

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, January 7, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

300 Marines to go to Helmand, Afghanistan

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — About 300 Marines will deploy this spring to troubled Helmand Province, marking a return to a region where brutal fighting killed hundreds of Marines during Operation Enduring Freedom.

The Marines on Friday announced the deployment to southern Afghanistan to support the NATO-led mission to train Afghan security forces in their fight with the Taliban.

Troops from II Marine Expeditionary Force, which is based at Camp Lejeune, N.C., will train and advise the Afghan National Army's 215th Corps and the nation's 505th Zone National Police, said unit spokeswoman

1st Lt. Katie Kochert.

U.S. Central Command requested the deployment, she said. For the Marine Corps, it will be a return to an area where it has operated through much of the past decade. Marines first entered Helmand at the beginning of the Afghanistan War in 2001. The unit returned en masse in early 2008 and remained in the province through October 2014, when they handed over control of Camp Leatherneck to the Afghan army.

Helmand was the site of some of the most brutal fighting between Taliban insurgents and U.S.-led coalition forces throughout Operation Enduring Freedom. Nearly 1,000 NATO troops, including hundreds of Marines, died in the province.

Since 2015, the Taliban has made successive inroads in Helmand, where they have captured several districts. Afghan security forces have suffered some of their most significant casualties in the province.

U.S. officials have blamed failures in Helmand largely on instability within the Afghan army's 215th Corps. The unit faced major issues in recent years, including poor leadership, overworked soldiers and fraud. Army Gen. John Nicholson told reporters last month at the Pentagon that ineffective and corrupt commanders have been removed from the unit. He said the unit has undergone retraining in the past year.

Nonetheless, the Taliban have

continued to target the province, with rare winter attacks occurring as recently as last week in Sangin and Marjah districts.

The U.S. is in the process of drawing down its force size in Afghanistan from 9,800 to 8,400 troops by Jan. 20, the day President-elect Donald Trump is sworn into office. The war in Afghanistan was rarely discussed on the campaign trail and it is unclear what policy changes Trump might make.

The Taliban control about 10 percent of the country, the most territory that it has held since 2001, according to NATO. The Afghan government controls about 70 percent of the country and the remaining 20 percent is contested.

Relatives: Shooting suspect 'lost his mind' in Iraq

Associated Press

The man police say opened fire with a gun from his checked baggage at a Florida airport had a history of mental health problems — some of which followed his military service in Iraq — and was receiving psychological treatment at his home in Alaska, his relatives said Friday after the deadly shooting.

"Only thing I could tell you was when he came out of Iraq, he wasn't feeling too good," his uncle, Hernan Rivera, told The Record newspaper.

Esteban Santiago, 26, deployed in 2010 as part of the Puerto Rico National Guard, spending a year with an engineering battalion, according to Guard spokesman Maj. Paul Dahlen.

In recent years, Santiago had been living in Anchorage, Alaska, his brother, Bryan Santiago, told The Associated Press from Puerto Rico. Bryan Santiago said his brother's girlfriend recently had called the family to alert them to his treatment.

In November, Esteban told FBI agents in Alaska that the government was controlling his mind and was forcing him to watch Islamic State group videos, a law en-

forcement official said. The official spoke Friday on condition of anonymity.

The FBI agents notified the police after the interview with Esteban Santiago, who took him in for a mental health evaluation.

Bryan Santiago said his brother never spoke to him directly about his medical issues.

Esteban Santiago was born in New Jersey but moved to Puerto Rico when he was 2, his brother said. He grew up in the southern coastal town of Penuelas before joining the Guard in 2007.

While in Iraq, Santiago cleared roads of improvised explosive devices and at least two members of his company were killed, spokesman Lt. Col. Candis Olmstead told The New York Times. He was awarded a Meritorious Unit Commendation.

Since returning from Iraq, Santiago served in the Army Reserves and the Alaska National Guard, Olmstead told the AP. He was serving as a combat engineer in the Guard before his discharge for "unsatisfactory performance," said Olmstead. His military rank upon discharge was E-3, private 1st class.

She would not elaborate on his discharge, but the Pentagon said he went AWOL sever-

al times and was demoted and discharged.

