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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Strike group sent to tense Pacific region

BY LEON COOK

Stars and Stripes

The USS Carl Vinson is bound for the tension-fraught Western Pacific.

The San Diego-based carrier and its strike group of helicopters, fighter jets and ships — including the guided-missile cruiser USS Lake Champlain and the destroyer USS Wayne E. Meyer — were due to depart Naval Air Station North Island, Calif., on Thursday and Friday, a Navy

statement said.

Another destroyer, the Hawaii-based USS Michael Murphy, is slated to join the entourage later this month.

The strike group's approximately 7,500 servicemembers "will focus on maritime security operations and theater security cooperation efforts" and take part in bilateral exercises that include "anti-submarine warfare, maneuvering drills, gunnery exercises and visit, board, search and seizure subject matter expert exchanges," the

statement said.

The routine deployment comes less than a week after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his country is close to testing an intercontinental ballistic missile.

China also recently confirmed that its aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, conducted drills in the South China Sea, where its increasingly assertive claims face challenges from its neighbors and the U.S. Navy, The Associated Press reported.

Marine recruits: Hazing took place in 'dungeon'

The Washington Post

QUANTICO, Va. — Drill instructors at the Marine Corps recruit center at Parris Island, S.C., drank alcohol on the job and repeatedly ordered recruits to do illegal calisthenics in a decrepit building called "the dungeon," recruits testified here Thursday.

The allegation emerged as Staff Sgt. Antonio B. Burke, a Parris Island drill instructor, became the first Marine to face a hearing in a series of cases involving hazing and abuse allegations. Burke is charged with cruelty and maltreatment, failure to obey a lawful general order and making a false official statement.

The suspected abuse came to light after a recruit, Pvt. Raheel Sidiqqi, 20, died March 18 in a fall from a third-story landing while running away from a drill instructor who had hazed numerous recruits, according to one of three investigations the service has carried out during the past year. Burke is at the center of a case that emerged a few weeks after Sidiqqi's death when a recruit's family wrote an April 27 letter to the White House complaining about his actions as well as those of several other drill instructors.

Burke, an administrative specialist who joined the service in 2007, was the senior drill instructor until he and several of his colleagues were removed from authority. Three others — Staff Sgt. Matthew T. Bacchus, Staff Sgt. Jose Lucena-Martinez and Sgt. Riley Gress — face arraignment on related charges Friday, Marine officials said.

In other cases, drill instructors were accused of putting recruits into an industrial-size clothes dryer and turning it on, including a Muslim recruit who was called

A Marine told the hearing that one drill instructor served as a lookout while others led incentive training, including burpees and push-ups on a floor covered in powder that made it hard to breathe.

a "terrorist." Marine officials have not yet identified the drill instructors in those cases, but have said that as many as 20 Marines at Parris Island could face criminal or administrative discipline.

Maj. Gregg Curley, the prosecutor, played a recording of Burke speaking with investigators and admitting that he ordered illegal incentive training. Doing so is common at boot camp, but it provides the service with fodder for a prosecution.

One Marine, Lance Cpl. Kelvin Cabrera, told the hearing Thursday that Burke's team of drill instructors took his platoon of recruits into "the dungeon" on at least two occasions. The building once was used as quarters for recruits, but has fallen into disrepair, Cabrera said.

Use of the facility was unsanctioned, and he said that it was "pretty obvious" that another drill instructor served as a lookout while Burke and others led incentive training, including burpees and push-ups on a

floor covered in powder that made it hard to breathe.

Cabrera also alleged that his drill instructors snatched a family photograph of his and Burke expressed a romantic interest in Cabrera's older sister. Burke ordered Cabrera to log onto his Facebook account afterward — something that Cabrera attempted to avoid by saying he forgot his password and then using the wrong one, the Marine said. Cabrera was ordered to do burpees and to reset his Facebook password, allowing Burke to look at other family photographs, Cabrera alleged.

"He keeps telling me 'No, use your real password,' Cabrera said of Burke.

Cabrera added that after Burke saw the photograph of his other sister and "said she was hot," he was ordered to call his home in Miami so Burke could talk to her and propose that he meet her for a drink when he visited the city.

Burke denied making any phone calls to the girlfriend or sister of any recruit, but admitted taking pictures from them.

"It was like an inside-joke-type thing," he told investigators, according to a recording played during the hearing.

Another former recruit, Zachary Mosier, also recalled being in "the dungeon" and said that he passed out on three separate occasions while enduring excessive incentive training. He eventually left the service on medical grounds because of a heart condition. "The building was in disrepair," Mosier said of the "dungeon" building. "Nobody had been in in a long while. I didn't think anybody planned to use it at any point.

"From what I could tell, it was just broken up all over the place," he said.

Missing-soldiers case shows gaps in probes

By ALEX HORTON
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Army criminal investigators said Thursday that they began looking into the disappearance of two soldiers from Fort Bliss, Texas, on Dec. 31, nearly two weeks after they were first reported missing by family members and their commanders.

Pfc. Melvin Jones, a cook, and Pfc. Jake Obad-Mathis, a supply soldier, both 20 and friends in the 1st Armored Division, were last seen together Dec. 19 in a Camaro belonging to Jones, according to local media reports.

Jones had requested holiday leave and was not considered absent without leave until this week, when his time off was to end. Obad-Mathis was not on leave and was considered AWOL on Dec. 20 after failing to report for duty, according to media reports.

