

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Beijing nixes US ships' Hong Kong visits

By CHRISTIAN LOPEZ

Stars and Stripes

The Chinese government has denied two U.S. Navy vessels entry to Hong Kong for scheduled port calls as pro-democracy protests continue in that city.

The amphibious dock ship USS Green Bay intended to make a visit on Saturday and the guided-missile cruiser USS Lake Erie planned to stop there next month, Cmdr. Nate Christensen, deputy spokesman for U.S. Pacific Fleet, told Stars and Stripes on Wednesday in an email.

The Green Bay is part of the Wasp Expeditionary Strike Group at Sasebo Naval Base,

Japan. The Lake Erie is homeported in San Diego.

Christensen directed to Beijing questions regarding why the request was denied.

Last year, China barred the amphibious assault ship USS Wasp from a port call in Hong Kong in September, the result of an ongoing trade dispute between the United States and China.

Subsequently, the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and guided-missile cruiser USS Chancellorsville paid visits to Hong Kong in November; in April, the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Bertholf made a port call there weeks after a transit of the Taiwan Strait.

Christensen acknowledged

the provisional nature of China's denial of port calls by the Navy.

"The U.S. Navy has a long track record of successful port visits to Hong Kong," he said, "and we expect to continue them."

Meanwhile, civil unrest continued Tuesday in Hong Kong, where thousands of demonstrators prompted authorities to shut down Hong Kong International Airport a second consecutive day, according to the South China Morning Post. Video posted online showed demonstrators clashing with police wielding shields and batons.

The airport resumed operations Wednesday, according

to a tweet from Cathay Pacific Airways.

Beijing has described the Hong Kong protests as "riots" and the protestors as "terrorists."

President Donald Trump on Tuesday tweeted: "Our Intelligence has informed us that the Chinese Government is moving troops to the Border with Hong Kong. Everyone should be calm and safe!"

Under the "one country, two systems" principle, Hong Kong, a former British possession, has remained mostly autonomous, holding on to rights to assembly, free speech and a free press. Hong Kong's autonomous status expires in 2047.

Skipper who fled Iran as a child might soon deploy to region

The (Norfolk) Virginian-Pilot

NORFOLK, Va. — The new skipper of one of America's aircraft carriers fled Iran as a child.

Now, he's preparing for a deployment that could take him back to the region at a time of heightened tensions between the two nations that helped mold him into who he is today.

Capt. Kavon Hakimzadeh took command of the USS Harry S. Truman in July, achieving a goal he set for himself 30 years ago after he first laid eyes on an aircraft carrier in Norfolk. Back then, he was a young sailor who'd joined the Navy straight out of high school to serve a country he had only lived in for about a decade.

His journey from Tehran to enlisted sailor to an officer in command of the ultimate symbol of American seapower is a story that he believes serves as a testament to the opportunities the United States provides.

Hakimzadeh was born in Texas to an American mother and an Iranian father. He moved to Iran when he was a baby and fondly remembers his childhood there in the 1970s.

He attended an international school where they spoke Farsi and English, kept the faith of his Southern Baptist mom and had uncles and cousins nearby. At the time, Iran was pro-American and embraced many aspects of Western culture.

But that quickly changed during the Islamic Revolution in 1979. He and his family were forced to flee to America when he was 11, his sister was 9 and his mother was seven months pregnant. They were rushed onto an airplane as the airport was about to close, destined for a small town near Hattiesburg, Miss., where the son of one of his father's business partners had agreed to take them in.

He said the weeks leading up to their departure were very much like the opening scenes

in the 2012 Ben Affleck film "Argo," which is based on the true story of the CIA's efforts to rescue six Americans who were hiding in the Canadian Embassy in Iran after the revolution.

"It just happened to be a country in chaos, a country in revolution. And so as an 11-year-old it was a little traumatic to have life as you know it completely change like that," Hakimzadeh said. "I think it is probably a lot to do with why I decided I wanted to serve and wanted to be in this line of work."

Hakimzadeh enlisted in the Navy to take advantage of the opportunities the military provided and give back to a country he and his family love. He is now preparing for the possibility that he could be called to return to the Middle East. His carrier strike group has completed its last major pre-deployment exercise.

While the Navy doesn't disclose where its ships plan to go or when, aircraft carriers are

frequently used as a highly-visible deterrent when tensions flare up around the world. The aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln is in the Middle East serving that purpose after Iran shot down an American drone and seized foreign oil tankers.

If the Truman is called to take the Lincoln's place in the region, Hakimzadeh said he and his crew are prepared.

"There's not some particular personal angst involved," he said. "I've deployed there multiple times in the past."

Hakimzadeh still speaks a little Farsi and is always happy to tell his family's story to those who want to know more:

"I love to tell people that it's a testament to our merit-based Navy that a kid at 19, 20 years old can look at these things and go, 'You know what? I want to command those one day.' And it's certainly a testament to the United States of America that a guy named Kavon Hakimzadeh can do that."

White-hat hackers find F-15 vulnerabilities

The Washington Post

LAS VEGAS — In a Cosmopolitan hotel suite 16 stories above the Def Con cybersecurity conference this weekend, a team of highly vetted hackers tried to sabotage a vital flight system for a U.S. military fighter jet. And they succeeded.