Still, he'd had some successes during his military career, being awarded a number of medals and commendations including the Iraq Campaign Medal and the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal.

His uncle and aunt in New Jersey were trying to make sense of what they were hearing about Santiago after his arrest at the Fort Lauderdale airport. FBI agents arrived at their house to question them, and reporters swarmed around.

Maria Ruiz told The Record that her nephew recently had become a father to a son and was struggling.

"It was like he lost his mind," she said in Spanish of his return from Iraq. "He said he saw things."

Santiago was flying from Anchorage on a Delta flight and had checked only one piece of luggage, which contained the gun.

Santiago was charged in a domestic-violence case in January 2016, accused of damaging a door when he forced his way into a bathroom at his girlfriend's home.

A month later, municipal prosecutors said he violated the conditions of his release when officers found him at her home during a routine check.

US dropped 26,171 bombs in 2016, mostly in Iraq, Syria

McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The U.S. dropped 26,171 bombs last year, 3,027 more than in 2015.

According to an analysis of Defense Department data from the Council on Foreign Relations, a nonpartisan think tank, the majority of the bombs were dropped in Iraq and Syria. The U.S. leads an international coalition fighting the Islamic State group in both countries and has carried out air operations in an attempt to reduce the area controlled by the terrorist organization.

Nearly the same amount of bombs were dropped in Syria (12,192) and Iraq (12,095) last year.

President Barack Obama sought to draw down American military presence abroad and has resisted committing ground troops to various international conflicts. Despite pushes from within his administration to commit U.S. military forces to the civil war in Syria, Obama

kept U.S. military action in the country focused on the Islamic State group. He was widely criticized for failing to follow through on the “red line” he set over Syrian President Bashar Assad’s use of chemical weapons against his own people.

The U.S. dropped 79 percent of the anti-Islamic State group coalition bombs in Syria and Iraq, totaling 24,287. That figure, along with others analyzed by CFR, is likely lower than the actual number dropped because one airstrike can involve multiple bombs.

Obama did authorize a troop surge in Afghanistan — a conflict he pledged to end during his campaign — where the U.S. dropped 1,337 bombs in 2016. There are 8,400 U.S. troops left in the country, more than Obama initially wanted to keep there at the end of his term. The U.S. only dropped 947 bombs in Afghanistan in 2015.

The U.S. also dropped more bombs in Libya in 2016 than it did in 2015. Nearly 500 bombs

were dropped in the North African country that has essentially been ungoverned since the fall of dictator Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. He was captured and killed during the Libyan civil war, kicked off by the Arab Spring protests that also began the Syrian conflict.

There were 34 American bombs dropped last year in Yemen, where the war began in 2015. That’s fewer than the 58 bombs the U.S. dropped there that year. The U.S. supports Saudi Arabia in the conflict, although it announced in December it will limit military support following criticism about the role American weapons and technology have played in civilian casualties.

In 2016, 14 bombs were dropped in Somalia, which has faced decades of instability, and three were dropped in Pakistan.

Marines put 1st women in ground combat unit

Associated Press

CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. — For the first time, the Marine Corps has put three enlisted female Marines in a ground combat unit once open only to men, officials said Thursday.

They will serve as a rifleman, machine gunner and mortar Marine, said 1st Lt. John McCombs, spokesman for the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force at Camp Lejeune.

They report Thursday to the 1st Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, which has had three female officers in its ranks for several months to help integrate the enlisted females into the unit, McCombs said. The women’s names and ranks were not released. “This process ensures the Marine Corps will adhere to its standards and will continue its emphasis on combat readiness,” McCombs said in an email.

Their entry in the unit marks ongoing efforts to comply with Defense Secretary Ash Carter’s directive in December 2015 to open all military jobs to women, including the most dangerous commando posts. That decision was formal recognition of the thousands of female servicewomen who fought in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars in recent years, including those who were killed or wounded.

The Army, Navy, Air Force and Special Operations Command all said they would not seek any exceptions and would recommend removing the ban on women in dangerous combat jobs.

In June, six months after Carter’s move, The Associated Press reported the Marine Corps had seven female officers either serving in combat posts or waiting in line to serve, and 167 women with noncombat jobs in front-line units.

There are about 40,000 Marines in the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force.

