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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

US launches rare strike on pro-Assad troops

Associated Press

BEIRUT — The U.S. military launched airstrikes on Syrian government-backed troops Wednesday after a major attack on its allied forces and U.S. advisers by at least 500 fighters, battle tanks, howitzers and mortars.

Syrian state-run media said the rare U.S. strike on government-backed troops killed and wounded dozens of tribal fighters, calling it a new effort “to support terrorism.”

The U.S.-led coalition said its action in Deir el-Zour province was in “self-defense.”

The overnight attack, which a U.S. military official earlier said killed about 100 of the attackers, added a layer to the Syrian conflict that is once again plunging into a new and unpredictable spiral of violence.

The attack in Deir el-Zour province in northeastern Syria occurred in crowded battle space. A stronghold of Islamic State militants until late last year, the province also was the group’s main source of oil revenue. U.S.-backed Kurdish-led forces have

been fighting for control of Deir el-Zour with rival Russia-backed Syrian troops that are reinforced by Iran-supported militias.

The U.S.-backed forces control areas east of the Euphrates River and most of the oil and gas fields, while government forces are based in the west.

Friction was reported previously, but Wednesday’s incident appeared to be the largest since last year. The ISIS militants have been dispersed in the province, which also has a number of U.S. bases.

In an email Thursday to The Associated Press, Col. Thomas Veale said the coalition reported to the Russians the buildup of the pro-government forces in the area before the attack and communicated with them during and after it. The Russian officials offered assurances that they would not engage the coalition forces in the area, Veale said.

“Pro-regime forces initiated hostilities with artillery pieces (howitzers). Additionally, Syrian pro-regime forces maneuvered T-55 and T-72 main battle tanks with

supporting mortar fire in what appears to be a coordinated attack on Syrian Democratic Forces approximately 5 miles east of the Euphrates River de-confliction line in Khusham, Syria,” Veale said.

By crossing the river, the pro-government forces would have violated the existing de-confliction agreement between Washington and Moscow, approaching U.S.-backed forces based near an oil field in the area. Russia is the main ally of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Asked if Russia was responsible for not stopping the attack, Veale said, “The de-confliction effort has served its purpose. Just as the coalition does not direct the operations of the SDF, the Russians do not direct operations of the Syrian regime.”

Veale said they suspect the Syrian pro-government forces were trying to seize terrain from the U.S.-backed forces liberated from ISIS militants last year, including major oil fields in the area.

Questions arise about US troops’ Afghan combat role

The Washington Post

When Marine Brig. Gen. Roger Turner’s task force deployed to Afghanistan’s most violent province last spring, it came with an uncertainty: To what degree would it be necessary to deploy U.S. troops in harm’s way as the military helped the Afghan government beat back the Taliban?

Turner characterized the dispatching of about 300 U.S. troops, primarily Marines from Camp Lejeune, N.C., to Helmand province ahead of their deployment as a “high-risk mission” in which combat was possible. The advisers were initially deployed to advise at the “corps level,” a description the U.S. military uses to describe U.S. servicemembers who coordinate and plan with senior Afghan officers in operations but don’t accompany Afghan troops on combat operations.

In August, President Donald Trump announced that after months of deliberation, he would not withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan, and in fact would modestly increase the size of the U.S. military presence and would expand what those already deployed could do. That would include allowing U.S. troops to advise Afghan kandaks, a distinction that could put Americans in grave danger more frequently.

That turned out to mostly not be the case.

Turner, meeting last week with a small group of reporters at the Pentagon, said his forces saw indirect enemy fire about 20 times over several months, significantly less often than U.S. units deployed to Helmand had experienced in the past. As first reported by Marine Corps Times, none of the Marines in the task force earned the Com-

bat Action Ribbon, a culturally important award in the service that recognizes those “who have actively participated in ground or surface combat,” including facing firefights and roadside bomb explosions.

Turner said it is “too simplistic” to say that the Marines hadn’t been in combat just because nobody earned the ribbon, and that the conversation about it has been frustrating. But he added that in Helmand, he and other commanders didn’t see a need to directly maneuver alongside Afghan troops after Washington added that as a possibility.

“They were doing it themselves, and they were willing to do it,” Turner said of the Afghan troops. “It’s their country, and they were willing and able to take the fight to the enemy. With our ability to enable them, they were ready to go.”

That stands in contrast to what a new conventional Army unit at the center of the administration’s strategy in Afghanistan is training to do when it deploys this spring. The 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade, a newly formed unit of about 500 Army advisers with several hundred more soldiers deploying to provide security, has been training for months to advise at the kandak level and to accompany Afghan troops on combat operations.

U.S. commanders are wary of explaining how they plan to use the new Army adviser unit, citing operational security. It also isn’t clear if the next rotation of Marines in Helmand may be more aggressive. Brig. Gen. Benjamin Watson, the new commander of Task Force Southwest, left open the possibility in an interview last month with Task & Purpose.

Navy looks to reform after scandal

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Adm. Bill Moran, vice chief of naval operations, said Wednesday that the Navy is addressing new policy reforms in the wake of the “Fat Leonard” fraud and corruption scandal.

Moran, who said he couldn’t comment directly on the case because it remains an ongoing investigation, said there are changes and policy efforts underway to thwart a repeat of one of the biggest scandals to hit the Navy.

