just in case anybody had any questions."

The 21-year-old Flint, Mich., native thumped Dutch fighter Nouchka Fontijn in convincing fashion to wrap up back-to-back middleweight gold.

Shields ran her Olympics record to 6-0, and she hasn't lost a fight since London, winning two world championships and a Pan-American Games title over the last four years.

Shields added the Val Barker trophy as the best boxer in the tournament to her medal tally. She was joined by Uzbek light flyweight Hasanboy Dusmatov, who won the men's Val Barker one week after completing his impressive run to gold. Shields is the sixth American to win a Val Barker Trophy, but the first since Roy Jones Jr. at the 1988 Seoul Games.

Wrestling: American wrestler Kyle Snyder's run to the world title in 2015 was so surprising that some wondered if it was something of a fluke.

Snyder showed he's for real on Sunday, adding an Olympic title to his burgeoning resume.

Snyder, the youngest wrestling world champion in U.S. history, is now the sport's

youngest Olympic champion in U.S. history. The 20-year-old Snyder beat Khetag Goziyev of Azerbaijan 2-1 for gold at 97 kilograms during the men's freestyle tournament.

Men's basketball: The U.S. team got their gold, and they did it easily.

Saving their best for last in a tournament that had been tough, the U.S. convincingly won its third straight gold medal, beating Serbia 96-66 on Sunday.

Kevin Durant scored 30 points and helped the Americans jump out to a huge lead by halftime.

It was the final game with the national team for Mike Krzyzewski, who took the Americans back to the top and leaves with them there after becoming the first coach to win three Olympic gold medals.

Carmelo Anthony also picked up his third gold to go with a bronze, becoming the most decorated male in Olympic basketball history.