3 Marines go to trial on hazing charges

BY MATTHEW SCHOFIELD
McClatchy Washington Bureau

QUANTICO, Va. — Three Parris Island Marine sergeants on Friday were scheduled for trial in the coming months to face charges involving violating orders, making false statements and, in two cases, recruit hazing.

Hazing at the camp became a focus of camp commanders and even the White House after the death last March recruit Raheel Siddiqui, 20, of Michigan. He fell 40 feet to his death two weeks into his training.

The fallout from Siddiqui’s death has led to a series of investigations that “have re-

vealed a culture permissive of hazing and recruit abuse.”

The Marines say these three men face allegations that have nothing to do with Siddiqui or his death. Court dates were scheduled for March 31 to April 5 for Staff Sgt. Jose Lucena-Martinez, April 10-14 for Staff Sgt. Matthew T. Bacchus and April 19-25 for Sgt. Riley Gress.

All three are charged with violating a lawful general order and making a false official statement. Bacchus is also charged with maltreatment, and Gress is charged with cruelty and maltreatment, an official Marine statement said.

The Marines entered the

courtroom one at a time, each hearing lasting less than 15 minutes.

Before the judge, Lt. Col. Christopher Greer, asked for a plea, he had their defenders read the lists of medals represented on their uniforms, which included those for service in Afghanistan and the global war on terror.

The Marines are being prosecuted in what is called a “special court-martial.” The maximum punishments are 12 months confinement, two-thirds of their pay for 12 months and “a bad conduct discharge and reduction to E-1.”

Report: Putin ordered effort to help Trump

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a hidden campaign to influence America's presidential election in favor of Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton, U.S. intelligence agencies declared Friday in the government's first formal allegation supporting claims that Trump and his supporters have resisted.

The intelligence report, an unclassified version of a more-detailed, classified account given earlier to Trump, the White House and congressional leaders, withheld the government's evidence to back up its assertions.

Trump, in a brief interview with The Associated Press, said he "learned a lot" from his discussions with intelligence officials but declined to say whether he accepted their assertion.

Trump would not detail what evidence he was presented with, saying only that he learned "a lot of confidential things." Because Trump is not yet president, he is legally constrained from revealing classified information.

In an earlier written statement, Trump said it was clear Russian email hacking did not deliver him the presidency.

The unclassified version of the intelligence report was the most detailed public account to date of Russian efforts to interfere with the U.S. political process, with actions that included hacking into the email accounts of the Democratic National Committee and individual Democrats like Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta. Russia also used state-funded propaganda and paid "trolls" to make nasty comments on social media services, the report said. There was no suggestion that Russia affected actual vote counting or tampered with ballot machines.

The report explicitly tied Putin to the hackings, called it the "boldest effort yet" to influence a U.S. election and said the Russian government provided emails to WikiLeaks — something the website's founder, Julian Assange, has denied repeatedly. The intelligence agencies also said Russia will continue to try to in-

fluence future events in the U.S. and worldwide.

Since Election Day, the intelligence agencies said, Russia has launched a "spear-phishing" campaign to try to trick people into revealing their email passwords, targeting U.S. government employees and think tanks that specialize in national security, defense and foreign policy.

Exactly how the U.S. monitors its adversaries in cyberspace is a closely guarded secret because revealing such details could help foreign governments further obscure their activities.

The unclassified report said the Russian effort was both political and personal.

"Russia's goals were to undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton and harm her electability and potential presidency," it said. "We further assess Putin and the Russian government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump."

Putin most likely wanted to discredit Clinton because he blames her for inciting mass

protests against his regime in late 2011 and early 2012, and because he resents her for disparaging comments she has made about him, the report said.

The report was released shortly after intelligence officials finished briefing Trump.

Trump has been dismissive of the intelligence agencies' claims of Russia's involvement for months, long before he saw the classified information Friday.

Just hours before he was briefed, Trump dismissed the assessment and told The New York Times the focus on Russia's involvement is a "political witch hunt" by adversaries. "They got beaten very badly in the election," Trump said. "They are very embarrassed about it. To some extent, it's a witch hunt. They just focus on this."