Among the changes, Moran, who made the comments during a congressional hearing, said the service has installed new layers of oversight in its contracting process for overseas ports.

“Most of the issues involve contracting for services on overseas ports,” he told a House Armed Services Committee subpanel. “So we have taken a

very strong turn on the process by which we do that. We put layers of oversight into how those contracts are issued and who is issuing them.”

The massive Justice Department case involves Malaysian defense contractor Leonard Glenn Francis, also known as “Fat Leonard,” who traded money, travel, gifts and prostitutes with officers in the 7th Fleet for classified material about U.S. ship and submarine schedules. More than two dozen have been criminally charged in the case, including a former Navy commander who pleaded guilty last week to a federal bribery charge.

The case is the biggest facing the Defense Criminal Investigative Service, which is the criminal investigative arm of the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, said Glenn Fine, the DOD’s principal deputy inspector general. Francis’ contract firm, Glenn

Defense Marine Asia, orchestrated a scheme to defraud the Navy of tens of millions of dollars by routinely overbilling for goods and services, Fine said.

The Navy has established a Consolidated Disposition Authority, or CDA, to determine whether hundreds of Navy officers should be charged under the Uniform Code of Military Justice or receive administrative action, Fine said. The CDA has already adjudicated more than 300 cases, he said.

“This is one of the largest and most complex public corruption criminal cases in DOD history,” Fine said. “And it involves disturbing and widespread ethical lapses throughout the Navy’s 7th Fleet.”

The comments on the case Wednesday came during a wide-ranging hearing before the House Armed Services subcommittee on military personnel that focused on senior officer misconduct problems.

Army gets tech upgrade in Europe

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. ground units in Europe are the first in the Army to be outfitted with new sensors designed to protect troop formations from Russian cyberintrusion and better challenge adversaries in an increasingly contested electronic warfare battle space.

Delivery of the equipment will be completed later this month, the Army said.

“This equipment will provide additional sensors on the battlefield to contribute to the commander’s common operating picture and assist in driving the targeting process,” said Capt. Sean Lynch, an electronic warfare officer with the Vilseck, Germany-based 2nd Cavalry Regiment.

The new electronic warfare systems ensure that commanders at the brigade level and lower can “geolocate enemy emitters” and “deny tactical communications,” Lynch said in a statement.

The moves to better equip units for electronic warfare come as the Pentagon is shifting its focus to sophisticated threats posed by Russia and China. The 2018 National Defense Strategy, released last month, warns that the U.S. military’s advantage over “near-peer” adversaries is eroding. Among the operational concerns is that Russia’s advanced electronic warfare systems could jam radio and allied GPS networks.

Russia’s deployment of electronic jammers to disrupt Ukrainian military radio communication has also caught the attention of American commanders.

“Russia knows how we roll,” now-retired Gen. Philip Breedlove warned in 2016 when he was head of U.S. European Command. “They have invested a lot in electronic warfare because they know we are a connected and precise force and they need to disconnect us to make us imprecise.”

Marines skeptical despite exoneration

The Washington Post

A North Carolina congressman says the Marine Corps is “publicly exonerating” several veterans it wrongly accused of committing war crimes more than a decade ago in Afghanistan, but those blackballed by the ordeal remain skeptical of the Pentagon’s sincerity.

The Marine Corps does not intend to re-examine the case, according to a letter from the Pentagon released Wednesday by Rep. Walter Jones, R-N.C., although top leaders have signaled their intent to provide counseling and other assistance to the 30 men who say they’ve suffered personally and professionally as a result of the military’s effort to prosecute and imprison them.

“We are concerned to hear of the challenges many members of Fox Company are facing — which are, unfortunately, all too common among our com-

bat veterans,” says the letter to Jones from Maj. Gen. Frederick Padilla, staff director for the Marine Corps commandant, Gen. Robert Neller.

Jones announced the development in a news release. A spokesman for Neller declined to provide further comment, saying Padilla’s letter “articulates the service’s position.”

Fox Company, in 2007, was the first unit deployed into combat from what was then the Marines’ new special operations force, MARSOC. After a turbulent first month in Afghanistan, including a hellish battle near the Pakistan border, all 120 elite Marines were expelled from the war zone by U.S. commanders. The 30-man platoon that came under attack was accused of slaughtering civilians, allegations fueled by erroneous media coverage immediately following the shootout and by senior American officials’ denunciations — one commander

referred to the incident as a “stain” on the military’s honor — before all of the facts had been determined.

“Too often, the Marine Corps and the other services don’t give the benefit of the doubt to the warfighter,” Jones told *The Washington Post*, reflecting on his successful 14-year effort to clear the names of two deceased pilots falsely held responsible for a crash that left 19 servicemembers dead. “This, to me, has always been an issue of fairness. Soldiers support soldiers. Marines support Marines. ... After so many years, I am grateful the commandant wrote me this letter vindicating what Fox Company did during that firefight.”

The Marines were cleared of criminal wrongdoing in 2008 after a military court examined the case. At the time, a three-star general concluded the troops had “acted appropriately” on the battlefield.

New policy will put mark on GI's record for harassment

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Military members who harass or bully people on the job or online can now be certain of a permanent mark on their service record, according to a new Pentagon policy on harassment.