It was the first time outside researchers were allowed physical access to the critical F-15 system to search for weaknesses. And after two long days, the seven hackers found a mother lode of vulnerabilities that — if exploited in real life — could have completely shut down the Trusted Aircraft Information Download Station, which collects reams of data from video

cameras and sensors while the jet is in flight.

They even found bugs that the Air Force had tried but failed to fix after the same group of hackers performed similar tests in November without actually touching the device.

“They were able to get back in through the back doors they already knew were open,” Will Roper, the Air Force’s top acquisition official, told me in an exclusive briefing of the results.

The hackers lobbed a variety of attacks — including injecting the system with malware and even going at it with pliers and screwdrivers.

The hackers briefed Roper

on the findings on Saturday afternoon. He was surrounded by discarded pizza boxes, iced coffee drinks — and the hotel’s drinking glasses filled with screws, nuts and bolts removed from five fully dismantled TADS devices, which run about \$20,000 a pop.

He’d expected the results to be about this bad, Roper told me on a private tour of the hacking event. He pinned the weaknesses on decades of neglect of cybersecurity as a key issue in developing its products, as the Air Force prioritized time, cost and efficiency.

He’s trying to turn that around, and is hopeful about the results of the U.S. govern-

ment’s newfound openness to ethical hackers. He’d come straight from Def Con’s first-ever Aviation Village, which the Air Force helped establish.

This is a change from previous years, when the military would not allow hackers to try to search for vulnerabilities in extremely sensitive equipment, let alone take a literal whack at it. But the Air Force is convinced unless it allows America’s best hackers to search out all the digital vulnerabilities in its planes and weapons systems, then the best hackers from adversaries such as Russia, Iran and North Korea will find and exploit those vulnerabilities first, Roper said.

Hospital corpsman found not guilty of sexual assault

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A hospital corpsman accused of sexually assaulting a fellow sailor was found not guilty by a jury of seven men and one woman on Wednesday.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Glenn Washington, assigned to Naval Dental Center Okinawa, was acquitted of sexual assault with bodily harm after admitting to investigators he had sex with a fellow sailor at his capsule hotel after a night of drinking in Tokyo’s Shibuya ward while on leave.

Jurors deliberated for three hours after the three-day trial in Yokosuka.

In a hotel surveillance video shown to jurors Tuesday, Washington was seen pulling the woman by her wrist to his capsule in the early morning hours of Nov. 3, 2018. The woman was stumbling, bumping into walls and moaning, “Oh God,” “I can’t” and “It’s too far.” She also called him by the wrong name.

The woman told investigators she did not remember going back to Washington’s hotel or having sex with him, according to prosecutors. In another video recorded outside the capsule, which is about 4 feet wide and has a collapsible screen instead of a door, Washington was seen taking off the woman’s boots and pants after she got

into bed. Washington then got in with her and closed the screen.

A groan was later heard coming from the pod, followed by sounds of the woman crying and vomiting.

“I don’t wanna,” the woman said in the video. “Don’t touch me.”

After about 30 minutes, Washington left the capsule, shirtless with his pants undone, walked to the bathroom and combed his hair. He put his shirt on and sprayed on cologne before closing the screen.

Washington said he returned to a Shibuya nightclub where his friends were dancing, according to a recording of his interrogation.

“He left her in a puddle of her own vomit,” prosecutor Navy Lt. Leah Fontenot said during closing arguments Wednesday.

Several hours later, the woman exited the capsule wearing only a sweater, made her way to the bathroom and had trouble finding her way back, according to video.

Defense attorney Cmdr. Jeffrey Marden argued prosecutors failed to prove that the sex was not consensual.

Washington’s friends who were with them in a nightclub earlier that night testified that before Washington took the woman back to his hotel, she had licked the zipper of his pants and touched his belt while dancing in front of him.

Russian TV: Fighter warded off NATO jet

Associated Press

MOSCOW — A Russian fighter jet warded off a NATO military aircraft that approached a passenger plane carrying Russia’s defense minister Tuesday, according to media reports in Russia.

State-owned news channel Rossiya 24 broadcast a video of the in-flight encounter over the Baltic Sea shortly after Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu returned to Moscow from a visit to Russia’s westernmost Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad.

The footage showed a Russian Su-27 maneuvering to drive off an F/A-18 fighter that flew close to the minister’s plane.

Russian news agencies carried a NATO statement saying warplanes of the Western military alliance moved to identify a Russian aircraft over the Baltic Sea without knowing Shoigu was on it. A similar incident occurred in 2017, when a Polish F-16 fighter approached Shoigu’s plane over the Baltic Sea and a Russian jet pushed it away.

There have been frequent encounters between Russian and NATO aircraft in recent years as both sides have increased military patrols amid growing tensions. Some of the encounters trigger mutual accusations of pilots performing unsafe maneuvers.

Trump official claims Statue of Liberty poem about Europeans

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A top Trump administration official said Tuesday that the famous inscription on the Statue of Liberty welcoming immigrants into the country is about “people coming from Europe” and that America is looking to receive migrants “who can stand on their own two feet.”