Duane Jones, Melvin Jones' father, told a local television station that his son was scheduled to pick him up at the airport Dec. 30 ahead of the Sun Bowl football game, but he did not arrive. He was scheduled for leave and was not declared AWOL at the time.

Delays in launching an official probe in the days after the disappearance has cast light on the often-frustrating, bureaucratic entanglements between military and civilian law enforcement when troops go AWOL, said Maggie Haswell, a former Air Force security forces specialist who volunteers to search for missing troops and veterans.

Army criminal investigators were alerted to the disappearances Dec. 31 and immediately launched the investigation, Army spokesman Christopher Grey told Stars and Stripes on Thursday. Army investigators typically handle felony cases.

Agents from the Army's Criminal Investigations Command "are aggressively investigating the whereabouts of the two missing [s]oldiers in question and we take this matter very seriously," Grey said Wednesday.

Missing-persons reports can be filed with civilian police departments 24 to 48 hours after a disappearance. But there is no equivalent trigger of investigation in the military, and civilian police are not always notified or search for AWOL troops as a priority, Haswell said.

"The civilian police aren't willing to get involved, or take too long to get involved, unless there are indications of foul play," Haswell said, adding investigators only took this particular case seriously after media reports and public outcry.

"Dear Commanders at Fort Bliss," Carin Obad, the mother of Obad-Mathis, wrote

on Facebook on Dec. 28 after phone calls with commanders. "My son is Jake Obad-Mathis and we will find him."

"Your leadership in his company is horrendous and we would like someone to step up and find our son," she added, apparently criticizing her son's commanders at Fort Bliss.

The military's law enforcement is often slow to move on AWOL troops, Haswell said. Commanders must request military police assistance for a missing servicemember, and they often wait 24 or 48 hours to give troops a chance to show up.

Occasionally, days or weeks can pass before military police are notified of an AWOL servicemember, she said.

Tatjana Christian, a spokeswoman for Army personnel and human resources, said Wednesday that soldiers are removed from their duty rosters 30 days after they are reported AWOL, which allows the service to fill that slot with another soldier.

"We do not actively look for deserters," Christian said, adding most AWOL troops are found only after being reported by civilian law enforcement following traffic stops and other encounters in which their names are cross-referenced in a database of military reports.

The El Paso Police Department did not respond to calls or emails seeking comment on their role in the investigation, and Army investigators have not released any new information on the case.

Haswell has spent four years voluntarily investigating active-duty troops and veterans who have gone missing across the country when civilian and military police do not begin active searches, she said.

The Warriors Aftermath and Recovery Group, which she leads, is a band of about 20 volunteers and various veterans' groups across the country who comb Facebook pages for leads, post missing-persons fliers and join search teams on the ground.

Volunteers are activated when reports of AWOL troops or missing veterans are received. The group has participated in between 100 and 150 investigations, Haswell said.

One investigation in North Carolina of an AWOL Marine came to a successful closure after Haswell tracked down credit card receipts and surveillance video, she said.

Haswell, who lives in North Carolina with a husband on active duty with the Marines, will investigate cases on the ground when they are nearby.

There are seemingly endless reasons for troops to miss formation, though most center on undiscovered car accidents, along with financial, family or mental health issues, she said.

But Haswell has only encountered one other case with two missing troops, when two Marines drowned in 2014 after their vehicle crashed into a canal in North Carolina.

"There are a lot of reasons one person will leave," she said. "Two together is very rare."

Haswell's first move after she receives a report is to offer help to families, she said. She began working with the families of Obad-Mathis and Jones shortly after receiving word of their disappearance.

Her background in military law enforcement is a vital tool in explaining the complications of who owns investigative authority, when family members are looking to military and police simultaneously for help, she said.

"We shouldn't have to wait two weeks to get someone from the Army base to at least look," Obad told the Washington Post. "Don't treat them all like criminals."

Civilian law enforcement possesses a different set of values and priorities about military culture, said Sky Gerrond, a former Air Force security operations officer.

An airman missing morning formation without notice is a serious concern for their commander, for instance, but a civilian police officer will most often view that as someone missing a shift at work, Gerrond said.

The authority of military police stops at the base gate, he said, so they are not permitted to conduct a search or investigation in a civilian jurisdiction.

When servicemembers are reported AWOL, communication between military officials and family members is uneven, Haswell said. Carin Obad told Haswell that a supervisor in her son's chain of command hung up on her after she demanded information on the investigation over the phone, Haswell said.

Obad could not be reached for comment by Stars and Stripes.

Haswell pointed to a stigma among the term AWOL for military police to move at a glacial pace even days or weeks after a servicemember is reported missing. The first instinct is to assume poor conduct or unprofessionalism, Haswell said, and their recovery and safe return becomes a low priority for military law enforcement.

That is an issue when a servicemember's life is in danger, Haswell said.

Her most recent investigation, the disappearance of Army Pvt. Dakota Stump at Fort Hood in October, concluded when he was found dead on post under his car weeks after his disappearance. There was no formal search for Stump, she said.

Okinawa Marines hone makeshift runway skills

BY LEON COOK
Stars and Stripes

Okinawa Marines traveled to mainland Japan to set up and practice landing on a makeshift runway, a task they could be ordered to perform during conflicts or after a natural disaster.

