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USS Truman deploys after 38 days home

BY CHRISTIAN LOPEZ
AND CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

In line with a new defense strategy aimed at being “strategically predictable, but operationally unpredictable,” the USS Harry S. Truman strike group has left home just 38 days after its last deployment.

The strike group, which includes the Truman aircraft carrier, Carrier Air Wing One and several guided-missile cruisers and destroyers, departed Naval Station Norfolk, Va., on Tuesday to conduct “sustainment operations and carrier qualifications in the Atlantic,” a Navy statement said.

It’s also scheduled to take part in dual-carrier operations with the USS Abraham Lincoln, which has been hosting the Navy’s

version of the F-35 joint strike fighter and recently served as a filming location for the much-anticipated “Top Gun” sequel.

The Truman strike group last deployed on April 11 to the Mediterranean and North Atlantic, but returned to Norfolk on July 21 for what the Navy called a “working port visit” that included routine maintenance and training.

Rear Adm. Gene Black, commander of the Truman strike group, said in the statement that this operational tempo follows the 2018 National Defense Strategy’s “dynamic force employment” concept that calls for more flexibility in the fleet.

“Since April when we began our deployment, our strike group has demonstrated our inherent maneuverability and flexibility as we took part in maritime security operations and evolutions with

several key allies and partners,” he said in the statement.

The USS Ronald Reagan strike group is following a similar schedule in the Western Pacific.

On Aug. 14, it deployed from Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, for the second time this year after spending less than a month at home following a patrol that ran from May until June.

It is unclear how long the Truman and Reagan deployments will last.

The Navy does not discuss future ship movements for security reasons.

“We remain flexible and ready on short notice to deploy whenever and wherever the nation needs, ready to fight,” Black said in the statement.

China, Russia hold unprecedented war games

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

China’s efforts to build an Asia-based military alliance to counter American power in the region took another step forward with unprecedented joint war games that began Friday in Russia.

The Peace Mission 2018 drills held in the Chelyabinsk region near the border of Kazakhstan are the first to include all eight members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, overseer of the war games. China dominates the SCO and has increasingly used it as a vehicle for implementing its regional and international goals.

India and Pakistan will for the first time join Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for the exercise, which focuses on anti-terrorism.

Involved are more than 3,000 troops and 500 weapons and pieces of equipment, including fighter jets, helicopters, tanks,

“Infantry Fighting Vehicles” and self-propelled weapons systems, China state media reported. The exercise concludes Wednesday.

The war games are significant for bringing together troops from India and Pakistan, neighboring countries with a history of military conflicts and mutual mistrust.

“Indian soldiers have never actively participated in a multilateral exercise that included Pakistan in the past,” an unidentified officer of the Indian army told the Times of India newspaper. “Troops from the two countries have, however, worked together in UN missions and operations.”

India sent 200 soldiers to the war games, the newspaper said.

The United States has been seeking stronger military ties with India as a means to push back on China’s growing ambitions in the Indian Ocean region. In May, U.S. Pacific Command was renamed Indo-Pacific Command to more for-

mally include India in a region the U.S. military has dominated since the end of World War II in 1945.

On Sept. 6, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will meet with their Indian counterparts in New Delhi.

Founded in 2001 by six nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has in recent years expanded its scope from political and economic collaboration to include more robust military cooperation, intelligence communications and counterterrorism efforts.

The SCO’s Peace Mission 2018 specifically serves as a means of deepening military relations between China and Russia.

On Monday, high-ranking military officials from the two countries met to negotiate expanding that association, according to the state-run Tass Russian News Agency.

“Today I offer to discuss the prospects of expanding and

deepening our bilateral relations, including holding joint military exercises and exchanging opinions on the situation in the critical regions of the world,” Russian Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov said of meeting in Moscow with Li Zuocheng, head of the Joint Staff Department of the Chinese Central Military Commission, Tass reported.

China is set to participate for the first time in the massive Russian Vostok-2018 military drills in September, China’s state news agency Xinhua reported Tuesday. The drills will involve about 300,000 troops and 1,000 aircraft from Russia’s eastern and central military districts and from the Northern Fleet, Xinhua said.

China will send about 3,200 troops, 900 weaponry items and 30 planes and helicopters for training that will include live-fire strikes and counterattack training, Xinhua said.

Niger ambush prompts Africa training changes

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said the military will modify how special operations forces are prepared for missions in Africa because of a deadly ambush by extremists last year in Niger that revealed a lack of training for troops heading into hot spots.

“On the Niger situation, we are making changes on the personnel assignment policy,” Mattis told Pentagon reporters Tuesday.

“As you know, one of the things we uncovered was some of those troops did not train together, what we thought was for a sufficiently long — long enough time.”

Mattis, who is reviewing changes recommended by U.S. Africa Command, said some new requirements have already been put into place.

An AFRICOM investigation of the October ambush, which killed four U.S. soldiers and brought intense scrutiny to a previously obscure American counterterrorism campaign, determined that the members of the Green Beret and Nigerien team known as Team Ouallam had little experience together as a unit.

“The investigation found that there were areas where training was insufficient, including pre-deployment collective training for Team Ouallam due to high turnover and the assignment of new members,” Maj. Karl Weist, an AFRICOM spokesman, said

Wednesday in a statement.