The comments from Ken Cuccinelli, the acting director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, came a day after the Trump administration announced it would seek to deny green cards to migrants who seek Medicaid, food stamps, housing vouchers or other forms of public assistance. The move — and Cuccinelli’s defense — prompted an outcry from Democrats and immigration advocates who said the policy would favor wealthier immigrants and disadvantage those from poorer countries in Latin America and Africa.

“This administration finally admitted what we’ve known all along: They think the Statue of Liberty only applies to white people,” tweeted former Texas Rep. Beto O’Rourke, a Democratic presidential candidate.

The administration’s proposed policy shift comes as President Donald Trump is leaning more heavily into the restrictive immigration policies that have energized his core supporters and were central to his 2016 victory. He has also spoken disparagingly about immigration from majority black and Hispanic countries, including calling Mexican immigrants rapists and criminals when he launched his 2016 campaign. Last year, he privately branded Central American and African nations as “shithole” countries and he suggested the U.S. take in more immigrants from European countries like predominantly white Norway.

Cuccinelli said in an interview with CNN on Tuesday night that “The New Colossus,” the Emma Lazarus poem emblazoned on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, referred to “people coming from Europe where they had class based

societies where people were considered wretched if they weren’t in the right class.”

Lazarus’ poem, written in 1883 to raise money to construct the Statue of Liberty’s pedestal and cast in bronze beneath the monument in 1903, served as a beacon to millions of immigrants who crossed past as they first entered the U.S. in New York Harbor. It reads, “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.”

Cuccinelli was asked earlier Tuesday on NPR whether the words “give me your tired, your poor” were part of the American ethos. Cuccinelli responded: “They certainly are. Give me your tired and your poor who can stand on their own two feet and who will not become a public charge.”

A hard-line conservative from Virginia, Cuccinelli was a failed Republican candidate for governor in 2013 after serving as the state’s attorney general. He backed Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas for president in 2016 and for a time was a harsh critic of Trump.

He is one of a slew of immigration hardliners brought in by Trump to implement the president’s policies. He was appointed to the post in June in a temporary capacity, which doesn’t require Senate confirmation.

Trump, asked Tuesday about Cuccinelli’s comments on NPR, appeared to back him up.

“I don’t think it’s fair to have the American taxpayer paying for people to come into the United States,” Trump told reporters before boarding Air Force One for Pennsylvania. “I think we’re doing it right.”

Immigrant rights groups strongly criticized the Trump administration’s new rules for immigrants receiving public assistance, warning that the changes would scare immigrants away from asking for needed help. And they voiced concern that officials were being given too much authority to decide whether someone is likely to need public assistance in the future.

Trump claims credit for Pa. Shell plant

Associated Press

MONACA, Pa. — President Donald Trump sought to take credit Tuesday for a major manufacturing complex in western Pennsylvania in his latest effort to reinvigorate the Rust Belt support that sent him to the White House. He was cheered on by fluorescent-vest-clad workers who were paid to attend by Shell, their employer, which is building the facility.

Despite Trump’s claims, Shell announced its plans to build the complex in 2012, midway through President Barack Obama’s tenure in the White House.

The event was billed as an official White House event, but Trump turned much of it into a campaign-style rally, boasting of achievements he claims as president and assailing his would-be Democratic rivals for the 2020 election.

“I don’t think they give a damn about Western Pennsylvania, do you?” he prodded the crowd.

Trump was visiting Shell’s soon-to-be completed Pennsylvania Petrochemicals Complex, which will turn the area’s vast natural gas deposits into plastics. The facility is being built in an area hungry for investment and employment, though critics claim it will become the largest air polluter in western Pennsylvania.

Trump contends that America’s coal, oil and manufacturing are reviving and he deserves the credit. He’s been focusing on his administration’s efforts to increase the nation’s dependence on fossil fuels in defiance of increasingly urgent warnings about climate change.

As for the new complex, he declared, “This would have never happened without me and us.”

Air Force: Most grounded C-130s are back in service

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Air Force has resumed flights of almost three-quarters of the transport planes that the service grounded last week after maintainers discovered unusual cracks in the wing joints of an Air National Guard C-130 Hercules aircraft, an Air Mobility Command spokeswoman said Wednesday.

Ninety-one of the 123 Air Force C-130 H- and J-model aircraft grounded for inspections were returned to service by Tuesday following thorough examinations of those aircraft, said Rose Riley, spokeswoman for the command, which provides logistics, transport and air refueling for the military.

So far, one C-130 was found to have a similar crack during

the inspections “and appropriate measures are being taken to address and repair it,” Riley said. The Air Force had previously said any aircraft found to have the atypical cracks would be sent to an Air Force depot for refitting of the joints.

The Air Force still had 31 aircraft waiting to be inspected as of Wednesday. Those inspections, which take about eight hours each, are being conducted at the locations where the C-130s were when Air Force Gen. Maryanne Miller, the AMC chief, ordered the grounding Aug. 7.

Riley said the stand down has had minimal, if any, impacts on overseas operations in areas such as Iraq or Afghanistan.

The stand down included roughly 25% of the service’s about 450 C-130 aircraft.

Jail guards may have falsified logs for checking on Epstein

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jail guards are suspected of falsifying log entries to show they were checking on inmates in Jeffrey Epstein's unit every half hour when they actually weren't, according to a person familiar with the probe into his death.