Because of the country's limited open space, members of the Air Traffic Control Mobile Team from Marine Corps Air Station Futenma set up their landing strip late last month at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni.

The training, performed several times each year, will be vital if and when the Marines are called upon to move supplies and personnel into a place without pre-existing facilities, a Marine Corps statement said.

"We go out and set up these runways, land and refuel aircraft, which allows us to further push into the country without having to take over airfields or build permanent structures," said Marine Cpl. Chris Swogger.

The mobile team includes six to eight Marines able to operate independently for 72 hours while they find a place to set up a runway, he said.

Expeditionary runways can be set up virtually anywhere with hard, flat ground at least 3,000 feet long and 60 feet wide, although the team checks for potholes and makes sure the soil isn't loose so aircraft don't skid during takeoff and landing, the statement said.

Marines mark off the runway, aided by a navigator and a communication technician.

"They are able to set up the strip to resemble what would be seen in a real-world scenario," Marine Capt. Jeffrey Simonson, a KC-130J pilot, said of the team's work. "The landing strip here in Iwakuni is much smaller [than runways on Okinawa]."

Setting up an expeditionary runway is an important skill for Marines, said Ralph Cossa, president of the Pacific Forum Center for Strategic and International Studies in Hawaii.

"They normally land on the beach, but if you want to sustain a presence somewhere, you're going to eventually need an airfield," he said. "The ability to create your own airfield greatly increases strategic flexibility."

Reagan carrier group to get early warning squadron

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS Ronald Reagan carrier group is getting a new Airborne Early Warning Squadron as the Navy moves closer to relocating Naval Air Station Atsugi units to Iwakuni.

Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron 125 (VAW-125) is scheduled to arrive next month at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni to replace the Atsugi-based Airborne Early Warning Squadron 115. It will be assigned to Carrier Air Wing 5, the Reagan's aviation wing.

The relocation is part of the Navy's goal of sending all of Atsugi's fixed-wing aircraft to Iwakuni. The move, directed in May 2006 as part of the U.S.-Japan Roadmap for Realignment, was to be completed in 2014. The phased relocation is now scheduled to begin in the second half of this year, Navy officials said.

Last August, an Atsugi-based Navy EA-18G Growler electronic warfare plane test-

ed its noise levels at Iwakuni in preparation of the move.

The base's population will double to approximately 10,000 with the arrival of nine squadrons from the carrier wing.

VAW-125, from Naval Station Norfolk, Va., will bring upgraded capabilities to the Reagan group. It flies the new E-2D Advanced Hawkeye early warning and control aircraft, the latest variant of the long-running E-2 Hawkeye series.

The E-2D "employs long-range radar and electronic communications capabilities to oversee the battle space and detect threats beyond the sensor range of other friendly units," said a statement from the Navy, which describes the aircraft as the "digital quarterback" of the fleet.

Hawkeyes are the Navy's longest-serving carrier-based aircraft.

VAW-115 first deployed to the Pacific in 1967 and joined CVW-5 in 1970. The oldest and only original squadron in the carrier wing, it will depart Atsugi this summer for Naval Base Ventura County, Calif.

Army puts decision on religious accommodations at brigade level

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Army has made it easier for Sikhs and observers of other religions to serve in uniform while upholding the tenets of their faiths by simplifying the process to receive religious appearance accommodations.

Brigade-level commanders now must grant religious accommodations to any soldier seeking to wear a religiously mandated beard, turban or Muslim hijab while in uniform with only a few exceptions, Army Secretary Eric Fanning wrote Tuesday in a memorandum. Previously, such uniform exemptions had to be approved by the secretary.

"The soldier's brigade-level commander will approve a request for a religious accommodation ... unless the commander determines the request is not based on a sincerely held religious belief, or identifies a specific, concrete hazard that is not specifically addressed in this directive and that cannot be mitigated by reasonable measures," Fanning wrote, noting the new policy would be added to Army Regulation

670-1, which defines the Army uniform appearance standards.

The Army has granted several Sikh soldiers temporary appearance waivers in recent years to wear neatly groomed unshorn beards and hair under turbans while serving in uniform. Those waivers were applied on a case-by-case basis, and most of them were granted only after the soldiers filed lawsuits seeking their uniform exemptions.

The new accommodations will be made permanent for soldiers throughout their careers once granted by their brigade-level commanders, Fanning wrote in the memo issued in the final weeks of his tenure.

The Sikh Coalition, which helped represent Sikh soldiers seeking exemptions in recent years, was pleased with Fanning's ruling.

Army officials previously have said their main concerns with allowing Sikhs and other soldiers to wear beards is the interference facial hair can have with properly wearing a gas mask. Nonetheless, the Army has granted more than 50,000 permanent medical exemptions since 2007 to allow soldiers to wear beards.

Trump weighs plans to alter intel agency

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump is considering plans to restructure and slim down a top U.S. intelligence agency, a person familiar with the discussions said Thursday. The move comes after Trump questioned the intelligence community's assessment that Russia interfered with the presidential election on his behalf.

Trump still is expected to name a Director of National Intelligence, but he is said to be looking at ways to reorganize the agency. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence was created after the Sept. 11 attacks to coordinate other U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies. Trump also is said to be considering changes at the CIA.

Trump transition spokesman Sean Spicer denied Thursday that Trump was considering "restructuring the intelligence community infrastructure." Spicer did not specifically address possible changes to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Former Indiana Sen. Dan Coats is a leading candidate for the post. The Washington Post reported Thursday afternoon that Trump was poised to announce Coats' selection.