Mattis directed AFRICOM, U.S. Special Operations Command, the Army and the Pentagon’s personnel and readiness office to develop plans to fix the various shortcomings. Those recommendations were recently submitted to Mattis’ office for consideration.

AFRICOM said it will release more details once Mattis’ review is finished.

While the investigation into the ambush highlighted errors in training and planning, lower-level officers were singled out for missteps rather than senior AFRICOM and SOCOM leaders.

Mattis said there would be no pause in counterterrorism efforts.

Smith named Navy’s top enlisted leader

Stars and Stripes

Fleet Master Chief Petty Officer Russell Smith has been selected as the new master chief petty officer of the Navy, the service announced Wednesday.

“After a thorough and deliberate review process, I am confident that Fleet Master Chief Smith is the right leader to be our Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy,” Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson said in a statement. “I look forward to working with him to advocate for our (sailors) and their families selflessly serving around the world.”

Smith’s selection comes following the announced retirement of Steven Giordano as the Navy’s top enlisted leader in June,

amid allegations that he fostered a hostile work environment in his office. The Navy said Wednesday that an investigation by the inspector general into the allegations against Giordano is ongoing.

Smith becomes the Navy’s 15th master chief petty officer of the Navy. He had been acting in that role since June. Richardson made the announcement from the Washington Navy Yard, alongside Smith and several chief-selects in their physical training uniforms.

“I am humbled and awed and even though I had a couple of minutes’ heads up, I’m still a bit speechless,” Smith said in a video posted on the Navy’s Facebook page. “Frankly, I can’t imagine how tough

the choice was because of the quality of the master chiefs we have in our Navy So thank you, sir, for this great opportunity and I won’t let you down.”

Richardson went on to praise Smith as someone who embodies “professionalism, expertise and humility and leadership.”

Smith takes over the post officially after working as fleet master chief for manpower, personnel, training and education, according to his Navy biography. Prior to that, he served as command master chief aboard the destroyer USS Momsen.

He joined the Navy in 1988 and began his career as an airman, later becoming a weapons technician and an intelligence specialist.

Pentagon: No price tag yet for Trump’s Space Force

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon does not yet know how much the nascent Space Force will cost, but nonetheless is working with Congress to write legislation creating the new military branch proposed by President Donald Trump, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Tuesday.

“We have not done the costing estimates (on Space Force), that’s underway right now,” Mattis told reporters during a rare on-camera appearance in the Pentagon’s briefing room.

Earlier this month, Vice President Mike

Pence announced the administration’s decision to create a Space Force as a branch of the military by 2020. While Congress had considered and rejected this idea over the last two years, the Trump administration laid out an ambitious agenda for the development of the first new military department since the Air Force was moved out of the Army in 1947.

As part of the fiscal 2019 defense authorization bill, Congress instructed the Pentagon to create a unified space command, replacing the current Space Command that is part of the Air Force. Mattis, flanked by Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the

Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that effort was already underway.

“Now we are implementing the National Defense Authorization Act and its provision for unified space command, in line with the president’s vision for a needed Space Force, while revising our vision for defending our assets in space and revising antiquated space acquisition processes,” Mattis said. “We are working now with Congress on our way ahead with regard to needed legislation for a separate department.”

Dunford said team leaders for the unified space command effort met on Monday.

Final 365 troops battling Calif. fires soon to head home

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Roughly 365 troops now remain in support of efforts to control the wildfires in California, as firefighters slowly contain the historic blazes, said Col. Robert Spano, a commander for the state's National Guard wildfire operations.

At the peak of operations, more than 1,000 soldiers from the National Guard and Army helped fight the fires. The Nevada and Colorado National Guards also contributed soldiers and aircraft.

California's fire season had an early and aggressive start this year, including the Mendocino Complex Fire becoming the largest in state history, burning more than 410,000 acres. It is now 90 percent contained, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Since July 26, C-130 aircraft from units in California and Nevada have been used to provide fire support to more than eight large fires, performed 233 missions and dropped more than 640,000 gallons of retardant. On Monday, the C-130s stopped operations. However, there are still many rotary-wing aircraft on scene performing water bucket drops and medical evacuations, Spano said. More so, about 200 soldiers from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., are still working on the ground with crews creating fire lines, but they are expected to return to their base on about Sept. 6. The rotary-wing crews could return home to California, Colorado and Nevada shortly thereafter.

"Even when we release the water buckets, the last thing to come off the fires will be medevac," Spano said. "As we get close to 100 percent containment, it makes their mission more critical."

At that time, crews can be at higher risk as they continue to create fire lines, he said.

Once this round of operations ends and the guard returns home, that's when what Spano calls the "fire break" begins.

"Fire break for us means the break of three weeks in September before we go on to [the] next fires in October," he said. "I tell everyone don't get complacent."

During this break, crews will reset and procure equipment and supplies and get ready for the next time.

"We know we're in this for the long haul," Spano said. "We know what the conditions are in California, 130 million dead trees and prolonged drought, and years before mitigation measures might have an impact on reducing wildfires."

"Right now we are the mitigation measures," he added. "We're going to continue to posture ourselves to always be ready."

Lasting US troop presence in Afghanistan not expected

The Washington Post

The United States will maintain a permanent diplomatic presence in Afghanistan, but the Pentagon does not expect an endless large-scale military mission there, the most senior U.S. military officer said Tuesday.

Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, pushed back at the notion that the United States was locked in a never-ending war in Afghanistan, which Washington and allies invaded in 2001 in what was expected to be a brief campaign against extremists.

Today, the Trump administration is conducting a re-energized campaign aimed at helping Afghan troops combat a large and powerful Taliban force. This weekend, the ninth American commander of international forces in Afghanistan, Army Lt. Gen. Austin "Scott" Miller, is set to take command, marking another inflection point in what has become the United States' longest war.

"We have permanent interests in South Asia, diplomatic interests and security interests. And we're going to maintain a presence to have influence in that region," Dunford said. "The form of that presence is going to change over time. ... But I certainly don't expect that the current forces that we have in Afghanistan represents an enduring large military commitment."

There are about 15,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, down from a peak of about 100,000 under President Barack Obama's surge. While officials expect that the U.S. force could shrink in the future with a hoped-for improvement in security, the United States has maintained large military footprints in some other nations, including Japan, Germany and South Korea, for decades.

Dunford and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, in a rare appearance in the Penta-

gon briefing room, highlighted the efforts of Afghan security forces and said their opponent, the Taliban, was showing signs of increased interest in negotiating a settlement to end the war.

Mattis pushed back against suggestions that a recent Taliban offensive in the Afghan city of Ghazni had demonstrated the weakness of local forces. Afghan troops required assistance from U.S. forces to fight a ferocious Taliban onslaught in Ghazni.

"This is not an easy fight. We've never said it was," Mattis said. "But I don't believe that you can use this example as emblematic, because if you look at where the Taliban were and what they were claiming they were going to do two years ago, one year ago, they have not succeeded in taking down these towns and holding these towns."

Mattis said Afghan forces had taken "serious casualties" over the past year and had remained in the fight, a sign of their determination. He suggested that support was growing among Taliban fighters for cease-fires like the one that was imposed temporarily in June.

The Taliban more recently rejected an offer from President Ashraf Ghani to begin another mutual cease-fire.

"There's a lot more to this than purely traditional military who-shot-who today," Mattis said. "We think there are positive reasons to stick with the strategy. And we are going to drive this to a negotiated settlement."

The Trump administration is hoping that increased military pressure will help spark peace talks, but so far the Taliban have refused to negotiate with the Afghan government.

Mattis also dismissed a proposal from Blackwater founder Erik Prince to replace U.S. military personnel with private contractors in Afghanistan.

USS McCain crew celebrates late senator's 82nd birthday

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The crew of the USS John S. McCain shared a birthday cake Wednesday to commemorate what would have been late Sen. John McCain's 82nd birthday.

A photo posted to the guided-missile destroyer's official Facebook page shows a white cake with "Happy Birthday Maverick!" written in blue icing. A message accompanying the image said the crew's mess has been christened the "Maverick

Café" in his honor.

McCain died Saturday after a battle with brain cancer. Last month, the former naval officer was added as a namesake for the ship, which also honors his Navy admiral father and grandfather. The USS McCain has been undergoing repairs at Yokosuka following a collision last year that killed 10 sailors near Singapore.

From staff reports

Inhofe's committee won't be like McCain's

CQ-Roll Call

With the death of John McCain, the Senate Armed Services gavel will almost certainly pass to James Inhofe, of Oklahoma, marking a significant change in leadership style and priorities for the powerful panel.

While the boisterous McCain was a hard-charging critic of both the Pentagon and the commander in chief, the more subdued Inhofe is, in many ways, the opposite.

During his time as the Armed Services Committee's ranking member from 2013 to 2015, the Oklahoma Republican rarely raised his voice, a marked contrast to McCain's sometimes fiery outbursts from the committee's podium or Senate floor.

And while McCain was a persistent and vocal critic of the Trump administration, including Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, Inhofe often defers to Mattis on major issues and has lauded President Donald Trump's foreign-policy decisions.

"I do disagree on a few things with McCain," Inhofe told reporters at a November break-

fast after McCain had said he worked better with former Defense Secretary Ash Carter, who served under President Barack Obama, than Mattis.

"Mattis, he's a godsend," Inhofe said.

Beyond Mattis, Inhofe's relationship with the president has also been far warmer than McCain's famously fraught relationship with Trump.

Before Trump won the presidency, he invited Inhofe to Trump Tower in New York to discuss military issues. Since Trump assumed office, Inhofe has praised Trump's decision to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem and has praised Trump's nuclear talks with North Korea.

Inhofe and McCain were also of different minds on policy issues affecting the military and its vast bureaucracy.

During Senate debate last year on the fiscal 2018 defense authorization act, McCain offered an amendment that would have created a new Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) commission to review all military installations. The proposal could have potentially

started a new controversial BRAC round, but the amendment ultimately failed.

Inhofe, who isn't altogether against the BRAC process, opposed starting a new round when the Trump administration and the Republican-controlled Congress were in the nascent stages of a military build-up.

With Inhofe now expected to helm the Senate Armed Services Committee, Pentagon hopefuls with careers in defense contracting — a sore spot for McCain, who worried about the so-called revolving door — could also face less scrutiny.

In November, McCain and Massachusetts Democrat Elizabeth Warren teamed up during the confirmation hearing for John C. Rood, a former vice president at Lockheed Martin and Trump's nominee for undersecretary of defense for policy. Rood stumbled in answering questions from Warren on if he would completely recuse himself from Pentagon discussions that relate to the Pentagon's biggest contractor.