Surveillance video reviewed after the 66-year-old financier's suspected suicide over the weekend shows guards never made some of the checks noted in the log, according to the person familiar with the investigation.

The person wasn't authorized to disclose information and spoke to The Associated Press on Tuesday on condition of anonymity.

The development comes as the federal jail in Manhattan where Epstein was being held comes under increasing scrutiny in the wake of Epstein's suicide. Epstein is believed to have killed himself early Saturday at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in New York, where he was awaiting trial in a sex trafficking case.

An autopsy was performed Sunday, but the manner in which Epstein killed himself has not been officially announced. The city's chief medical examiner said investigators were awaiting further information.

His death prompted the Justice Department to place two guards assigned to watch Epstein on administrative leave and temporarily reassign the jail's warden to an office post pending the outcome of two investigations. The FBI and the Justice Department's inspector general are investigating Epstein's death.

Attorney General William Barr has expressed outrage that Epstein was able to take his own life Saturday while under the care of the federal

Bureau of Prisons, the jail's parent agency that was already facing criticism.

Earlier this week, Barr said the Justice Department has already found "serious irregularities" at the Metropolitan Correctional Center, adding that the facility "failed to adequately secure this prisoner."

Since Epstein's death, details have emerged about the jail that show it is a chronically understaffed facility that possibly made a series of missteps in handling its most high-profile inmate.

A person familiar with the jail's operations said a guard in Epstein's unit was working a fifth straight day of overtime and another guard was working mandatory overtime the day Epstein died.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because he lacked authorization to publicly discuss jail operations.

Epstein had been alone in his cell when he was found unresponsive Saturday, even though he only recently had returned to the Special Housing Unit from suicide watch, the person familiar with the jail's operations said. The jail had placed him on 24-hour monitoring — with daily psychiatric evaluations — after he was found injured on the floor of his cell two weeks ago with neck bruises.

After that incident, Epstein had been placed on suicide watch. He was taken off that watch at the end of July and returned to the jail's special housing unit.

Following his death, federal prosecutors vowed to continue pursuing justice for the accusers who have come forward over the years — shifting their focus to possible charges against anyone who assisted or enabled Epstein in what authorities say was his rampant sexual abuse.

Southeastern US deals with lingering heat wave

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Stifling heat smothered states from Texas to South Carolina on Tuesday with temperatures that felt like 120 degrees, making it difficult to be outside for long, much less work or play.

As the entire Southeast baked amid heat warnings and advisories that reached from central Texas to coastal Georgia, construction workers toiled under a blazing sun in Louisiana. Alabama's largest city opened its auditorium for anyone needing to cool down.

Some schools and coaches limited football practice for players getting ready for the upcoming season, and social media was dotted with photos showing automobile thermometers with triple-digit readings.

Forecasters said a cold front and storms could lead to a slight midweek cool down, but for the meantime it was just too hot.

The National Weather Service said the afternoon heat index, a combination of temperature and humidity, climbed to 120 degrees in Clarksdale, Miss., nearly hitting the 121 degrees

it felt like Monday. Readings were nearly as high in cities including Dyersburg, Tenn., and West Memphis, Ark.

In downtown Birmingham, Ala., a piano-playing sidewalk evangelist sought refuge from the sun with two umbrellas — one over his head and the other on his sunny side.

Around the corner, artist Henry L. McShan sold his watercolor landscapes in a shady spot beside a park. Temperatures in Birmingham were already in the 90s Tuesday morning and topped 100 degrees later.

"I'm going to be here all day. I've got several bottles of water. I'm ready for it," said McShan, his face glistening with sweat.

It was just as sizzling along the Gulf Coast in south Alabama and along the Florida Panhandle. The heat index hit 117 before noon Tuesday in the Mobile, Ala., area. Pensacola saw a heat index of 115, also before noon.

Heat exhaustion and heat stroke are prime threats during heat waves, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

United to pilots: No alcohol for 12 hours before flight

Associated Press

DALLAS — United Airlines is setting an earlier cutoff time for when pilots must stop drinking alcohol before flights.

The airline is telling pilots they must abstain from alcohol for 12 hours before flights, up from the previous eight hours.

The change in the rule — it's called "bottle-to-throttle" in the airline business — comes several days after two United pilots were arrested in Scotland and charged with suspicion of being under the influence before a flight to the U.S.

The old eight-hour limit complied with Federal Aviation Administration rules, which also

prohibit pilots from flying with a blood-alcohol content at or above 0.04%. Almost all states make it a crime to drive a car at or above 0.08%.

An extra four hours will help social drinkers sober up, although it might not be long enough for a heavily drunken person. Some researchers calculate that once someone puts down the bottle, their blood-alcohol level drops 0.015% each hour. At that rate, a drinker could go from 0.12% to zero in eight hours, or from 0.18% to zero in 12 hours.

United sent a bulletin describing the new policy to pilots a week ago, and it took effect last Saturday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man admits putting camera in bathroom

NJ NEWTON — A New Jersey man admitted installing a hidden camera in his neighbor's bathroom in hopes of videotaping a 13-year-old nude.

Joseph Rebisz, 56, of Newton pleaded guilty to criminal attempt/endangering by photographing or filming a child in a prohibited sexual act or in the simulation of such an act.

Under terms of a plea agreement, he will undergo an evaluation and register as a sex offender under Megan's Law.