After finally seeing the intelligence behind the claims of the outgoing Obama administration, Trump released a one-page statement that did not address whether Russia sought to meddle. Instead, he said, "there was absolutely no effect on the outcome of the election."

Major who spent career overcoming obstacles retires

The Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer

It wasn't how Maj. Ivan Castro thought his Army career would end.

But looking back on the past nearly three decades and obstacles he's overcome along the way, Castro was happy with the results.

After taking the brunt of a mortar blast in Iraq in September 2006, many didn't think Castro would last the week.

He proved them wrong. And for more than a decade since, never stopped surprising his fellow soldiers, friends and family.

Castro returned to duty after 17 months of recovery.

He was the first blind graduate of the Maneuver Captain's Career Course at Fort Benning, Ga.

He commanded a special operations recruiting company.

Out of uniform, Castro completed more than 50 marathons. He cycled across America. He trekked 200 miles across Antarctica to the South Pole.

More importantly, officials said Castro served, and continues to serve, as an inspi-

ration, even as he officially ends his Army career.

Maj. Gen. James E. Kraft Jr. said Castro's well-attended retirement ceremony was a fitting tribute to a selfless career, with a hall full of those who served with Castro, laughed with him, overcame obstacles with him, cared for him or relied on him for moral and physical courage.

"I think it's fair to say that we've all been touched at a very deep level and inspired by Ivan Castro," Kraft said.

Castro, who began his Army career as an enlisted soldier in 1988, said, "It's bittersweet, but all good things come to an end. 'I've been very blessed.'"

Castro, a native of New York, lived in Puerto Rico before joining the Army and later served with the 101st Airborne Division, 82nd Airborne Division.

He was serving with the 82nd Airborne's 2nd Brigade Combat Team in Iraq as a scout platoon leader when he was injured Sept. 2, 2006.

On a rooftop near Baghdad, Castro was in the process of moving his men to a new

location when a mortar struck the neighboring building.

He shouted for his men to move, but never heard the second blast, as another mortar landed just five feet from him.

The explosion ripped his shoulder apart, down to the bone. It broke his arm, nose and cheekbone.

Castro's lungs collapsed. He suffered an aneurysm. His right eye was blown out of his head. Shrapnel lodged inside his left eye.

Once recovered, he set a goal to go back to work within special operations.

With the help of special operations leaders, Castro returned to the 7th Special Forces Group and was later chosen to command the special operations recruiting company.

According to Kraft, some said it wasn't a good idea to put someone so badly injured in a position as a recruiter.

But Castro's injuries weren't a warning to recruits, Kraft said.

"It resonated in spades," he said. "He has unconditionally loved this military vocation of ours and everyone that wears or has worn this uniform."

Business booming for legal marijuana

The Washington Post

While some activists are planning to give away marijuana on Inauguration Day, other entrepreneurs are taking a different approach: making a ton of money from it.

According to *Governing.com*, 29 states and the District of Columbia have or will soon have laws legalizing marijuana in some form. Use of recreational marijuana is legal in eight states. As its popularity has grown, so have profits. In 2016, sales of legal marijuana in North America totaled \$6.7 billion — an increase of more than 30 percent — according to a report from Arcview Market Research. The number is projected to rise to \$20.2 billion by 2021.

Debra Borchardt, who covers retail and cannabis for *Forbes*, contends that the growth is larger and faster than even the

dot-com era and also quoted Arcview's new editor-in-chief who said "the only consumer industry categories I've seen reach \$5 billion in annual spending and then post anything like 25 percent compound annual growth in the next five years are cable television (19%) in the 1990's and the broadband internet (29%) in the 2000's."

Regulatory resistance, particularly at the federal level, is waning. Jeff Sessions, the potential attorney general, is opposed to cannabis, but has other fish to fry. Recently Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., asked the federal Financial Crimes Enforcement Network for additional guidance to help banks serve the growing number of marijuana merchants (many banks have been reluctant to serve this industry due to existing federal statutes).

Growth is being fueled by the rising pop-

ularity of marijuana-infused concentrates and edibles. But what's not included in these numbers are the billions being generated by indirect industries that are also profiting from the cannabis boom, including those that sell accessories, machinery and equipment, pesticides and real estate.