The policy being announced Thursday pulls together a complicated mix of rules governing sexual harassment, bullying, hazing and other forms of hostile online behavior and workplace discrimination. The goal is to clarify the process for victims filing complaints and make sure that those responsible are held to account for their actions.

The overhaul comes almost a year after an online nude photo sharing scandal rocked the Marine Corps. The ensuing criminal investigation forced leaders across all the military services to create more vigorous social media standards. The scandal showed how difficult it is to track or govern inappropriate

behavior by military members in the largely anonymous online universe.

Pentagon officials said consolidating various harassment policies will make it easier for victims to report problems, seek help and see the consequences for offenders. Until now, some members of the military who engaged in such actions could face punishment but then see any mention of the infractions expunged from their records.

The military services will have 60 days to develop plans to put in place the policy.

"We have a sexual harassment policy, we have a memo that clarifies response and reporting of sexual harassment, we have regulations on hazing and bullying, we have a policy that covers discriminatory harassment," said Elise Van Winkle, the Pentagon's principal director for force resiliency. "What this does is pull these together to cover all forms of

harassment."

An important change involves clearer guidelines on how a military member can report harassment, particularly for troops who may belong to one service but work in a job reporting to another service. Army soldiers, for example, can work at an air base overseas and report to an Air Force commander. A Navy officer working at U.S. Pacific Command may have airmen or Marines on staff.

The new policy will allow troops to file harassment complaints wherever they feel most comfortable, though their own service would provide them assistance. An alleged offender probably would go through the justice system. If found guilty, he or she would face punishment from his or her own service.

Standardizing the rules "helps increase the effectiveness of these policies when we deploy them to the field," Van Winkle said.

More DOD misconduct complaints; fewer guilty

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of complaints filed against senior military and defense officials has increased over the past several years, but more cases are being rejected as not credible and fewer officers are being found guilty of misconduct, according to data from Defense Department investigators.

Overall, there were 803 complaints filed in the fiscal year that ended last Sept. 30, compared with 787 the previous year. But just 144 were deemed credible and investigated by the inspector general, and 49 senior officials were eventually found guilty of misconduct. Allegations against the officials often involve ethical misconduct, such as having an inappropriate relationship, but they also include violating travel rules, wrongly accepting gifts, sending subordinates on personal errands or treating workers badly.

The data were released Wednesday during a House Armed Services personnel subcommittee hearing. Glenn Fine, who is serving as the Pentagon's inspector general, said the decline in the number of cases being investigated is due to a more thorough screening process of the complaints that come in. As a result, he said, about one-third of the cases that are investigated are ultimately substantiated. That rate is a bit lower than last year, but much higher than previous years. The rate in 2008 was 14 percent.

Senior military leaders also told the panel that they are seeing far more so-called whistleblower complaints that can trigger investigations and stall careers, but only a tiny fraction of the alleged offenders are found guilty.

Fine told the House panel that just two whistleblower cases charging a senior official with retribution were substantiated in the 2017 fiscal year, compared with three in each of the two previous years.

Sex assaults reported at West Point double

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of sexual assaults reported at the U.S. Military Academy roughly doubled during the last school year, according to data reviewed by The Associated Press, in the latest example of the armed forces' persistent struggle to root out such misconduct.

It's the fourth year in a row that sexual assault reports increased at the school in West Point, N.Y. There were 50 cases in the school year that ended last summer, compared with 26 made during the 2015-16 school year. By comparison, the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., and the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., saw only slight increases.

Defense Department and West Point officials said the big jump at the Military Academy resulted from an effort to encourage victims to come forward. But the dramatic and consistent increases may suggest more assaults are happening.

"I'm very encouraged by the reporting," Lt. Gen. Robert Caslen, superintendent at West Point, told the AP in an interview. "I recognize that people are not going to understand" the desire for increased reporting, he said. But, he added, "I've got the steel stomach to take the criticism."

The annual report on sexual assaults at the three military academies is due out this month. The Naval Academy's reports increased to 29 last year from 28. The Air Force Academy's also edged up by one, to 33.

About 12,000 students are enrolled across all three institutions. The AP reviewed the data ahead of its public release.

The report highlights persistent problems within the Air Force Academy's sexual assault prevention office that emerged late last year. Staffing and management issues led to sweeping disciplinary actions, the resignation of the director and an office restructuring.

Those problems could cast doubt on a sharp decline in reported sexual assaults at the Air Force Academy for the 2015-16 school year, considering a widespread loss of confidence in the office. Students may have been reluctant to file reports.

There have been worrying trends.

An anonymous survey released last year suggested there were more sexual assaults, unwanted sexual contact and other bad behavior at all three academies. It found 12 percent of women and nearly 2 percent of men said they experienced unwanted sexual contact. The largest increases were at the Army and Navy academies.

Some in both parties oppose budget deal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers pressed to enact a massive budget deal Thursday along with a temporary funding measure to prevent a government shutdown at midnight. GOP leaders moved to shore up support among conservatives for a plan to shower the Pentagon and domestic programs with an extra \$300 billion during the next two years.

“It’s going to need bipartisan support. We are going to deliver our share of support,” House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., told conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt on Thursday morning. “I feel very good about Republicans. Our members who are focused on the military are very happy where we landed with that.”

The measure was a triumph for Republican allies of the Pentagon and for Democrats seeking more spending on infrastructure and fighting opioid abuse.