Rebisz had a copy of his neighbor's key to take care of their dogs when they were away.

The camera was discovered before Rebisz captured any images of the teen.

High school cancels football season

VA BLAND — A school district in southwest Virginia canceled its football season because it doesn't have enough willing players.

The Roanoke Times reported that Bland County High School canceled its varsity and junior varsity schedules for the upcoming school year.

Bland assistant principal and athletic director Tyler Eastep said officials made the decision when the team's membership dropped below 10. He said he is unsure if there will be a team for the 2020 season.

Naked suspected burglar rescued from chimney

CA LOS ANGELES — Firefighters rescued a naked man accused of burglary after he got stuck in the

chimney of a Los Angeles-area home.

KNBC-TV reported Portia Woffard discovered the man after she heard strange noises coming from the Ladera Heights house across the street from her home.

Woffard said the man claimed he was in the chimney because somebody laced his drugs and people were trying to kill him.

Firefighters responded and pulled him out of the chimney.

Authorities said the man ran into the Ladera Heights neighborhood after he broke into a home in Culver City.

Man arrested after many tires slashed

NC CAPE HATTERAS NATIONAL SEASHORE — Park rangers said authorities caught a man slashing tires on the Outer Banks after at least a dozen vehicles had similar punctures this year.

The National Park Service issued a news release saying that a 62-year-old man was arrested after authorities saw him puncturing tires on a Jeep Cherokee at the Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

He was only identified as a resident of East Lake.

This year, at least 66 tires have been slashed at parking lots at the seashore, as well as more vehicles elsewhere. Most of the vandalized vehicles were sport-utility models, with many being Jeep Wranglers.

Man accused of faking death pleads guilty

AL BIRMINGHAM — An Alabama man accused of faking his death and fleeing to Thailand to avoid trial on child sex charges pleaded guilty to other charges.

News outlets reported Jackson Matthew Hall, 28, entered the plea to Social Security fraud and aggravated identity theft.

A U.S. Attorney's Office statement said Hall was set to appear in court in 2016 on charges of child abuse, first-degree rape and first-degree sodomy of a child younger than 12.

It said he used another person's identity to obtain a Social Security card, driver's license and U.S. passport, and faked his death before fleeing the country.

Masked man throwing object incites panic

TX HOUSTON — Hundreds of panicked people rushed out of a Houston mall after a masked man jumped on a food court table and said he would kill himself before throwing down an unknown object covered in toilet paper.

Houston police were searching for the masked man, who they said left Memorial City Mall amid the chaos. Police said he could face a terroristic threats charge.

Police said two people at the Houston mall suffered minor injuries in the crowd.

Traffic stop nets arrest and a live grenade

FL ARCADIA — A Florida man was in custody after telling narcotics officers during a traffic stop that he had a live grenade.

The DeSoto County Sheriff's Office called in a bomb squad from a neighboring county to disarm the explosive after taking Donald Reid Jr. into custody.

Reid was arrested and charged with multiple counts of

possession of firearms and ammunition by a convicted felon.

Photos posted by the sheriff's office on Facebook showed a cache of weapons, including a pistol, rifle and what the authorities described as an M67 grenade.

House fire kills about 60 pet snakes

DE DOVER — A fire department official said dozens of pet snakes died when a blaze ripped through a home in Delaware.

The Delaware News Journal reported that no people were injured in the fire.

The homeowner told firefighters that approximately 60 snakes were in the house. All of them were believed to be dead.

Deputy Chief Michael O'Connor Jr. of the Dover Fire Department said the snakes were kept in bedrooms throughout the house.

Toy run draws more than 300 riders

VT MONTPELIER — More than 300 motorcycle riders took part in the 33rd annual Toy Run over the weekend.

The event, organized by United Motorcyclists of Vermont, is aimed at collecting toys to be donated to children in nine Shriners Hospitals.

The Times Argus reported that a total of 344 bikers turned out for the event, which followed a route from Berlin to the State House in Montpelier. They came from as far away as New York and Maine. Many had stuffed toys strapped to their handlebars. They also raised money.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

QB-coach combo brings free agents to KC

Associated Press

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. — The Kansas City Chiefs needed a playmaking safety and signed coveted free agent Tyrann Mathieu.

They needed help at cornerback and signed Bashaud Breeland and Morris Claiborne.

They had to address the pass rush and extended the contract of defensive end Frank Clark.

That aggressive approach to roster turnover speaks volumes about the job Chiefs general manager Brett Veach has done in Kansas City. But it also speaks volumes to the fact that the Chiefs, for years a franchise that struggled to lure top talent on the open market against higher-profile teams, has become a destination for players seeking playoff glory and Super Bowl rings.

“I wanted to come to a team that had great talent, great core players,” explained Mathieu, who signed a \$42 million, three-year contract in March. “Any time you can play for an organization that has a

great history and obviously a great quarterback that’s really going to take this league over, really by storm — really this was a no-brainer for me and my family.”

In fact, that may be the biggest reason everyone seems to want to play in Kansas City: the unique combination of an innovative players’ coach in Andy Reid and quarterback Patrick Mahomes, whose record-setting debut as the starter portends postseason success for years to come.

“They’ve got a good ball club and the best offense in the league,” said Claiborne, a former first-round draft pick who signed a \$3 million deal late last week.