"I don't like your answers," McCain told Rood, who was

ultimately confirmed. "I suggest you answer the question or you're going to have trouble getting through the committee."

Inhofe, however, is not as inherently suspicious of industry executives-turned-Pentagon officials.

"They're bringing knowledge with them on how to do things and do things cheaper," Inhofe has said. "There's kind of a tendency to assume that somehow industry is all on the take and that they're the bad guys. But look, they're the knowledgeable ones."

With Inhofe at the helm, the committee can expect more hearings on China's military ascension, Africa issues, and space. Following the Pentagon's January release of the National Defense Strategy, which labeled Russia and China as the nation's top security threats, Inhofe has traveled the globe and has witnessed China's rise firsthand.

Inhofe also was instrumental in standing up U.S. Africa Command, a unified combatant command with geographic responsibility for nearly the entire continent.

Former Marine arrested after drug-related killing in Taiwan

By MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

A man who identified himself as a former U.S. Marine has been arrested in connection with a grisly drug-related homicide on Taiwan, multiple media reports said.

Ewart Odane Bent, 30, was taken into custody Aug. 24 by Taiwanese police in the killing of Ramgahan Sanjay Ryan, 43, a Canadian who was hacked to death and dismembered with machetes on the evening of Aug. 21, according to the English-language Taiwan News.

Both Bent and Ryan were English teachers who allegedly became involved with a local drug ring, the report said. Ryan was believed to have become a police informant.

After his arrest, Bent was taken to the New Taipei Public Prosecutor's Office, the Taiwan News said. It is unclear when he will be officially charged.

Bent has denied involvement in the slaying, said the report, citing the Hong Kong-based tabloid Daily Apple.

Bent moved to the island at the behest

of Israeli-American tattoo shop owner and former Israel Defense Forces soldier Oren Shlomo Mayer, 37, the Taiwan News said. The Daily Apple described Mayer as a "drug dealer" and the "largest supplier of marijuana in northern Taiwan."

Before his death, Ryan had "heated disputes" with Mayer and Bent over drugs, the Taiwan News said. The pair is alleged to have ambushed him while he walked his dog at a riverside park in New Taipei City.

Mayer and Bent allegedly moved Ryan to a secluded area, tied him down with a chain and hacked him with the machetes, the report said. They then severed his head and limbs with a wire saw, and the body parts were placed in white trash bags and dumped in the Xindian River.

The dog ran home and reportedly led two of Ryan's friends to his body the next day.

Police began to focus their investigation on Bent because Ryan's phone showed they had argued over drugs, the Taiwan News said. Bent's phone also placed him in the area at the time of the killing.

Mayer fled to the Philippines shortly af-

terward, the report said. Taiwan has been working with the Philippine government to have him extradited.

Police also arrested Wu Hsuan, 21, a Taiwanese-Canadian man who works as a promoter for a Taipei nightclub, the Taiwan News reported. Wu allegedly colluded with Bent and Mayer in selling drugs at the club.

Wu admitted to police that he purchased two machetes for the men on Aug. 18 and stood lookout while they killed Ryan, the Taiwan News said. Wu was released Monday on about \$10,000 bail.

On his Instagram account, Bent describes himself as a former Marine trained in mixed martial arts. Some social media photos show a large "U.S.M.C." tattoo on one of his arms.

Marine officials on Okinawa said they could not comment on the reports, but referred Stars and Stripes to Marine Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C. Headquarters then referred questions to Manpower and Reserve Affairs, which had not responded by publication time.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man jumps 50 feet off bridge to avoid crash

MD ROCKVILLE — Maryland police said a man jumped 50 feet from a bridge just outside Washington to avoid crashing cars.

News outlets cite a Maryland State Police release saying Toray Lamond Guider's car struck the guardrail Sunday on the Capital Beltway and overturned, but he was able to get out and walk to the right shoulder. An off-duty fire and rescue worker, William Schnaekel, 45, of Dallastown, Pa., pulled his car in front of Guider's to help.

Police said a car driven by Fatemeh Beshkari, 46, then crashed into the overturned car and the rear of Shanaekel's vehicle.

Police believe Guider, 43, jumped at that point to avoid getting hit by the car. He remains hospitalized. Schnaekel and Beshkari also received medical treatment.

Poet laid to rest under unique tombstone

ME BRUNSWICK — The founder of the Dead Poets Society of America has been laid to rest under a special tombstone he commissioned before suffering a fatal heart attack.

The family of Walter Skold read poetry, including some of his works, during the ceremony Monday at Pine Grove Cemetery in Brunswick. His remains were buried under a slate tombstone carved with a dancing skeleton at the top. Carved on the bottom, hidden from view under the dirt, were these words: "This here rock's a talking stone just like Walt, who's turned to bone."

Skold combined humor, history and the macabre in his travels to the gravesites of more than 600 poets after launching

the Dead Poets Society in 2008 in Maine, drawing inspiration for the name from the 1989 Robin Williams movie.

He died at 57 in January, a little more than a month after enlisting the son of novelist John Updike to carve a unique grave marker.

Woman, 70, says she was kept in kennel

TX MALAKOFF — An East Texas man and woman have been arrested after a woman, 70, said they kept her in a kennel, beat and kicked her, withheld food and water and forced her to walk on broken glass.