But it represented a bitter defeat for many liberal Democrats who sought to use the party’s leverage on the budget to resolve the plight of immigrant “Dreamers” who face deportation after being brought to the U.S. illegally as children. The deal does not address immigration. And some tea party Republicans shredded the measure as a budget-buster.

Beyond the \$300 billion figure, the agreement adds \$89 billion in overdue disaster aid for hurricane-slammed Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico, a po-

litically charged increase in the government’s borrowing cap and a grab bag of health and tax provisions. Cotton growers and dairy farmers would get relief courtesy of the bipartisan leadership of the Senate Appropriations Committee, while popular funding for community health centers would be extended for two years, among myriad health provisions.

“I love bipartisanship, as you know,” said Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz. “But the problem is the only time we discover bipartisanship is when we spend more money.”

Senate leaders pressed to approve the measure Thursday and to send it to the House for a confirming vote before the government begins to shut down at midnight. But hurdles remain to avert the second shutdown in a month.

While Senate Democrats celebrated the rare moment of bipartisanship — Minority Leader Chuck Schumer called it a “genuine breakthrough” — progressives and activists blasted them for leaving immigrants in limbo.

The White House backed the deal — despite President Donald Trump’s outburst a day earlier that he’d welcome a government shutdown if Democrats didn’t accept his immigration-limiting proposals.

Trump himself tweeted that the agreement “is so important for our great Military,” and he urged both Republicans and Democrats to support it. But the plan faced criticism from deficit hawks in his own party.

Trump to seek 24 Super Hornet jets

Bloomberg

President Donald Trump’s fiscal 2019 budget will request 24 Super Hornet jets built by Boeing, reversing an Obama administration decision to stop buying the fighter after this year, according to two people familiar with the decision.

The Navy has argued that it needs more of the planes designated F/A-18E/F to fill a shortage in its inventory until more of Lockheed Martin’s newer F-35s are deployed. Before Trump even took office, he’d promoted the Super Hornet as a less costly alternative to the F-35, though the two planes have different capabilities.

The proposal in the budget due to be presented Feb. 12 is likely to be welcomed in Congress, which consistently has added more Super Hornets than requested and resisted Pentagon plans under former President Barack Obama to phase it out. Lawmakers approved 12 of the aircraft in fiscal 2016 when none was requested and 12 more in fiscal 2017 when two were requested. This fiscal year, House and Senate ap-

ropriators have proposed adding 10 aircraft to the 14 requested.

If Boeing “can get the cash for this, it’s very good news” because 24 aircraft per year is the minimum economic production rate to keep Boeing’s plant in St. Louis operating, Richard Aboulafia, military aircraft analyst for the Teal Group, said in an email. Boeing also is working with the Kuwaiti government to build as many as 32 F/A-18s for Kuwait during the next few years. “The big question is: How long will the Navy sustain the line?” Aboulafia said. “But in the ‘here and now,’ this is very good news for one of Boeing’s most profitable programs.”

The people familiar with the budget request asked not to be identified in advance of its release. Lt. Seth Clarke, a Navy spokesman, said in an email, “I can’t confirm a specific number” for any aircraft procurement in the coming budget.

The fiscal 2019 request for the Super Hornets will be the largest since fiscal 2012, when the Navy asked for funds to buy 28 of the fighters.

Marine gear is stored in cold caves in Hell, Norway

BY MARTIN EGNASH

Stars and Stripes

HELL, Norway — The giant caves in these fjordside mountains pack enough firepower for 4,600 U.S. Marines and are built to withstand the first few days of a hypothetical World War III.

The several hundred feet of rock would most likely protect the hidden weapons stashes

from a nuclear missile attack.

The cave system here is part of the Marine Corps program to store vital equipment in areas of strategic interest.

The Marine Corps Pre-Positioning-Norway caves began in the mid-1980s, during the height of the Cold War. Ever since then, the Marines have periodically moved heavy equipment into the area. The caverns of combat

gear, which only a few years ago could have been regarded as a relic of the Cold War, have taken on new strategic significance because of concerns about a more aggressive Russia.

In 2016, the Corps reached an agreement with Norway to host rotational Marines in six-month increments.

Having the equipment in Norway cuts down on response time

for any type of emergency contingency, program spokesman Maj. Thomas Stona said.

Inside the caves are rows filled with items like LAV-25 armored vehicles, M1A1 Abrams tanks, 155mm Howitzers and cold-weather gear. The caves contain enough food and bullets to stand up a Marine expeditionary brigade and support them for several weeks of combat.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Couple inundated with mystery packages

MA ACTON — A Massachusetts couple said it was fun at first when they started receiving free mystery packages from Amazon that they hadn't ordered.

Now they think it's annoying and want it to stop.

Mike and Kelly Gallivan, of Acton, told The Boston Globe the first package arrived in October. Packages have continued to arrive at a rate of one or two a week, about 25 in all.

The Gallivans said Amazon told them the merchandise was paid for with a gift card with no sender's name.

Two experts say the Gallivans are likely unwittingly being used in a ruse to manipulate Amazon buyer reviews. The anonymous sender is likely writing glowing reviews of their own product.

\$3,000 burger comes with engagement ring

MA BOSTON — For \$3,000, patrons at one Boston restaurant can order a burger that comes with an engagement ring on the side.