Let's not also forget the lawyers and lobbyists who are battling to spread legalization throughout the country. Investments, particularly in testing and growing technologies are "pouring in" said Arcview's CEO in the *Forbes* article. "Twenty-one percent of the total U.S. population now live in legal adult use markets," said Troy Dayton.

For entrepreneurs, investors and opportunists, the marijuana industry could be a new dot-com boom.

GOP concerns grow over repeal of health care law

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans are increasingly jittery over rushing to demolish much of President Barack Obama's health care law without having a GOP alternative that's ready to go.

While nothing about revamping the nation's \$3 trillion-per-year health-care system will be easy, Republican leaders want congressional committees to have legislation dismantling much of Obama's overhaul ready by late January. They're hoping Congress can quickly send a measure to incoming President Donald Trump phasing out the law, perhaps a couple of months later.

Crafting a GOP replacement is likely to take longer, thanks to Republican divisions and solid Democratic opposition. With 20 million Americans now covered under Obama's law, one political nightmare for Republicans would be repealing the statute and then proving unable to pass a new version.

Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., told reporters Friday that Republicans might find themselves in a "box canyon" if they erase the health care law without a sub-

stitute in hand.

One part of Obama's law Republicans are eager to repeal is its tax increases on higher-earning people and segments of the health care industry that help finance expanded coverage. Corker said that if those taxes are voided but Republicans temporarily continue subsidies to help people buy coverage, "that means Republicans would have to vote for a tax increase" to pay for them — usually a nonstarter for the GOP.

Corker said he supported repealing and replacing simultaneously, a sequence that Trump has said he favors. "That, to me, is the prudent course of action."

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said that if Republicans void Obama's bill, Democrats won't help them pass alternative legislation.

While Republicans will likely just need a simple Senate majority to approve their repeal bill, for procedural reasons later replacement legislation will probably need 60 votes in a chamber the GOP controls by just 52-48. That means a need for at least eight Democratic votes,

Dems want fast-food workers to testify at nominee's hearing

Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — Almost two dozen Senate Democrats are calling for fast-food workers to testify at the confirmation hearing for President-elect Donald Trump's Labor secretary pick, Andy Puzder, who is the chief executive of the parent company of the Carl's Jr. and Hardee's burger chains.

Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, Patty Murray of Washington and 21 other Democrats wrote to the chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on Thursday, saying they were concerned that Labor Department investigations of CKE Restaurant Inc. outlets "have turned up violations of basic protections of workers' rights in more than half of their inspections."

The Carpinteria, Calif.-based chain, which has more than 3,300 locations in 42 U.S. states and 28 countries, is facing "several potential class-action lawsuits" by employees regarding wage and other disputes, the lawmakers said.

"It is essential that the committee hear from these employees and other Americans who have had first-hand experience

with Mr. Puzder or the businesses he has led," the senators wrote to committee chairman, Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn.

An analysis in September by Bloomberg BNA found that about 60 percent of Labor Department investigations of Carl's Jr. and Hardee's restaurants since 2009 turned up at least one violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act, which covers minimum wage, overtime and other regulations.

Still, that was one of the best performances by leading fast-food outlets.

"Mr. Puzder's tenure at CKE and his company's treatment of thousands of working families 'bear directly' on his qualifications and suitability to serve as secretary of Labor," the senators wrote. They added that if confirmed, Puzder "would be responsible for overseeing the enforcement of many of the labor laws his company has repeatedly violated."

In a letter released Friday, Alexander wrote back to the senators saying he would not change committee precedent to hear only from the nominee at a confirmation hearing.

Puzder's confirmation hearing tentatively is scheduled for Jan. 17.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Cops: Woman drives into river, drinks beer

PA YORK — Police said a Pennsylvania woman drove into a river to avoid arrest, then ignored officers and continued drinking beer as she floated in the vehicle.

The York Daily Record reported police approached the woman near a boat launch Monday to arrest her for fleeing from them earlier. She was wanted for running a stop sign.

They say she hit the gas and barreled into the Susquehanna River.

They say officers tried to communicate with her but she just ignored them and drank her beer.

A fire department boat brought the woman back to shore.

The woman was taken to York Hospital and police continue to investigate. Her name wasn't released.

Female warden picked to lead prison

IA IOWA CITY — Iowa's maximum-security prison for male offenders will have the first female warden in its 178-year history.