Tyler television station KLTW reported that Leonnia Darlene Anderson Castillo, 47, of Log Cabin, remains in the Henderson County Jail in Athens charged with first-degree felony injury to the elderly.

Tommy Lee Anderson, 49, of Malakoff, is charged with felony unlawful restraint and is out on bail.

A police affidavit says the victim approached a Malakoff police officer and said she had been staying with the woman, to whom she is related, and her boyfriend when the ordeal began last January. Other relatives rescued her on Aug. 22.

Man dresses as woman, takes video in bathroom

SC GREENVILLE — Authorities said a man wearing a wig, makeup and women's clothing tried to take a picture of a woman from under the stall divider of a South Carolina convenience store bathroom.

Greenville police said a woman told investigators she knocked on a stall door Sunday and heard a male voice, but wasn't initially bothered after peeking under the door and see-

ing women's shoes.

But police said the woman then saw a cellphone appear under the divider from the next stall and called 911.

Police told media outlets they arrested Shawn Thomas Hallett, 38, of Levelland, Texas, after finding a video of the woman on his phone. He was charged with voyeurism.

Large hornets' nest removed from car

OH ALLIANCE — European hornets have been removed after building a large nest in a car in Ohio — a scene that looked like a horror movie.

Travis Watson, who owns The Bee Man, was called into action after the nest was found inside the El Camino on Sunday.

Watson told WJW-TV the queens emerge from hibernation in April, and it takes a long time to get workers in the nest. Once the queen starts to only lay eggs, the nest starts growing quite rapidly in July.

Watson said the hornets aggressively defend the nest and can sting repeatedly. He wore a triple-layer suit and sting-proof gloves while blowing a powder into the nest.

Tiggs the lizard found safe weeks after escape

MA WILMINGTON — A Massachusetts woman's 3½-foot lizard that went missing nearly a month ago is home again safe and sound.

Liz Rose said her black-and-white tegu lizard, named Tiggs, was found close to her home in a neighbor's shed on Sunday, no worse for wear other than being a little skinnier.

The Wilmington woman told The Sun, of Lowell, the lizard native to South America escaped his outdoor enclosure on July 31 and had evaded capture

attempts for weeks. She'd even tried to set traps for Tiggs, 4, using chicken and quail eggs.

Hundreds of fish die in lagoon in tony town

CA LOS ANGELES — California officials are trying to solve a stinky mystery: A die-off has left hundreds of fish floating in a recently restored lagoon on the tony Malibu coast.

California State Parks Angeles District Superintendent Craig Sap said Monday that scientists believe the Malibu Lagoon die-off, which began Aug. 22, is likely caused by the unusually warm water temperatures.

Pot package falls off trailer; 2 arrested

NE KEARNEY — Two people arrested in south-central Nebraska are facing possible prison time for hauling marijuana, including some that had fallen onto Interstate 80.

The Kearney Hub reported that Charlie Red, 49, of Sedalia, Colo., and Damaisy De La Caridad Rodriguez, 29, of Miami, pleaded no contest Friday in Buffalo County District Court to felony distribution of marijuana. They face up to 20 years in prison.

Authorities said a motorist saw and then picked up a package that fell from a flatbed trailer being pulled by a pickup on Interstate 80 on Jan. 19. It contained marijuana.

The pickup soon stopped on the interstate shoulder, and Red and Caridad Rodriguez eventually were met by a Nebraska state trooper. The trooper then discovered a false compartment on the bottom of the trailer and several plastic bags of marijuana.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Tide's reign undermines SEC coaches

Associated Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — The decade-long chase to catch Alabama has caused patience to wear thin across the rest of the Southeastern Conference.

As Nick Saban and Alabama chase their sixth national title in 10 seasons, five of the SEC's other 13 programs have new coaches. It represents the league's highest turnover since 1946, when the SEC had six new coaches.

The new faces this year include Texas A&M's Jimbo Fisher, Mississippi State's Joe Moorhead, Arkansas' Chad Morris, Florida's Dan Mullen and Tennessee's Jeremy Pruitt. Mississippi's Matt Luke was an interim coach last year but was hired on a permanent basis after the season.

"I don't think there's one reason for the turnover," Georgia athletic director Greg McGarity said. "It's just a wide range of things. I think the competitiveness in this conference with the records and success we've had, certainly others want to experience that same success."

SEC Network analyst Gene Chizik believes there is one: Alabama's supremacy. Rivals look at the Crimson Tide's success and wonder why they can't put together a similar run.

"Look at all the teams out

there that think they should be — not beat, [but] be like — Alabama," said Chizik, the coach of Auburn's 2010 national championship team. "A&M thinks they should. Auburn thinks they should. LSU thinks they should. Georgia thinks they should. Florida thinks they should.

"I think that obviously the expectations have grown with salaries of coaches, and Alabama being the standard in the league has definitely put pressure on everybody to win."

The flurry of SEC coaching changes continues a trend. Only four of the league's 14 coaches — Saban, Auburn's Gus Malzahn, Vanderbilt's Derek Mason and Kentucky's Mark Stoops — have more than two full seasons of experience in their current positions.

The only league that has undergone more coaching turnover during that span is the American Athletic Conference. The difference is that most of the American coaches left voluntarily to take higher-profile jobs. Virtually all the SEC coaching changes have been firings, the exception coming when Florida hired Mullen away from Mississippi State.