Pauli's, in the city's North End, said that with 48 hours' notice, the restaurant's Big Boy burger will arrive with a 7/8 carat Neil Lane ring nestled in the bun. The ring will come framed with round diamonds and a 14k gold band.

The restaurant said the burger is part of a Valentine's Day special.

Old extinguisher found in museum

AK KODIAK — Two Kodiak firefighters made a fitting find at the Baranov Museum.

The firefighters last week

found a bullet-ridden copper and brass fire extinguisher — estimated to be at least 100 years old — in the museum's crawl space, the Kodiak Daily Mirror reported.

Firefighters Matt Stone and Dan Farmer were conducting a routine fire safety check when they found the extinguisher.

Museum board members said similar extinguishers were used in bunkers during World War II. Kodiak was a hub during that period. A large naval base was constructed in the 1930s, and by the 1940s more than 25,000 people lived in the then-tiny village of Kodiak.

Naked man covered in oil attacks family

PA APOLLO — A Pennsylvania man is facing charges after police alleged the 19-year-old attacked his family while tripping on LSD and then resisting arrest while naked and covered in cooking oil.

The Tribune Review said a number of more serious charges including assault and terrorist threats were dropped after the victims refused to pursue charges against him at a preliminary hearing.

Police said Lonnie Beatty had taken the hallucinogen Jan. 16 and lost control, assaulting two female relatives and their children. When police arrived, they said he was naked, wearing only one sock, and covered in cooking oil.

Woman found holding eyeball outside church

SC ANDERSON — Authorities said a woman was found holding her eyeball outside a South Carolina church.

Anderson County Sheriff Chad McBride told news outlets that it took two or three deputies and two emergency

medical workers to subdue the woman to start rendering aid.

A retired minister who helped the woman, the Rev. Terry Mitchell, said it appeared she had intentionally hurt herself on nearby railroad tracks.

Deputies 'pull over' low-flying balloons

CA YUCAIPA — Sheriff's deputies "pulled over" two hot-air balloons for skimming rooftops in San Bernardino County.

The San Bernardino Sun reported that the Sheriff's Department began receiving calls shortly before 8 a.m. Tuesday about the balloons coming dangerously close to rooftops in Yucaipa and even hitting the tops of trees.

A sheriff's statement said deputies went to the neighborhood, where they saw the balloons flying above a golf course and coming within 5 feet of rooftops. The deputies got the attention of the pilots and had them land.

Authorities will send a report to the Federal Aviation Administration, which will decide if the pilots violated any air laws.

Gender reveal water spraying draws ire

KY INEZ — Residents in a troubled Kentucky water district have expressed outrage at a local firetruck participating in a gender reveal by spraying blue water.

News outlets report a video showing the gender reveal has lit up social media in Martin County. Inez Volunteer Fire Department Chief Lee Gauze said one of his firefighters paid \$6.70 for 1,000 gallons of water for the celebration anticipating his son's birth.

Several posts in the Facebook group "Martin County

Water Warriors" criticized the timing as residents continue to rely on bottled water for everyday needs.

The district blamed problems on a decrease in customers and a corresponding loss in revenue for infrastructure repairs and proposed a 49.5 percent rate increase.

Teen makes false 911 call for stuck cat

TN OOLTEWAH — Authorities said a Tennessee teen whose cat was stuck in a tree falsely reported a fire to attract help.

Hamilton County 911 Center's director of operations, Jeff Carney, told WRCB-TV that multiple agencies responded Monday to what they thought was a fire at 18-year-old Trevor Austin Lane's home.

According to Lane's arrest report, his cat had been stuck in the tree since Sunday night and he figured the fire department's "big ladders" would be of use. He was charged with a 911 violation and jailed on \$1,500 bond.

Lack of time, money cancels Tall Ships fest

SC CHARLESTON — There will be no Tall Ships Charleston festival this year.

The Post and Courier of Charleston reported organizers ran out of time and money. This year's event had been planned in May.

Tall Ships America executive director Bert Rogers said organizers were unable to get enough money in time to attract enough ships. Rogers said it costs between \$25,000 and \$50,000 per ship for a three-day harbor event like Tall Ships Charleston.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

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Davis rips flagbearer selection process

Associated Press

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea — It was a feel-good story for a few hours: Luge veteran Erin Hamlin gets the chance to enter her last Olympics carrying the U.S. flag into the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang Games, winning that distinction after a vote by some of her fellow athletes.

And then Shani Davis tweeted.

With that, the entire process was called into controversy. The tweet posted to Davis' account said the process by which Hamlin won was executed "dishonorably," and included a reference to Black History Month — raising the question of whether the speedskater was suggesting that race played a role in the decision.

Davis is black, Hamlin is white.

"We feel strongly toward Shani and they felt strongly for Erin," U.S. speedskater Joey Mantia said. "That's just that."

Hamlin and Davis were among eight nominees for the flagbearer role, and athletes from each of the eight winter sports federations — bobsled and skeleton, ski and snowboarding, figure skating, curling,

biathlon, hockey, speedskating and luge — represented those nominees in balloting that took place Wednesday night.

Eventually, the final vote was deadlocked at 4-4. Hamlin won a coin toss, the predetermined method of picking a winner if all else failed in the athlete-led process. The U.S. Olympic Committee confirmed the tie, and that voters knew if the tie couldn't be broken by them the coin toss would have to occur.