The Board of Corrections on Friday approved the appointment of department veteran Patti Wachtendorf as warden of Iowa State Penitentiary in Fort Madison.

Wachtendorf has been warden at the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women in Mitchellville, the state's prison for female offenders, since 2009.

Wachtendorf will replace Nick Ludwick, who recently informed the department of plans to retire later this month.

The prison's history dates to 1839, before Iowa was a state. The old prison closed in 2015,

and a high-tech replacement opened that houses hundreds of the state's most dangerous male offenders. Ludwick had been warden since 2010 and was instrumental in moving to the new prison.

Clarinda Correctional Facility warden Sheryl Dahm will replace Wachtendorf at Mitchellville.

Atheist complains about grieving book

SC ANDERSON — After an atheist complained, South Carolina troopers are going to stop sending a book to family members of people who die in wrecks that includes Bible passages and a chapter called "If God Seems Far Away."

The American Humanist Association told the Anderson Independent-Mail that the atheist called them after getting the book from the Public Safety Department after her father died in a wreck.

Public Safety Department spokeswoman Sherri Iacobelli said they got no other complaints about the book but decided to stop sending them after hearing from the association. She said the state spent thousands of dollars on the book last year because it has helpful information on coping with grief.

Iacobelli said troopers will still give sympathy cards and a booklet about practical considerations instead.

Authorities investigate rash of windmill thefts

OK DRUMMOND — Authorities are investigating after several steel windmills were reported stolen in three northwest Oklahoma counties.

Oklahoma City TV station

KOCO reported the windmill thefts were reported in Alfalfa, Garfield and Major counties over the past few weeks.

Garfield County Sheriff Jerry Niles said that although windmills can be collector items, he thinks they were stolen for scrap metal.

The windmills can be as tall as 30 feet, so the sheriff says there's likely more than one person involved in the theft.

Niles said authorities have identified a possible suspect but no arrests have been announced.

Game warden shoots family's pet deer

KS WICHITA — A western Kansas family is outraged after game wardens killed a deer that was allowed inside their house and took walks with the family.

The Wichita Eagle reported that Kim Mcgaughey, of rural Ulysses, described the deer as "very much a big pet."

The 2-year-old mule deer was named Faline, after Bambi's friend and future mate in the cartoon movie.

But it's illegal to keep a wild animal as a pet in Kansas, and wildlife officials said something had to be done.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism says pet deer have killed at least two people.

The department said it was trying to protect people from being injured by the deer, and eliminate the possibility of disease being passed to humans, livestock and other deer.

Center faces fine for risque performance

HI HONOLULU — The Maui Arts and Cultural Center has come under fire for allowing a performance in June

that prompted complaints about sexual dancing and nudity.

Hawaii News Now reported the theater is accused of violating its liquor license by allowing the male performers in "Thunder from Down Under" to expose too much skin.

Two complaints have been filed against the theatre regarding the June 8 performance, and the theatre has decided not to challenge the allegations.

A description of the traveling performance on the show's website says it features "chiseled bodies, seductive dance routines, cheeky humor and boy-next-door charm."

Maui's Liquor Control Board wouldn't reveal what evidence they had for a hearing this week on the matter, but a county spokesman says the theatre will likely have to pay a fine.

The theatre declined to comment.

Dead sharks found dumped at park

FL TITUSVILLE — Wildlife officials are trying to determine who has been dumping dead sharks at a park in central Florida.

Florida Fish and Wildlife officials told WESH-TV that they received a tip about someone dumping sharks next to the Indian River at Kennedy Point Park in Titusville.

Officers removed three dead sharks from the shore there Thursday. Each one was about 2 feet long.

Officials say the animals will be taken to a lab where they'll determine what kind of sharks they are and how old they were. It's unknown exactly how long the carcasses had been left there.

Recreational fishing regulations allow a catch limit of just one shark per person per day.

From wire reports

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Several playoff teams prefer balance

Associated Press

NFL teams ran the ball less than ever in 2016, yet six playoff teams had a 1,000-yard rusher.