The beauty of that mindset among players, at least from the Chiefs’ perspective, is that it creates a snowball effect. Top players want to play for a good team, making a good team even better.

The biggest pitfall of the Chiefs a year ago, when they lost to the Patriots in overtime in the AFC title game, was

their much-maligned defense. But consider their quartet of high-profile additions: All of them reside on that side of the ball, shoring up the biggest weakness.

They’ve made a team that has won three consecutive AFC West titles even stronger.

“I just got finished playing with Aaron Rodgers,” said Breeland, who played part of last season in Green Bay, “and to me (Mahomes) is like a younger version of Rodgers with a lot more attributes. Young guys are starting to propel differently these days. He’s an exciting player and I’m just ready to compete against him. I know that if I can ball against him at practice, then I can play against anybody.”

Claiborne was recently suspended the first four games of the regular season for violating the NFL’s substance-abuse policy. So not only was he looking for a place where he could win after average seasons with the Cowboys and Jets, he was looking for a place that could give him a second chance.

Just like the Chiefs have given to Mathieu, who was kicked off the team at LSU before becoming an NFL star, and Clark, who likewise was booted off his college team before Seattle drafted him.

Both have steered clear of trouble in the league, but both — like wide receiver Tyreek Hill and several others that have come through Kansas City — carry baggage.

“They knew what I was going through and they wanted to help me through it,” Claiborne said. “That was a part of the reason that really made up my mind as I want to come here. These guys not only care about me as a football player, but as a man and as a person.”

Players around the league are aware of the culture and success in Kansas City, too. Claiborne said Mathieu, his old college teammate, called him not long ago to stump for him signing with the Chiefs.

It was a sales pitch that is becoming increasingly unnecessary.

Brown rejoins Raiders camp, but still doesn’t practice

Associated Press

NAPA, Calif. — Antonio Brown walked onto the Oakland Raiders practice field in his familiar No. 84 jersey surrounded by cameras and received warm greetings from teammates.

His weeklong absence to deal with his frostbitten feet and a grievance with the NFL over the use of a helmet has ended and now he’s eager to get back on the field as soon as he can.

“I’m extremely grateful to be here,” Brown said during a short news conference Tuesday. “I’ve been dealing with a lot of adversity. I’m excited to be back and see my teammates and get in the groove of things.”

Brown has not participated in a full practice for the Raiders after starting training camp on the non-football injury

list with injuries to his feet that reportedly came from frostbite suffered while getting cryotherapy treatment in France. Agent Drew Rosenhaus called the injuries on Brown’s feet “brutal” and Brown left camp last week to meet with a specialist.

Brown gave no timeline for when he would be healthy enough to practice, saying only to “stay tuned.”

Coach Jon Gruden said he didn’t know whether Brown would play in an exhibition game but was confident he’d be healthy enough for the season opener Sept. 9 against Denver.

“I feel a lot better working toward 100%,” Brown said. “It’s been a process with the feet. Any time you have a lot of blisters, it’s hard to change direction and run and do what I do naturally. I’ve been away getting a lot of work. I’m excited

just to move forward.”

Brown also has been battling with the NFL over his helmet, losing a grievance on Monday to use a version of his helmet that is no longer certified.

The National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment sets performance and test standards for equipment. Brown’s Schutt Air Advantage helmet is no longer allowed because the NFL follows the National Athletic Equipment Reconditioners Association (NAERA) rule that helmets 10 years old or older cannot be recertified.

Schutt has discontinued making the helmet because current technology had moved past it.

Brown sent out a tweet offering a signed Raiders helmet for a newer version of Brown’s preferred helmet. Rosenhaus said they have found a newer

version and are now waiting for it to be certified.

“Hopefully we’re going to get this behind us soon,” Rosenhaus said.

Brown has been the game’s most prolific receiver the past six years but the Raiders were able to acquire him from Pittsburgh for just a third- and fifth-round pick in March because of problems off the field and with the organization.

But the Raiders are counting on him being a major part of their team this season as they try to bounce back from a 4-12 campaign in Gruden’s first season back on the sideline in Oakland.

Quarterback Derek Carr said Brown’s return brought extra life to the team and he believes the extensive time they spent together working in the offseason will help them get back up to speed quickly.

G Leaguers back in USA Basketball camp

Associated Press

There were more than 50 players from the G League who helped USA Basketball get into the FIBA World Cup by winning enough games during the tournament's qualifying rounds.

A few of them are getting a thank you this week.

USA Basketball invited some of those qualifying players to the final week of World Cup training camp in El Segundo, Calif., that started Tuesday. The group will scrimmage in practice against NBA players who getting ready to compete in China at the World Cup — and while there's no chance for the G League guys to make that team, it's another opportunity to wear USA across their chest for a few days.

"I didn't even wait for them to finish asking the question before I said 'Absolutely,'" former UCLA forward Travis Wear

said. "I'm not going to turn down that opportunity to play with the best of the best."

Plenty of NBA players turned down the chance to be on the World Cup team. Wear — who was with the South Bay Lakers last season, spent the summer league with Golden State this year and is looking for a job this season — jumped at the chance to just practice with that group.