USA Luge declined comment on the tweet. Calls placed to Davis' phone rang unanswered, and his agent Ian Baranski did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

Hours before the tweet was posted, Hamlin was beaming about the opportunity. The four-time Olympian told the story about how her parents, Ron and Eileen Hamlin, always wrestle with the decision about whether to spend the money for high-priced tickets to the opening ceremony — and in the end, always go to see their daughter march into the stadium with her U.S. teammates.

"I think they're going to be really glad that they made that decision," Hamlin said. "They're really pumped. I'm sure my brothers will be. We've grown up watching the Olympics and we're always like, 'Who's going to be carrying the flag?' And to actually be that person is insane."

Davis was certainly a worthy candidate. He's now a five-time Olympian, with two gold medals and two silver medals in his collection. It could not be determined if Davis posted the tweet himself, or if anyone else with access to his account may have.

Hamlin is a four-time Olympian, a winner of a bronze medal at the 2014 Sochi Games, a two-time world champion and a winner of 23 World Cup medals. Despite that résumé, Hamlin — who is retiring after the Olympics — never thought she would be the pick.

In December, when asked in an interview with The Associated Press if she thought it would be possible, Hamlin giggled.

"To me, that always seems to be a really, really big-name person," Hamlin said at the time.

Numbers will define Olympic Games, not philosophies

Associated Press

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea — The world hasn't seen such an intersection of sports and politics since the U.S. boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics and the Soviets returned the favor four years later in Los Angeles.

The Winter Olympics begin Friday in a rugged and brutally cold area of rural mountains near the North Korean border, with a lot more at stake than the glittery medals chased by the best ice and snow athletes in the world.

They will unfold — officially, at least — without the Russians who dominated on the ice and snow and in the backroom of the drug testing labs four years ago in Sochi. And they will take place amid rising world tensions and a last-minute rapprochement of sorts between the two Koreas that may be as much of a show as the games themselves.

Politics are very much in play, but in the end the Olym-

pics are usually defined more by numbers than philosophies.

With that in mind, here are some numbers that might help make sense of it all:

3 — Mikaela Shiffrin's goal is to do what no skier has ever done — win five gold medals on the slopes. The young American star probably won't do that, but there's a good chance she can win three, something skiers have done only three times. Shiffrin is a prohibitive favorite to defend the slalom title she won in Sochi, a top contender in the giant slalom and the favorite in the combined.

2 — The number of North Korean athletes who qualified for the Olympics on merit. Up to 22 will actually compete in the games, cheered on by a highly choreographed group of singers and dancers, along with the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

13,500 — The number of eggs Norway's Olympic team will be sending back after a breakfast order went sunny side up. Norway thought it was

ordering 1,500 eggs from a Korean distributor for the Games but a translation mistake caused 15,000 to be delivered instead.

50 — Miles from the mountains of Pyeongchang to the North Korean border.

100 — The perfect number Shaun White scored last month to give him a spot in the snowboard halfpipe. The U.S. star won the first two golds in the sport before flaming out in Sochi.

4 — The unofficial over-under for the number of halfpipe snowboarders carried off the slopes on stretchers. White himself was sent to the hospital twice after crashes last year, and defending gold medalist Iouri Podladtchikov was knocked out in a crash last month at the Winter X Games.

149 — In Sochi the best men's ice hockey teams were made up of NHL players, 149 of them in all. No current players will be in Pyeongchang, after the league decided its best interests were not served by shutting down in midseason for

three weeks like it did the last five Winter Olympics.

\$900 million — The amount of ads NBC has sold for its broadcast of the games.

14 — The time difference in hours from New York, which is why some of the biggest prime-time events on NBC will actually take place in the morning in Korea.

4 — If it's a Winter Olympics there have to be new sports. There are four of them in this Olympics, including a mass start speedskating event featuring 24 skaters that has been compared to a NASCAR race on ice.

168 — Russia is officially banned from the Olympics because of a state-sponsored doping scheme the country carried out in Sochi. But 168 Russians will still compete under a neutral flag as "Olympic athletes from Russia" and 45 others could win last-minute appeals and make their way onto the snow and ice.

10.5 — The over-under for gold medals won by U.S. athletes.

Georgia holds on, signs No. 1 recruiting class

Associated Press

Georgia was not about to blow this lead.

The Bulldogs, who let a 13-0 halftime advantage get away in a national championship game loss to Alabama, finished their 2018 recruiting class with a flourish and laid claim to the No. 1 ranking on national signing day.

Georgia loaded up in the new early signing period and came into Wednesday's start of the traditional signing period with the top-rated class, according to 247 Sports' composite rankings. Coach Kirby Smart and the Bulldogs put the finishing touches on the recruiting championship by flipping a pair of four-star linebackers, one who had been committed to Michigan (Otis Reese) and another who had been committed to Alabama (Quay Walker), and grabbing a highly touted wide receiver from Texas (Tommy Bush).

Georgia also beat Miami and Alabama for star cornerback Tyson Campbell from American Heritage High School in Plantation, Fla.

"It's ridiculous," said Mike Farrell, the national recruiting coordinator for Rivals. "The average star ranking is near historic levels."

National champion Alabama had finished on top of the recruiting rankings each of the last seven years, but the Tide finished outside the top three this year. No, coach Nick Saban is not slipping. The Tide had a relatively small class (18 signees), which kept down its ranking. Alabama also landed the top-rated uncommitted recruit left in the country entering the second signing period when cornerback Patrick Surtain Jr. picked the Tide over LSU early in the day.