SEC coaches understand the competitive nature of the league and how it can impact job security.

"The conference is what it is," Stoops said. "Might as well be the AFC East."

Fisher has the most security of the new coaches, as Texas A&M lured him away from Florida State with a 10-year contract that guarantees him \$75 million. Most coaches don't have that kind of leverage and must realize the risks that come with coaching in the SEC.

"People have set a very high standard in this league and have committed resources to being successful," Tennessee athletic director Phillip Fulmer said. "When you're not, you [try] something else."

Lately, nobody has set a higher standard than Alabama.

"At this point in time, Alabama is the gold standard," Ole Miss athletic director Ross Bjork said. "Florida was the gold standard a few years back. Tennessee won a national championship 20 years ago. Things are going to go in cycles. Alabama's cycle has lasted longer than most, but I think you make your decisions for what you need, not just because one program has this or that."

Some schools have tried to replicate Saban's success by hiring one of his former assistants.

Pruitt and Georgia's Kirby Smart are former Alabama defensive coordinators. Fish-

er and South Carolina's Will Muschamp were assistants on Saban's LSU staffs in the early 2000s, with Muschamp also following Saban to the NFL's Miami Dolphins in 2005.

Georgia's fared the best with a former Saban assistant. The Bulldogs won the SEC title last season before losing the national championship game in overtime to Alabama.

The Saban coaching tree hasn't been as fruitful for other SEC rivals. Florida dismissed Muschamp in 2014 and replaced him with former Alabama offensive coordinator Jim McElwain, who lost his job last year. Pruitt marks Tennessee's second try with a former Saban assistant; Derek Dooley was fired in 2012.

All the recent upheaval in the coaching ranks has created an unusual dynamic in the SEC, with no coach clearly on the hot seat as the season opens.

Chizik says it's unlikely to stay that way for long. Chizik was fired at Auburn just two years after his national championship season.

"Here's the bottom line," Chizik said. "As we kick off in early September, in this league I would say there are very few (SEC coaches) or none who are probably on the hot seat. That can absolutely change by the end of October."

Spartans RB Scott eager for senior season

Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. — The NFL can wait for now. LJ Scott is back at Michigan State with a list of areas he'd like to shore up.

"Improving on my yards after contact, my speed as well," the senior running back said. "I feel like I haven't did enough of catching out of the backfield. I would like to see a little more of that."

Scott's return after his junior season was big news for the Spartans, who now look like Big Ten title contenders in 2018. After three consistently productive seasons in East Lansing, it wouldn't have been a big surprise if Scott had turned pro, but he decided to come back to Michigan State

— and now he sounds like he'd welcome a bigger workload this year.

"Twenty-five, 30 carries a game would be good for me," Scott said. "Even more would be even better."

The 11th-ranked Spartans open the season Friday night against Utah State.

Scott rushed for 699 yards and 11 touchdowns as a freshman in 2015, and he scored the winning TD in the final minute of the Big Ten title game that year. Since then, he has remained an important part of the offense, although he has yet to rush for 1,000 yards in a season.

His receptions total inched up to 20 last year, but that wasn't a huge part of his game. Part of the reason Scott now expects a bigger role is because Michigan State no

longer has running backs Madre London and Gerald Holmes, who combined for 162 carries a season ago.

Scott ran for 898 yards on a career-high 201 carries last year. He also fumbled five times, so that's another area in which there's room for improvement.

"He's got to hold onto the football. I don't think there's any question about that," coach Mark Dantonio said. "He was very good really the two previous years, I felt."

Michigan State could have a pretty balanced offense this year with quarterback Brian Lewerke orchestrating the passing game — and Lewerke's running ability also takes some pressure off Scott.

"One of the top things that was on my mind was stay healthy," he said.

Djokovic overcomes stifling US Open heat

Associated Press

NEW YORK — His cheeks red, hair matted with sweat, Novak Djokovic appeared to be in such distress as he trudged to a changeover on a steamy U.S. Open afternoon that someone suggested it would be a good idea to have a trash can at the ready, just in case he lost his lunch.

Djokovic sat down and removed his shirt. He guzzled water from a plastic bottle. He placed one cold towel around his neck, a second across his lap and a third between his bare upper back and the seat.

He was not even 1½ hours into his first match at Flushing Meadows in two years, and while Djokovic eventually would get past Marton Fucsovics 6-3, 3-6, 6-4, 6-0 Tuesday, it was a bit of an ordeal.

“Survival mode,” Djokovic called it.

With the temperature topping 95 degrees and the humidity approaching 50 percent — and that combination making it feel more like 105 — nearly everything became a struggle for every player across the grounds on Day 2 of the U.S. Open, so much so that no fewer than six quit their matches, with five cit-

ing cramps or heat exhaustion.

About 2 hours into the day’s schedule, the U.S. Tennis Association decided to do something it never had at this tournament: offer men the chance to take a 10-minute break before the fourth set if a match went that far. That is similar to the existing rule for women, which allows for 10 minutes of rest before a third set when there is excessive heat.