From The Associated Press

Clapper: Report to include Russian motives for hacking

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A final report by intelligence agencies on Russian hacking during the election will be released early next week and will include Moscow's motives for the interference, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told the Senate on Thursday.

Clapper and two other top U.S. intelligence officials declined to provide details, but in testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee they again confirmed that the Russian government was behind the operation. They also warned lawmakers that Russia would continue cyberattacks to sway public opinion.

President-elect Donald Trump was to be briefed on the undisclosed findings Friday. He has rejected the consensus among intelligence agencies that Russia intervened to assist his campaign and to cause chaos in the U.S. He has lobbed harsh criticism at the agencies, equating the findings with the false assessment in 2003 that Iraq held weapons of mass destruction.

"We assess that only Russia's senior-most officials could have authorized the recent election-focused data thefts and disclosures, based on the scope and sensitivity of the targets," according to written testimony by Clapper, U.S. Cyber Command Director Adm. Mike Rogers and Marcel Lettre, undersecretary for defense intelligence.

Thousands of emails from Hillary Clinton's campaign manager, John Podesta, were released by WikiLeaks in the weeks before the November election, a steady drip that some say damaged her campaign. Last month, the CIA said it believes that Russia intended to assist Trump's campaign.

Clapper, Rogers and Lettre testified that Russia cyber-operations will continue to target the United States and will attempt to "conduct influence operations to support Russian military and political objectives."

The Senate committee helmed by Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., a top Russia critic, is planning hearings on the cyber-threat after President Barack Obama imposed sanctions and kicked Russian operatives out

of the country last month in retaliation for the hacks.

McCain said the upcoming joint report by the National Security Agency, the CIA and the FBI will help provide full knowledge of the facts.

"Every American should be alarmed by Russia's attacks on our nation," McCain said. "There is no national security interest more vital to the United States of America than the ability to hold free and fair elections without foreign interference."

However, other Republicans on the Senate panel avoided the topic of Russia, which is threatening to overwhelm Trump's incoming Republican administration, and questioned the current conclusions about its role.

Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., said Trump's plans for a massive military buildup undercut the intelligence community's assertion that Russia favored him over Clinton as a candidate.

A Trump administration will be a stronger military adversary and would have been the less desirable choice from the Russian point of view, he said.

NIH: Give peanut-based food to babies to avoid allergies

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Most babies should start eating peanut-containing foods well before their first birthday, say guidelines released Thursday that aim to protect high-risk tots and other youngsters from developing the dangerous food allergy.

The new guidelines from the National Institutes of Health mark a shift in dietary advice, based on landmark research that found early exposure dramatically lowers a baby's chances of becoming allergic.

The recommendations spell out exactly how to introduce in-

fant to peanut-based foods and when — for some, as early as 4 to 6 months of age — depending on whether they're at high, moderate or low risk of developing one of the most troublesome food allergies.

"We're on the cusp of, hopefully, being able to prevent a large number of cases of peanut allergy," said Dr. Matthew Greenhawt, of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, a member of the NIH-appointed panel that wrote the guidelines.

Babies at high risk — because they have a severe form of the skin rash eczema or egg allergies — need a checkup be-

fore any peanut exposure, and might get their first taste in the doctor's office.

For other tots, most parents can start adding peanut-containing foods to the diet much like they already introduced oatmeal or mashed peas.

No, babies don't get whole peanuts or a big glob of peanut butter — those are choking hazards. Instead, the guidelines include options like watered-down peanut butter or easy-to-gum peanut-flavored "puff" snacks.

"It's an important step forward," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infec-

tious Diseases, which appointed experts to turn the research findings into user-friendly guidelines. "When you do desensitize them from an early age, you have a very positive effect."

Peanut allergy is a growing problem, affecting about 2 percent of U.S. children who must avoid the wide array of peanut-containing foods or risk severe, even life-threatening, reactions.

For years, pediatricians advised avoiding peanuts until age 3 for children thought to be at risk. But the delay didn't help, and that recommendation was dropped in 2008.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

4 shot in gunfight over postings on Facebook

TX ALLEN — Police said four people were wounded during gunfire in a North Texas neighborhood blamed on a feud over some Facebook postings.

Allen police on Wednesday detained several people for questioning following the overnight shootings. Sgt. Jon Felty said an internet disagreement that had been going live on Facebook led to Tuesday night's altercation.

Police said at least nine people from Dallas drove about 25 miles north, to a home in Allen, to confront several individuals. Felty did not immediately provide details on the Facebook postings or who opened fire.

Felty said all four gunshot victims were taken to hospitals and should recover. Names of the victims weren't immediately released.

Stranded snowmobiler rescued after texting

NH PITTSBURG — Rescuers found a stranded snowmobiler in a remote area of northern New Hampshire after he was able to send a text to the trailmaster of a snowmobile club.

The Fish and Game Department said Christopher Thayer, 48, of Epsom, got stuck in a ditch next to a trail near Rump Mountain on Tuesday night. His cellphone coverage was minimal, and when he reached 911 it was initially believed that he had been suffering a medical emergency.

Thayer was able to communicate via text messages with the Pittsburg Ridge Runners Snowmobile Club trailmaster, who determined his location and that he wasn't suffering a medical emergency. Thayer was

found about 90 minutes later by a Pittsburg firefighter close to the Maine border.