"Honestly, to be able to wear 'USA' in any way, shape or form and represent the country is an incredible experience," Wear said. "I was so happy that I could take part in that and it's definitely something that I am forever grateful for."

Wear is one of eight former qualifying-team players brought back for practice — the others: Chris Chiozza, Scotty Hopson, John Jenkins, Ben Moore, Chinanu Onuaku, Chasson Randle and Travis Trice. Combined, those eight

players made 22 appearances for the U.S. in 12 qualifying games, with Trice making six and Wear and Randle four apiece.

The only player who appeared in qualifying games for the U.S. and has a chance to make the World Cup roster is Derrick White, who was promoted to the national team last week and is one of 15 candidates still in camp for the 12 final roster spots.

"We are very grateful for what every player did for us in qualifying," USA Basketball managing director Jerry Colangelo said.

FIBA changed the qualifying rules for this year's tournament, which meant the U.S. and other nations basically couldn't use NBA players because of scheduling conflicts. So the U.S. put together different rosters, primarily of G League players, for each of the six two-

game qualifying windows. Jeff Van Gundy was the qualifying coach for the U.S., getting a new group of players for every round.

Van Gundy will coach the G League invites this week, as well, and Wear said he's eager to be reunited with him for at least a few more days.

USA Basketball national team coach Gregg Popovich praised the job Van Gundy has done. Popovich also raved about the job the G League players did just to give the U.S. a chance at a third consecutive World Cup gold medal. That's why some of them are back this week for the last days of camp for the Americans.

"You look at this team now, getting ready to embark to China and play, they're qualified because of the work that we did and the games that we won," Wear said. "That's very satisfying."

MLS gets another chance to chip away at Liga MX

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Major League Soccer has another chance to chip into Mexico's continental dominance.

Reigning MLS Cup champion Atlanta United will host the second annual Campeones Cup on Wednesday night, facing Liga MX powerhouse Club America in a game that certainly means more to the home team and its league.

Despite some modest inroads by MLS in recent seasons, Liga MX remains the dominant force in North America.

Mexican teams have won all 11 editions of the CONCACAF Champions League, and had both finalists eight of those years. Liga MX is also positioned to take the inaugural Leagues Cup title, having claimed three of the four semifinal spots, while Tigres UANL captured the first Campeones Cup — pitting the champions from each league in a single game — with a 3-1 victory over

Toronto FC.

Atlanta United, which won the MLS Cup title in just its second season and has set numerous attendance records while establishing itself as one of the top-drawing teams in the world at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, got a taste of North American reality in this year's Champions League.

Going in with high hopes of becoming the first MLS team to win the continental club title, Atlanta went down meekly to eventual champion Monterrey in the two-legged quarterfinals. United lost 3-0 on the road before salvaging a bit of pride with a 1-0 home victory.

The Campeones Cup provides another shot at Liga MX, and it comes at a time when Atlanta is fully into its league season and appears to be in top form.

"We want to prove, of course, as Atlanta United but also as an MLS club that we are coming closer to the Mexican league,"

United coach Frank de Boer said Tuesday. "We have to be 100 percent to beat them. But I have the confidence that we're getting closer and closer."

It's not exactly a fair fight.

Not only does Liga MX benefit from a much longer history (it was founded in 1943 — 53 years before MLS) and deeply rooted soccer culture in Mexico, its teams are not encumbered by the salary cap and roster limitations that are designed to hold down costs in MLS.

"Right now, the Mexican teams set the bar in North America. We're trying to chip away at that," United defender Michael Parkhurst said. "Our teams have to deal with restrictions that Mexican teams don't. Hopefully, through the new (collective bargaining agreement, which will replace the current deal after this season), we'll be able to catch up a little bit quicker and give ourselves a better chance."

Atlanta has won four of its last five matches, the only setback a thrilling 4-3 loss at MLS-leading Los Angeles FC. United has been especially tough on its own pitch, with 10 victories and one draw in its last 11 games at Mercedes-Benz Stadium. United has posted eight shutouts while surrendering just five goals during its dominating run at home.

Josef Martinez heads into this game with 22 goals in MLS play, ranking second in the league, and having set a record by scoring in 10 straight matches.

While United is winding down its league season, Club America is just getting started. The team is 3-0-1 through its first four games of the 2019-20 Liga MX season, and also defeated MLS squad Houston Dynamo to advance to the semifinals of the Leagues Cup.

Club America features former LA Galaxy star Giovani dos Santos.

Acuna's bat, arm help Braves top Mets

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Ronald Acuna Jr. heard chants of “MVP! MVP! MVP!” as he trotted off the field in the sixth inning, tipping his cap to the crowd when he reached the dugout.

Maybe the Atlanta fans are on to something.

It was another dazzling all-around night for the 21-year-old phenom, who scored his

100th run after smashing one off the wall, hit another one into the seats, and showed off his dazzling arm with a bullet of a throw to the plate.

Acuna's heroics carried Max Fried to his fifth straight win, leading the Braves past the New York Mets 5-3 on a sweltering Tuesday night.

“It's kind of normal for me now,” Fried said. “He's a tre-

mendous player and he plays hard every night.”

The Braves cooled down a New York team that had won 15 of its last 17 games to surge into playoff contention.