“At the end of the day, the ATP or a lot of the supervisors, they’re kind of sitting in their offices, where [there’s] an A.C. system on, where it’s cool. And we have to be out there. They tell us it’s fine; they’re not the ones playing,” said No. 4 seed Alexander Zverev, who won in straight sets in the early evening, when it was far less harsh. “For sure, the rule should be more strict. There should be a certain temperature, certain conditions where we shouldn’t be playing.”

How bad was it out there at its worst Tuesday?

“Bloody hot,” said two-time major semifinalist Johanna Konta, who lost 6-2, 6-2 to No. 6 Caroline Garcia.

“Brutal,” said 2014 U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic, who ad-

vanced when his opponent retired in the third set.

“Really not easy,” said three-time Grand Slam title winner Angelique Kerber, who defeated Margarita Gasparyan 7-6 (5), 6-3.

“Terrible. It’s awful out there,” said Tennys Sandgren, an American who won in straight sets and will face Djokovic in the second round. “I don’t know how guys are hanging in there. I was thinking in the third set, like, ‘It’s getting really bad. I just don’t know how long I have to play out there.’ And I think everybody kind of feels similarly.”

Djokovic certainly did.

“Everything is boiling — in your body, the brain, everything,” said Djokovic, who’s won two of his 13 Grand Slam titles in New York but sat out last year’s U.S. Open because of an injured right elbow.

In the last match on Ashe, 2017 runner-up Madison Keys advanced with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over 71st-ranked Pauline Parmentier of France. The final match of Day 2 was in Louis Armstrong Stadium, where five-time major champion Maria Sharapova got past 39-year-old Patty Schnyder 6-2,

7-6 (6). Schnyder, who retired in 2011 but is now back on tour, was the oldest woman to qualify for a Grand Slam tournament.

Djokovic was appreciative of the chance to recover a bit after the third set. He even took about a minute for a quick ice bath — as did Fucsovics, nearby.

“Naked in the ice baths, next to each other,” Djokovic said. “It was quite a magnificent feeling, I must say.” Because action began at 11 a.m., and the USTA implemented the heat rule for men at about 1 p.m., those playing in the earliest matches weren’t able to get that sort of relief.

That included Italy’s Stefano Travaglia, who quit in the fourth set of his match after feeling dizzy and cramps. Afterward, he said, he could barely walk.

“My head was spinning. ... I didn’t have any energy. I saw four balls when I swung. It was a terrible feeling. I couldn’t stay on court,” he said. “There was no sense in continuing. Things probably would have gotten worse. I probably would have hurt myself.”

USMNT, Sounders striker Dempsey retires

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Former U.S. national team captain and Seattle Sounders striker Clint Dempsey announced his retirement on Wednesday, effective immediately.

In a statement issued by the Sounders, the 35-year-old Dempsey said he believes it’s the right time to call it quits after playing soccer professionally for 15 years.

“After a lot of thought, my family and I have decided that this is the right time for me to step away from the game,” Dempsey said. “I’d like to thank all of the teammates, coaches and support staff that I’ve worked with throughout my career. It has always been my dream to make it as a pro. I’m grateful to have been on this ride. I would like to thank all of the fans who have supported me throughout my career with the New England Revolution, Fulham, Tottenham, Seattle Sounders and the U.S. men’s

national team.

“Y’all have always made me feel at home, and it is something that I will always remember.”

Dempsey is tied with Landon Donovan as the greatest U.S. goal scorer, scoring 57 international goals in 141 appearances. He captained the U.S. in the 2014 World Cup in Brazil when the Americans reached the knockout stage before losing to Belgium in the round of 16.

Dempsey had a decorated career overseas in England, most notably with Fulham, before returning to MLS in 2013 with the Sounders. His return to Seattle was a major moment for MLS — an American player who had success in England made the decision to return to the league with good years still remaining on his career.

He missed the second half of the 2016 season with a heart condition that put his career in jeopardy, but he returned to Se-

attle the next season after being cleared by doctors. Dempsey was the MLS Comeback Player of the Year last season when he again became the leading scorer for the Sounders and reclaimed a place on the U.S. national team.

Dempsey’s role with the Sounders this season has decreased and Seattle has made roster additions. He had just one goal in 14 games this season for Seattle and had been sidelined with a back injury. Dempsey’s last game was July 25, when he played 11 minutes as a sub against San Jose.

“Clint Dempsey has been one of the most impactful players in the history of the sport in our country. From his early success with the New England Revolution to his achievements both as a top player in the English Premier League and for the U.S. Men’s National Team, Clint showed us that there are no limits for an American player,” MLS commissioner Don Garber said.

Pinch-running pitcher's gaffe costs Phillies

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Vince Velasquez was aggressive at the wrong time.

Velasquez, a pinch-running pitcher, was called out for leaving second base early while tagging up, resulting in a game-ending double play that gave the Washington Nationals a 5-4 win over the Philadelphia Phillies on Tuesday.

After Aaron Nola outpitched Max Scherzer for the second time in six days in a matchup of NL Cy Young Award contenders, the Phillies watched Washington rally for three runs in the ninth to take a 5-3 lead.

Wilson Ramos got Philadelphia within a run with a pinch-hit double in the bottom half, and Velasquez ran for the catcher. Greg Holland relieved and retired Jorge Alfaro on a fly ball to center, with Velasquez moving to third as the potential tying run. Velasquez slid past the bag but wasn't tagged.

The Nationals, however, appealed that Velasquez left too soon, and he was called out. A replay upheld the ruling.