Police and the U.S. Border Patrol also helped look for Thayer.

Man pleads guilty in Fort Benning assault

GA COLUMBUS — Federal prosecutors said a southern California man pleaded guilty to assaulting a woman on Fort Benning near Columbus.

Authorities said Alberto F. Islas, 59, of the Los Angeles area, pleaded guilty this week to assault with intent to commit aggravated sexual abuse.

Prosecutors said Islas admitted to attacking a woman at the Army installation by threatening her with a gun in an effort to coerce sex on Sept. 25.

Islas, who is in custody, faces up to 20 years in prison.

Prosecutor removed over sex complaints

IA KEOSAUQUA — A judge has removed the chief prosecutor from office in Van Buren County after finding the attorney regularly sexually harassed his employees.

Tuesday's ruling came after the civil trial of Abraham Watkins that began Oct. 31 last year and ended last month with a deposition. Judge James Drew found that Watkins violated rules that bar Iowa attorneys from committing sexual harassment as part of their practices.

Watkins was accused of commenting on female employees' breasts, making other sexual comments and dressing inappropriately in the office.

His attorney said after the ruling was released that it may be appealed directly to the state Supreme Court.

Teacher who quit over nude photos drops suit

SC SPARTANBURG — A South Carolina teacher who resigned after a student spread nude pictures of her through text messages and social media has dropped her lawsuit against her former employer.

Multiple news agencies report that online court records show Leigh Anne Arthur dismissed the suit against the Union County School District on Dec. 2.

Arthur had sued both the district and former interim Superintendent David Eubanks earlier last year, saying she wanted her dignity back after being forced to quit.

Arthur had told The Associated Press she had been struggling emotionally since a student went through her cellphone and found photos taken as a Valentine's Day gift to her husband. The student was charged with a computer crime and voyeurism.

Introductory course in walleye fishing slated

VT ENOSBURG FALLS — Want to learn how to ice fish for walleye? The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is holding a free introductory course at Lake Carmi.

The clinic is scheduled for Jan. 14 from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Organizers say the course is designed to cover the basics of ice fishing such as ice safety, fishing regulations, drilling holes and rigging equipment while focusing on tactics and techniques for targeting walleye through the ice.

Instructors from Vermont Fish & Wildlife's Let's Go Fishing Program and the Lake

Champlain Walleye Association will run the clinic. Equipment will be provided but anglers may also bring their own.

Death of pony found with throat slit probed

FL NAPLES — Collier County authorities are investigating the case of a dead pony, which was found with its throat slit in the driveway of a vacant house.

The Naples Daily News reported the pony was found Dec. 28.

The animal had a laceration from the back of the left jaw, under the top of the throat and ending at the back of the right jaw.

Investigators determined that the injury was not the result of an animal attack because of the precision of the cut. The pony is believed to be between 6 and 9 years old.

Hearing on custody of abandoned baby set

LA NEW ROADS — Louisiana child protection officials say a hearing is expected soon to determine whether a newborn baby found in a trash can in a Wal-Mart restroom will stay in state custody.

Linda Carter of the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services said the hearing is expected soon.

The Advocate reported that firefighters and hospital workers named the baby Olivia. New Roads Police Chief Kevin McDonald said the baby, found Dec. 23, is doing well.

McDonald said Kyandrea Thomas, 34, is believed to have given birth to the child. She's charged with attempted second-degree murder.

From wire reports

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Once-reeling Steelers roll into playoffs

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Mike Tomlin doesn't remember the exact conversation. Alejandro Villanueva does.

The Pittsburgh Steelers were reeling in early November. Mired in a four-game slide filled with losses both heartbreaking and baffling. The talk of a seventh Super Bowl quickly took a backseat to far more pressing matters. Namely, would the Steelers get it right, and if they did, would they get it right in time to salvage a playoff berth?

Villanueva understood he was part of the problem. There were some block schemes the massive and massively thoughtful 6-foot-9 left tackle couldn't seem to get right. So Tomlin and his offensive line coach, Mike Munchak, got together and decided they'd seen enough, modifying some calls and ditching others altogether.

For Tomlin, it was just another adjustment in a series of them, the kind needed to deal with the ebb and flow of the four-month test of patience and resolve that is a typical NFL season. Not to Villanueva.

"You have to come up with a new offense," Villanueva said. "We had to come up with different plays, see who we had on our roster, accommodate to different runners and different receivers and that takes time. You can practice it all you want, but it's on Sundays where you can really get better. For myself, some of the protections I struggled with, we stayed away from. We got better as an offense."

One more predicated on hogging the ball and dictating the tempo with running back

Le'Veon Bell than seeing if it could put the scoreboard on tilt. The result? Seven consecutive wins, an AFC North title and all the momentum it could possibly need going into a wild-card game against Miami on Sunday.

Perhaps in a way it's fitting. Pittsburgh's malaise began on a muggy, one-sided 30-15 reality check delivered by the Dolphins on Oct. 16. Quarterback Ben Roethlisberger was off early, an issue that only exacerbated itself when he played on after tearing cartilage in his left knee in the first half. The running game mustered little. The run defense even less. And just like that, the swagger the Steelers played with during a breezy 4-1 start vanished.

"One of those weird days in football," guard David DeCastro said. "Sometimes you're going to have one of those weeks."