It's the first time that major college football has had two signing periods, thanks to changes to the recruiting calendar. The vast majority of top prospects signed in December and most FBS schools had signed the bulk of their classes.

NBA roundup

LeBron's buzzer-beater lifts Cavaliers over T-wolves in OT

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — One second. One shot. One player.

For one night, LeBron James made all of Cleveland's problems disappear.

James dropped in a fade-away jumper over Jimmy Butler's outstretched hand as the buzzer sounded in overtime, giving the Cavaliers a cleansing 140-138 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves on Wednesday night.

Moments after blocking Butler's potential game-winning shot with 1.3 seconds left, James caught a long inbound pass from Jeff Green, created some space from Butler near the foul line and sank a shot that ended Cleveland's eight-game losing streak on national television.

"Once I caught it, I just trusted everything I've done in my career," James said.

The Quicken Loans Arena crowd erupted and James was mobbed by teammates as the struggling Cavs, who have won just seven of their last 20 games, finally had something to celebrate after weeks of tension and turmoil in a season slowly slipping away.

But as he has done so many times, James delivered one of those moments that have defined him.

"The way we've been playing, we needed that," said Cavs coach Tyronn Lue, who was back on the bench after falling ill Tuesday night in Orlando. "He was very special."

James finished with 37 points, 15 assists and 10 rebounds in 48 minutes. The three-time NBA champion also passed Zydrunas Ilgauskas (5,904) on Cleveland's career rebounds list.

Butler scored 35, and Karl-Anthony Towns had 30 for the Timberwolves, who were in position to win in OT before James came to Cleveland's rescue.

With the score tied 138-

AP source: Cavs trade Wade, overhaul roster

CLEVELAND — A person with direct knowledge of the trades says the Cleveland Cavaliers have overhauled their roster with three deals, including one that sends Dwyane Wade back to Miami.

Moments after they agreed to trade Isaiah Thomas, Channing Frye and a first-round pick to the Los Angeles Lakers, the Cavs completed a three-team deal with Sacramento and Utah, said the person who spoke Thursday on the condition of anonymity because the transactions have to be approved by the league.

The Cavs sent guard Derrick Rose and forward Jae Crowder to the Jazz for forward Rodney Hood. They'll receive guard George Hill from the Kings in exchange for guard Iman Shumpert.

Also, the 36-year-old Wade is returning to the Heat for a protected second-round pick. Wade played 13 seasons in Miami, winning three NBA titles — two of them with LeBron James.

Wade signed a one-year deal with the Cavs, but has said he wanted to retire with Miami.

— Associated Press

all, Butler drove the left side and had a step on rookie Cedi Osman before pulling up for a short shot. However, James, who had missed a three-pointer that would have won it in regulation, came from the weak side to reject it and set up the dramatic finish.

"I didn't see him," Butler said. "That's part of the game."

Towns made all six of his three-point attempts and Minnesota drained a season-high 19 three-pointers, but the Timberwolves were unable to stop James when it mattered most.

"One second in the game, it's a tough play — and he made a hell of a shot," Minnesota coach Tom Thibodeau said.

Rockets 109, Heat 101:

James Harden scored 41 points and Houston beat host Miami for its sixth straight victory and 10th in 11 games.

Chris Paul added 24 points, seven assists, and seven rebounds for the Rockets.

Goran Dragic and Josh Richardson each had 30 points for Miami. The Heat have a five-game losing streak, their longest slide of the season.

Harden eclipsed the 40-point mark for the eighth time this season. He was 13 of 25 from the field, going 5 of 12 from three-point, and hit 10 of 12 free throws. He also had six assists and rebounds.

Pistons 115, Nets 106:

Andre Drummond had 17 points and 27 rebounds, and Detroit beat visiting Brooklyn for its fifth straight victory.

Blake Griffin scored 11 of his 25 points in the fourth quarter for the Pistons, who have not lost since acquiring him in a trade last week. Griffin will face his old team Friday night when the Los Angeles Clippers are in town.

Allen Crabbe had 19 of his 34 points in the fourth quarter for the Nets. They have lost four in a row and eight of nine.

Jazz 92, Grizzlies 88:

Ricky Rubio had 29 points and eight rebounds, Rodney Hood scored 18 points and Utah beat host Memphis for its seventh straight victory.

Andrew Harrison led the Grizzlies with a career-high 23 points, and Marc Gasol had 20.

Spurs 129, Suns 81: LaMarcus Aldridge scored 23 points in 28 minutes and the Spurs routed host Phoenix, matching the most one-sided loss in Suns history.

That record was set in the Suns' 124-76 home loss to Portland in their opener this season.

Patty Mills added 18 points and Danny Green 17 for the Spurs.

College basketball roundup

St. John's knocks off No. 1 Villanova

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — St. John's took down another of the nation's elite, and stunned No. 1 Villanova 79-75 on Wednesday night for its second win over a top-five team this week — and first over the top-ranked team in 33 years.

Shamorie Ponds scored 26 points to spark the Red Storm (12-13, 1-11 Big East) to their first conference win of the season and easily their best week since Chris Mullin was in uniform, not the coach.