"I wasn't nervous. I was trying to put pressure on the outfielder," Velasquez said.

Manager Gabe Kapler told Velasquez after the game he should've stayed on second.

"He's an inexperienced runner who gave us a valiant effort," Kapler said. "He got overzealous."

Anthony Rendon hit a go-ahead, two-run homer off Pat Neshek (1-1) in the Nationals ninth. The Nationals trailed 3-2 when Bryce Harper drew a leadoff walk from Tommy Hunter. Neshek surrendered Rendon's 17th homer, and Washington added another run on an error after Ryan Zimmerman hit his third double of the game and stole third.

"I was just trying to see a pitch to hit," Rendon said about connecting on a 1-2 slider.

It was the latest gut-wrenching loss for the Phillies, who are 6-13 since Aug. 8 and fell 4½ games behind NL East-leading Atlanta.

"It's a super difficult loss to swallow," Kapler said. "I don't worry about this group. They're tenacious and resilient."

Alfaro and Odubel Herrera hit homers

off Scherzer to hand Nola a 3-0 lead. But poor defense and a shaky bullpen blew it.

Nola gave up two runs — one earned — and four hits, striking out eight in seven innings. He threw eight dominant innings in Philadelphia's 2-0 win at Washington last Thursday.

Scherzer gave up three runs and four hits in five innings, tying for his shortest outing of the season on April 4 at Atlanta.

"It was awesome," Scherzer said of the comeback. "A great team win."

Herrera, who hit a two-run shot off Scherzer last week, gave the Phillies a 1-0 lead in the fourth. Batting cleanup for the first time in his career, Herrera drove a 2-2 fastball into the right-field seats for his 21st homer. Alfaro connected in the fifth.

Nola took a shutout into the seventh before Rendon led off with a single and Zimmerman hit a double with one out. Matt Wieters followed with a grounder to first. Carlos Santana stepped on the bag for the second out but made an errant throw home allowing Zimmerman to also score.

Roundup

Athletics end Astros' 6-game streak

Associated Press

HOUSTON — One night after misplaying a fly ball that led to a six-run inning by the Astros, Nick Martini quickly got over his miscue and came up with another big hit against Houston.

Martini hit a tiebreaking double in the ninth inning and the Oakland Athletics defeated Houston 4-3 Tuesday night, snapping the Astros' six-game winning streak.

The A's moved within 1½ games of the AL West-leading Astros.

"That's a great team win," Edwin Jackson said. "It's a big win for us. It's no secret we needed to come out today and get a win after [Monday's] game."

Ramon Laureano drew a one-out walk from Roberto Osuna (1-2), Jonathan Lucroy singled and Martini followed with his double.

Martini misplayed a fly ball by Josh Reddick and then over-

threw second in the eighth inning of Monday's 11-4 win by the Astros.

Martini also hit a tying RBI double in the ninth against Houston on Aug. 17.

Red Sox 8, Marlins 7: J.D. Martinez scored when Marlins shortstop JT Riddle threw away a potential double-play ball in the ninth inning, lifting host Boston over Miami following a wild, back-and-forth final two innings.

Boston snapped a three-game skid and avoided its first four-game losing streak of the season.

Braves 9, Rays 5: Pinch-runner Adam Duvall scored the tiebreaking run on a delayed dash from third base in host Atlanta's four-run eighth inning, and the Braves beat Tampa Bay to snap the Rays' eight-game winning streak.

Yankees 5, White Sox 4: Pinch-hitter Neil Walker connected for a solo home run in the bottom of the ninth inning, and host New York rallied from

a four-run deficit.

Aaron Hicks hit a tying homer in the eighth and rookie Miguel Andujar also had a two-run shot to help the injury-depleted Yankees win for the ninth time in 11 games.

Orioles 12, Blue Jays 5: Josh Rogers won his major league debut, Tim Beckham hit a three-run homer and host Baltimore rolled over Toronto.

Indians 8, Twins 1: Carlos Carrasco struck out 11 and withstood another scary Minnesota line drive, pitching host Cleveland past the Twins.

Royals 6, Tigers 2: Jakob Junis held scuffling Detroit to six hits in his first career complete game, Adalberto Mondesi homered to spur a five-run frame and host Kansas City beat the Tigers.

Reds 9, Brewers 7: Jose Peraza started Junior Guerra's rough outing with a two-run homer, and host Cincinnati withstood Christian Yelich's first multihomer game.

Dodgers 8, Rangers 4:

Manny Machado drove in four runs, Brian Dozier hit his 20th homer of the season and visiting Los Angeles beat the Texas for their fourth win in a row.

Cardinals 5, Pirates 2: Jose Martinez and Tyler O'Neill homered, rookie Jack Flaherty pitched seven innings and host St. Louis beat Pittsburgh in Mike Shildt's first game since being promoted to full-time manager.

Rockies 3, Angels 2: Carlos Gonzalez hit a two-run homer in the first inning and Colorado beat host Los Angeles to split their series.

Padres 2, Mariners 1: Travis Jankowski homered on Felix Hernandez's first pitch and rookie Jacob Nix came within two outs of a complete game in his fourth big league start for host San Diego.

Giants 1, Diamondbacks 0: Pinch-hitter Gorkys Hernandez singled home the winning run with one out in the ninth inning, lifting host San Francisco to a win against Arizona.