One followed by three more just like it. A steady but ultimately futile effort by backup quarterback Landry Jones in a home loss to New England. A somnolent 21-14 performance on the road in Baltimore when Roethlisberger returned. Then the potential dagger: a 35-30 setback at Heinz Field to Dallas in which Roethlisberger hit Antonio Brown on a fake spike touchdown to give Pittsburgh the lead with 42 seconds left only to see the Cowboys go right back down the field to win it.

Roethlisberger vented afterward, saying it was time for everyone to be accountable, a subtler version of the challenge Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers offered with his team floundering at 4-6 as Thanksgiving approached. While the quarterback has been

better, so have the players around him, following a trend that's become the hallmark of Tomlin's decade-long tenure.

"We need to be a better team at the end of the thing than we are at the beginning of the thing because that's just how it goes," Tomlin said.

Something the Steelers have been when December rolls around. Pittsburgh is 13-1 in regular-season games played in December or January during their run to three straight postseason berths, the first time the Steelers have done that since reaching the playoffs from 1992-97.

Tomlin, as is his habit, downplayed the idea that any one move produced a turnaround. It's a season. Things evolve based on health, experience (or lack thereof) and opportunity. Over the last two months Pittsburgh's stars have remained out of the trainer's room. Rookie defenders Sean Davis, Artie Burns and Javon Hargrave grew up. And an unheralded offensive supporting cast began to figure things out. Ageless James Harrison and protege Bud Dupree put an end to the rotation at outside linebacker. Villanueva and the rest of the line became the cohesive, pile-pushing force Tomlin and Munchak envisioned in August.

One game, one play, one sequence didn't get things right. The accumulation of small things over time did.

"When I say it's business as usual, it doesn't mean it's without change," Tomlin said. "It's getting a more black-and-white personality."

Oswelier getting second chance with Texans

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Brock Oswelier is getting a second chance to start for the Houston Texans.

With Tom Savage out with a concussion, the Texans will look to their \$72 million man to lead them in their wild-card playoff game against Oakland on Saturday.

Oswelier joined the Texans in the offseason on that huge contract after spending his first four seasons in Denver. He started the first 14 games this season before being benched in the second quarter against Jacksonville on Dec. 18 after throwing interceptions on consecutive drives to give him 16 for the season. Savage took

over and rallied the Texans to the victory and started Houston's last two games.

But Savage suffered a concussion early in the second quarter Sunday in a loss to the Titans, and Oswelier took over and threw for 253 yards and a touchdown and ran for another score.

It will be Oswelier's first career playoff start after he was benched for Peyton Manning before the start of the postseason in Denver last season.

"It's a dream come true. ... I couldn't be more excited," Oswelier said. "I can't wait for Saturday to be here. I wish it was here today. But I'll definitely be ready to go."

With Savage out Saturday, Brandon Weeden, who hasn't played since last season, will back up Oswelier.

Oswelier's coaches and receivers all thought he played more freely on Sunday than he had in the past and the quarterback explained what he thinks brought about the change.

"I told myself: 'If you get an opportunity to go back in, just go have fun. Get back to the joy of football,'" he said.

Oswelier set that tone the second he took the field on Sunday, gathering the offensive linemen and telling a quick joke before getting down to business.

"Everyone had a good little laugh," Oswelier said. "I'm

going to keep that one between me and the linemen."

Oswelier and star receiver DeAndre Hopkins had some trouble connecting this season with the quarterback often trying to force balls to Hopkins that were intercepted. Things were different on Sunday when Oswelier and Hopkins linked up repeatedly, and he ended with a season-high 123 yards receiving. It was the most yards he'd had since finishing with 113 in a win over Kansas City on Sept. 18.

"He did a great job coming in, being a leader and stepping in, forgetting about everything that's happened," Hopkins said.

Butler stuns No. 1 Villanova

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Butler coach Chris Holtmann had the perfect plan to take down No. 1 Villanova on Wednesday night.

Play ugly, which worked beautifully.

Kethan Savage scored five of his 13 points during a decisive late run that helped the 18th-ranked Bulldogs end the nation's longest winning streak at 20 games — and perhaps the Wildcats' five-week run atop the polls — with a 66-58 victory that sent students streaming onto the court.

"We felt if we could make it ugly on the defensive end, we'd give ourselves a chance," Holtmann said. "We did."

What the Bulldogs (13-2, 2-1 Big East) also did was add another chapter to a storied program that captured the hearts of college basketball fans with back-to-back runs to the national championship game in 2010 and 2011 and broke hearts when two recent former players and the son of an assistant coach all died in 2016.

By extending their home-court winning streak to 12, the Bulldogs handed the defending national champs their first loss

since last March. After losing 69-67 to Seton Hall in the Big East championship game, Villanova won six straight in the NCAA Tournament to capture its second national title. Then the Wildcats won their first 14 games this season for the longest winning streak in school history.

"It stings right now," Villanova preseason All-America Josh Hart said after scoring 13 points. "But we're not going to be discouraged by it."

Hart was 3-for-11 from the field and 1-for-5 on three-pointers.

"They prevented us from getting those guys involved," coach Jay Wright said when asked about why the Wildcats' better scorers had so much trouble. "They played really good team defense. I was impressed."