Acuna sparked a two-run first against Zack Wheeler by leading off with a long single off the wall in right-center, coming around to score his 100th run of the season on Josh Donaldson's

single. In the fourth, the youngster lined a 409-foot drive into the left-field seats for his 34th homer.

He wasn't done, either. Acuna ended the sixth by scooping up a single to left by Juan Lagares and rifling a one-hop throw to the plate to get Todd Frazier trying to score from second.

“His arm is a weapon,” manager Brian Snitker said.

MLB roundup

Sale, Devers help Red Sox down Indians in 10th

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Jackie Bradley Jr. homered with one out in the 10th inning as the Boston Red Sox edged the Cleveland Indians 7-6 on Tuesday night after blowing a late lead and potential win for ace Chris Sale.

Rafael Devers became the first player in major league history with six hits and four doubles — and he made a costly error at third base — as the Red Sox won for just the fourth time in 16 games.

“Every single ball was a scud missile,” Bradley said. “He hit it hard every time.”

Bradley drove a 2-0 pitch from Nick Wittgren (4-1) over the wall in right field for his 14th homer, allowing the Red Sox to hang on.

It was anything but easy as Boston blew a 6-1 lead over the final four innings, costing Sale his seventh win on a night when he also made history by getting to 2,000 career strikeouts faster than any other pitcher.

Yankees 8, Orioles 3: Domingo German pitched seven strong innings to become the first 16-game winner in the majors and host New York ran its winning streak over Baltimore to 15 games.

DJ LeMahieu homered on the first pitch he saw and Aaron Judge added a two-run double in New York's four-run fourth.

Nationals 3, Reds 1: Brian

Dozier hit his 17th home run, Juan Soto hit a second-deck shot for his 25th and Joe Ross extended his scoreless streak to 17¹/₃ innings as host Washington beat Cincinnati.

Ross (3-3) allowed one run and five hits in his 6²/₃ innings, and Daniel Hudson earned his third save of the season as Washington won its third game in a row.

Giants 3, Athletics 2: Madison Bumgarner struck out nine in seven innings, pitching host San Francisco past Oakland.

Evan Longoria and Kevin Pillar each hit RBI doubles during a string of three straight two-out doubles by the Giants in the sixth.

Blue Jays 3, Rangers 0: Five Blue Jays pitchers combined on a five-hitter, Teoscar Hernandez and Billy McKinney hit back-to-back home runs, and host Toronto beat slumping Texas.

Texas has lost six of seven, a stretch in which the Rangers have been shut out twice and scored more than three runs just once.

Phillies 4, Cubs 2: J.T. Realmuto homered and drove in the tiebreaking run with an RBI double in the seventh inning to lift host Philadelphia over Chicago.

The Phillies overcame 15 strikeouts for the win, but the pitching staff did the job.

Jason Vargas allowed two runs and five hits in six innings.

Blake Parker (2-2) and Mike Morin each tossed a hitless inning and Hector Neris finished for his 21st save.

Dodgers 15, Marlins 1: Rookie Will Smith had his first two-homer game, and Los Angeles twice hit back-to-back homers in a rout of host Miami.

Cody Bellinger tied a career high with his 39th home run and Justin Turner hit his 20th for the Dodgers, who totaled six homers, a season-high 13 extra-base hits and no singles until there were two out in the ninth.

Astros 6-1, White Sox 2-4: Ivan Nova tossed a four-hitter and host Chicago took advantage of an injury to Houston ace Gerrit Cole for a win and split of a doubleheader.

Houston won the first game behind six solid innings from Zack Greinke and solo home runs by George Springer and Jose Altuve.

Cole didn't start the second game because of right hamstring discomfort. Chris Devenski (2-1) took the mound and lasted just two innings in taking the loss.

Mariners 11, Tigers 6: Kyle Seager homered three times and Tom Murphy added two to lead visiting Seattle past Detroit.

Seager and Murphy hit back-to-back homers in the fourth and sixth innings before Seager added his third in the ninth.

Cardinals 2, Royals 0: Jack Flaherty tossed seven in-

nings of three-hit ball, Tommy Edman and Paul Goldschmidt drove in the only runs and visiting St. Louis beat Kansas City.

Flaherty (6-6) struck out seven with a lone walk. The right-hander left after throwing 110 pitches, and the St. Louis bullpen nailed down the win.

Twins 7, Brewers 5: Christian Yelich returned to the starting lineup and sparked a late rally, but it wasn't enough for host Milwaukee as Marwin Gonzalez hit a three-run homer to propel Minnesota to a come-from-behind win.

With Milwaukee trailing 4-1 in the seventh inning, Yelich hit an RBI double and scored on Yasmani Grandal's three-run home run. But Gonzalez hit his blast in the eighth to put the Twins ahead.

Diamondbacks 9, Rockies 3: Jarrod Dyson homered on the second pitch of the game during a five-run first inning, and visiting Arizona beat Colorado.

Rays 7, Padres 5: Ji-Man Choi hit a go-ahead, two-run home run with two outs in the seventh inning and rookie Austin Meadows also connected as visiting Tampa Bay beat San Diego for its fifth straight win.

The Rays, who hold the AL's second wild-card spot, have won nine straight on the road.

Pirates 10, Angels 7: Josh Bell homered and had three RBIs as visiting Pittsburgh rallied past Los Angeles.