Mullin played for St. John's when it beat No. 1 Georgetown 66-65 on Jan. 26, 1985. And he was on the sideline exhorting his players in the final minutes of this shocker.

St. John's beat then-No. 4 Duke 81-77 at Madison Square Garden on Saturday, snapping an 11-game losing streak. It was the first win for St. John's since Dec. 20 against Saint Joseph's.

The Wildcats (22-2, 9-2) ended a nine-game winning streak and will surely tumble

from the top of the national rankings, where they've spent the last five weeks at No. 1.

No. 2 Virginia 59, Florida State 55: Devon Hall scored 17 points, Ty Jerome added 15 and the Cavaliers rallied in the second half to beat the host Seminoles.

Kyle Guy scored 10 of his 13 points in the final 20 minutes as the Cavaliers fought back from a 32-22 halftime deficit to remain unbeaten in the Atlantic Coast Conference. Virginia was 5-for-10 on three-pointers in the second half and committed just one turnover.

No. 14 Ohio State 64, No. 3 Purdue 63: Keita Bates-Diop scored 18 points, including the decisive putback with 2.8 seconds left, to give the visiting Buckeyes an upset of the Boilermakers, ending the nation's longest winning streak at 19 games.

No. 7 Texas Tech 76, Iowa State 58: Freshman Zhaire Smith scored a career-high 21 points, including a steal that led

to his alley-oop slam, and the Red Raiders beat the visiting Cyclones.

Texas A&M 81, No. 8 Auburn 80: Duane Wilson made one of two free throws with four seconds left to lift the Aggies to an upset of the host Tigers.

Texas A&M (16-8, 5-6 South-eastern Conference) held on for its third straight win after squandering a 17-point lead in the second half. Freshman guard T.J. Starks scored a career-high 23 points.

UNLV 86, No. 23 Nevada 78: Jovan Mooring scored a career-high 31 points with six three-pointers, Shakur Juiston had 19 points and 12 rebounds and the Runnin' Rebels beat the Wolfpack in a Governor's Series matchup to snap the their opponents' 16-game home winning streak.

No. 25 Miami 87, Wake Forest 81: Lonnie Walker IV scored 19 points to lead the host Hurricanes to a victory over the Demon Deacons.

Lafayette 81, Army 54:

Alex Petrie scored 23 points and the Leopards cruised past the visiting Black Knights.

Petrie was 6-for-12 from the field and made all nine of his free throws for the Leopards (7-17, 5-8 Patriot League). Matt Klinewski added 14 points and six rebounds, Justin Jaworski also had 14 points and E.J. Stephens chipped in 10. Paulius Zalys led the team with 10 rebounds in addition to his six points.

Navy 69, Holy Cross 34: Cam Davis and George Kieran combined to score 32 points and the visiting Midshipmen held the Patriot League-rival Crusaders to the second fewest point total allowed in program history.

Matt Faw's free throw with 16 seconds left allowed Holy Cross to escape the all-time low point total allowed set by Penn State on Feb. 9, 1947, in the Midshipmen's 52-33 victory. The 35-point margin of victory is Navy's largest in series history.

NHL roundup

Bruins remain hot, win for 18th time in 23 games

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The Boston Bruins have been winning every conceivable way recently. Against the sagging New York Rangers, they used stellar goaltending early and six straight goals to do the job.

Riley Nash and Zdeno Chara scored first-period goals and Patrice Bergeron added two in the second to help the surging Bruins swamp the Rangers 6-1 on Wednesday night.

The Bruins won for the 18th time in their last 23 games, getting 21 saves from backup netminder Anton Khudobin. The Bruins (33-11-8) are just a point behind Atlantic Division-leading Tampa Bay.

"In the first period, our goaltender was terrific," Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said. "He was the difference tonight. We got a lead going into the second and once that happened, our group thought we would be in good shape."

Tim Schaller's goal that made it 4-1 at 7:25 of the second period chased Rangers goaltender Henrik Lundqvist and brought boos from the crowd at Madison Square Garden. Lundqvist was replaced by Ondrej Pavelec.

"After they scored two in the first, instead of staying aggressive the way I need to be, I became passive," said Lundqvist, who hasn't won since Jan. 18. "When you lose a lot, obviously

it's going to affect you."

The Rangers had won seven straight over the Bruins, including both meetings this season. But New York was no match for the Boston attack on Wednesday.

Maple Leafs 3, Predators 2 (SO): James van Riemsdyk scored in regulation and again in the seventh round of a shootout in host Toronto's victory over Nashville.

Kasperii Kapanen also scored in regulation to help the Maple Leafs win for the sixth time in seven games. Frederik Andersen made 44 saves to improve to 7-1-0 against Nashville.

Kings 5, Oilers 2: Paul LaDue scored the tiebreaking goal on a power play with 5:27

remaining, and host Los Angeles pulled away late against Edmonton.

Darcy Kuemper made 25 saves for his fourth straight win, although his shutout streak ended at 193:58 — the second-longest in Los Angeles history behind Jonathan Quick's mark of 202:11 in October 2011. Adrian Kempe and Kyle Clifford also scored for the Kings, who are 5-2-0 after losing six in a row.

Connor McDavid scored for the third straight game and Leon Draisaitl had a power-play goal for the Oilers, who failed to earn a point for the second time in their past eight games (5-2-1). Cam Talbot made 23 saves.