No. 2 Baylor 65, Iowa State 63: Manu Lecomte made a short, high-arc jumper over a taller defender with 8 seconds left and Baylor edged Iowa State in its Big 12 home opener.

No. 23 Notre Dame 77, No. 9 Louisville 70: Steve Vasturia scored a career-high 24 points to lead Notre Dame over Louisville.

Matt Farrell tied his career

high with 22 points for the Irish (13-2, 2-0 ACC), who have won four straight overall and six in a row at home against Louisville..

No. 10 Creighton 85, St. John's 72: Freshman 7-footer Justin Patton scored a season-high 25 points and grabbed nine rebounds as Creighton bounced back from its first loss of the season with a victory over host St. John's, snapping the Red Storm's three-game winning streak.

Pittsburgh 88, No. 11 Virginia 76 (OT): Jamel Artis scored 24 points, Michael Young added 19 and Sheldon Jeter hit a pair of three-pointers in overtime to lift host Pittsburgh over Virginia.

No. 15 Oregon 83, Washington 61: Tyler Dorsey made eight three-pointers and finished with 28 points, and Oregon overcame foul trouble to pull away from host Washington in the second half.

N.C. State 104, No. 21 Virginia Tech 78: Freshman guard Dennis Smith Jr. had 27 points, 11 assists and 11 rebounds for the second triple-double in program history, and host North Carolina State rode a dominant first-half performance to a victory.

Allen back with Duke after 1 game

Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — Grayson Allen was back for No. 8 Duke after an indefinite suspension for his latest trip of an opponent wound up being one game.

Allen had 15 points and seven assists in the Blue Devils' 110-57 rout of Georgia Tech on Wednesday night — the final game for Hall of Fame coach Mike Krzyzewski before he takes a leave of absence to have back surgery.

"[Krzyzewski] ultimately felt that I was ready to come back, and I felt good coming back," Allen said. "And so I accept all the discipline that came my way, and I know that it was my fault."

Allen was suspended indefinitely Dec. 22, one day after he was caught tripping an opposing player for the third time in a calendar year. This time he was caught tripping Elon's Steven Santa Ana on a drive in the first half of a 72-61 win.

At the time, Krzyzewski said he would suspend the preseason AP All-American guard and his team's second-leading scorer "until I feel good about the entire situation where he is at."

After the game, Krzyzewski said he and athletic director Kevin White discussed the suspension and found that it was "appropriate" to reinstate him.

Krzyzewski is scheduled to have the operation Friday and the school expects him to be back in roughly four weeks. Associate head coach Jeff Capel will be in charge during Coach K's absence, with his first game coming Saturday against Boston College.

Allen watched from the bench in street clothes Saturday as Virginia Tech routed the Blue Devils 89-75. After that game, Krzyzewski revealed that he had stripped Allen of his team captaincy.

Allen and the Blue Devils visit both the 12th-ranked Seminoles and ninth-ranked Cardinals next week.

WRs Williams, Cain eager to face Tide

Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C.— Clemson co-offensive coordinator Jeff Scott walked over to receiver Deon Cain shortly before the Tigers left the locker room to face Ohio State with a smile and a simple message: "Welcome to the playoffs."

It has been a long, fretful national title game journey for both Cain and Mike Williams, two of Clemson's most dynamic receivers. Williams had to watch the 45-40 loss to Alabama last January from the sidelines, a frightening neck injury in the first quarter of the season-opener knocked him out for the year.

For Cain, it was his own mistake that cost him. He was sent home along with two other players — suspended for breaking team rules — two days before Clemson's 37-17 win over Oklahoma in the Orange Bowl. Cain also missed the national championship loss.

Now, both are back and eager to make an impact against No. 1 Alabama (14-0) on Monday.

"They're very excited," teammate and fellow receiver Artavis Scott said. "Who wouldn't be when you're playing for a national title."

Williams was a 1,000-yard receiver clearly marked as Clemson's main target in 2015 when he collided with the goal post stanchion making a TD catch against Wofford. Williams lay still for several, uncomfortable minutes until he was strapped to a backboard and taken off the field.

The diagnosis was serious — a neck fracture — but Williams' made a strong recovery and an even stronger return in 2016 with team highs of 90 catches, 1,267 yards receiving and 10 touchdown grabs.

"I've gotten better in all parts of my game," Williams said. "Running routes, blocking, reading defenses, that was my goal."

Cain, like Williams, has made the most of his time back on the field. He leads the Tigers front line receivers with 19.1 yards a catch with 640 yards on 33 grabs. His nine TDs are second behind Williams.

Gibson helps Anaheim shut out Detroit

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — After a couple of days off to recover from the busiest game of his NHL career, John Gibson had an easier night of work and another impressive result for the Anaheim Ducks.

Gibson made 23 saves in his eighth career shutout, and Nick Ritchie scored in the first period of the Ducks' 2-0 victory over the Detroit Red Wings on Wednesday.

The young goalie was solid when tested, but he had practically nothing to do against the Red Wings in comparison to Sunday, when the Philadelphia Flyers bombarded him with 54 shots in Anaheim's 4-3 shootout victory.

Gibson and the Ducks got their first shutout victory since Nov. 1 despite playing without captain Ryan Getzlaf, who has a lower-body injury. Anaheim spent its days off working on

defensive teamwork after getting embarrassed by the Flyers, and it paid off in a cohesive effort against the Red Wings and their struggling power play.

"I think everybody was holding themselves accountable to have a bounce-back defensive game, and I thought we executed pretty well," Gibson said. "Some games you [face] 15 shots. Some games you get 30 shots, and sometimes you get a whole lot. You just have to be ready."

Ondrej Kase scored late in the third period and Antoine Vermette had two assists for the Ducks, who have won three of four and earned points in six straight games.

"That was definitely more of what we want to reproduce," Vermette said. "We want to take more pride in our defensive play, and we were able to reduce both their shots and their scoring chances."

Canucks 3, Coyotes 0: Ryan Miller made 22 saves for his 37th career shutout to help host Vancouver win its fifth straight.

Brandon Sutter, Bo Horvat and Sven Baertschi scored for the Canucks, who have their longest win streak of the season. The victory moved them above .500 for the first time since October.

Canadiens 4, Stars 3 (OT): Max Pacioretty's second goal of the game, on a breakaway 19 seconds into overtime, lifted visiting Montreal past Dallas.

Pacioretty took a pass from Jeff Petry and skated in on Stars goalie Kari Lehtonen for the win. Montreal was playing its fifth straight overtime game and improved to 3-0-2 in the stretch.

Rangers 5, Flyers 2: Kevin Hayes and Michael Grabner each scored two goals, Henrik Lundqvist stopped 30 shots and

visiting New York won for the fourth time in five games.

Chris Kreider also scored to help the Rangers match the Columbus Blue Jackets (27) for the most wins in the NHL.

Jets 4, Panthers 1: Patrik Laine had a goal and an assist to help visiting Winnipeg win its second straight after losing two in a row.

Mark Scheifele, Nikolaj Ehlers and Shawn Matthias also scored for the Jets and Connor Hellebuyck made 31 saves. Bryan Little notched two assists.

Flames 4, Avalanche 1: Mikael Backlund scored for the fifth consecutive game, leading host Calgary past Colorado.

Alex Chiasson had a goal and an assist and Kris Versteeg and Johnny Gaudreau also scored for the Flames. Mark Giordano, TJ Brodie and Sean Monahan had two assists each.

Butler takes over in 4th quarter, leads Bulls past Cavs

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — LeBron James was reminded what it's like to be Cleveland's only star.

Lonesome and no fun.

Jimmy Butler took over in the fourth quarter, scoring 10 straight points during a critical stretch and leading the Chicago Bulls to a 106-94 win Wednesday night over the Cavaliers, who had a less-than-100 percent James and were without Kyrie Irving and Kevin Love.

Butler, who was coming off a 52-point game against Charlotte, scored 14 of his 20 points in the fourth as the Bulls held off Cleveland's rally and ended the Cavs' 13-game winning streak with James in the lineup.

Butler said Dwyane Wade, who returned to his hometown this summer, encouraged his new teammate to take control.

"The guy who wears No. 3 on this team came to me and was like, 'Win the game,'" Butler said. "So I guess a switch cut on. I knew I was going to have to do that in the fourth anyway, but

with him telling me that, you can't let D-Wade down.

"He's been doing it for years. It was my time to step up."

James, who has been battling a head cold for several days, was questionable until about 20 minutes before the game, when the Cavs announced he would be the one — and only — member of Cleveland's "Big 3" in uniform. He finished with 31 points, eight rebounds and seven assists in 37 minutes.

James was forced to go it alone as Irving missed his third straight game with a hamstring issue that appears to be more serious than first diagnosed and Love is still recovering from a nasty case of food poisoning.

James said there was never any question he would play.

"If I can walk, I can go," he said, "unless coach tells me to sit down. My plan was to play."

But without Irving and Love, the Cavs didn't have enough firepower to slow the Bulls, who got 17 points from Doug McDermott and made a season-high 13

three-pointers.

Bucks 105, Knicks 104: Giannis Antetokounmpo made a turnaround jumper at the buzzer to give Milwaukee a victory over host New York.

Antetokounmpo finished with 27 points and 13 rebounds, and he gave the Bucks a final possession when he knocked the ball off Derrick Rose and out of bounds with 8.6 seconds left. Officials originally ruled the ball was off the Bucks but reversed the call after video review.

Warriors 125, Trail Blazers 117: Stephen Curry had 35 points with five three-pointers, Kevin Durant scored 30 points and blocked three shots and Golden State beat visiting Portland.

Curry shot 12-for-25 on a night Splash Brother Klay Thompson struggled to find his stroke from long range, going 1-for-7 and scoring 14 points. Curry added seven rebounds and five assists.

Hornets 123, Thunder 112:

Nicolas Batum had a season-high 28 points, and Charlotte beat visiting Oklahoma City to snap a two-game losing streak.

Russell Westbrook had 33 points and 15 rebounds, but fell two assists shy of his 17th triple-double of the season for Oklahoma City. Enes Kanter added 22 points, and Victor Oladipo and Steven Adams each had 18.

Hawks 111, Magic 92: Dennis Schroder scored 18 points, Dwight Howard had 13 points and 12 rebounds and Atlanta pulled away late in a victory over host Orlando for its fourth straight win.

Heat 107, Kings 102: Tyler Johnson scored 23 points and visiting Miami beat Sacramento to snap a six-game losing streak.

Clippers 115, Grizzlies 106: Austin Rivers scored a season-high 28 points and helped rally host Los Angeles from a 12-point deficit in the third quarter to beat Memphis for its second win in a row.