Ezekiel Elliott (Cowboys), Jay Ajayi (Dolphins), Le'Veon Bell (Steelers), LeGarrette Blount (Patriots), Devonta Freeman (Falcons) and Lamar Miller (Texans) each topped 1,000 and will run again in January. Last year, Adrian Peterson was the only 1,000-yard rusher in the playoffs.

"I think really getting the running game going was crucial to us starting the ball rolling in the right direction," injured Dolphins quarterback Ryan Tannehill said after the team bounced back from a 1-4 start to win six in a row.

Ajayi had three 200-yard games, including 204 in a win over Pittsburgh that started Miami's turnaround.

"I know that when I'm productive, the team is going to be successful," Ajayi said. "But I feel that my play also allows a lot of guys to be able to make plays as well, and it's shown."

The formula for winning has

changed drastically since the days teams relied on a smash-mouth, ball-control running offense. It began with the evolution of the West Coast offense as the short-passing game replaced many running plays.

It continued when more teams started incorporating spread offenses, using three and four wide receivers and putting quarterbacks in the shotgun formation for many snaps. Fullbacks lost their jobs and running backs became more specialized.

This season, teams averaged 26 rushing attempts per game. That's the fewest total in league history, according to Pro Football Reference. The average was 36.9 in 1976, 30.2 in 1986, 28.3 in 1996 and 28.2 in 2006.

But several successful teams had effective ground games led by a workhorse back.

The Patriots (14-2) ran the ball 99 more times this season than last. Blount's success helped 39-year-old Tom Brady post one of his best years. Blount ran for 1,161 yards and a league-best 18 TDs while Brady tossed 28 TDs and a career-low two interceptions

after returning from his four-game suspension.

"LeGarrette's been very consistent for us," Patriots coach Bill Belichick said. "He's been durable so he's there for us every week, gets a lot of tough yards. He's a big back but he's had some explosive plays as well. It's been good for us in really a lot of situations. He can run inside, he can run outside. He's athletic and he's got good quickness and agility for a 245-250 pound back, whatever he is."

In Dallas, Elliott's emergence took pressure off fellow rookie Dak Prescott. Elliott led the NFL with 1,631 yards rushing and the dynamic duo helped the Cowboys (13-3) finish with the No. 1 seed in the NFC.

"He has gotten better and better every week," Cowboys coach Jason Garrett said of Elliott.

The Steelers, Falcons and Patriots had three of the best-balanced offenses in the league. Each team had a 1,000-yard rusher and ranked in the top 5 in passing.

Bell ran for 1,268 yards and Ben Roethlisberger threw for

3,819 yards. Bell also caught 75 passes for 616 yards.

"I don't just want to be known as a running back," Bell said. "I want to be a guy who's known in every situation, a playmaker who can catch the ball out of the backfield and make big plays, plays that can obviously change the game."

Freeman had 1,079 yards rushing and Matt Ryan threw for 4,944 to lead Atlanta (11-5) to the No. 2 seed in the NFC.

Of the six playoff teams with a 1,000-yard rusher, only the Texans ran the ball fewer times than last year but they gained more yards thanks to Miller. He had 1,073 yards.

"The running game is very important in the playoffs," Houston coach Bill O'Brien said. "It's important to be able to run the football, to be in manageable third downs, to control the tempo of the game."

Oakland (12-4) is another playoff team with a strong rushing offense that used three backs. Latavius Murray (788), Jalen Richard (491) and DeAndre Washington (467) helped the Raiders rank sixth in yards rushing.

First-timers, new wave of talent dominates All-Pro Team

Associated Press

The Associated Press 2016 NFL All-Pro Team is showing off the new wave of pro football stars.

Three rookies among 17 first-time selections highlight the team, including Dallas running back Ezekiel Elliott, and Kansas City's Tyreek Hill, who is a unanimous choice as a punt returner.

Atlanta quarterback Matt Ryan, edging New England's Tom Brady, who was suspended for four games, is another first-time All-Pro.

Tennessee right tackle Jack Conklin is the other rookie making the revamped roster announced Friday.

"It's special," Elliott said. "Just to be able to come into this league my first year and

dominate and just play at the level I'm playing, and just kind of get these honors already as a rookie, it means a lot. I was never even All-American in college. I was never a first-team All-American. I'll never get a Buckeye tree at Ohio State. That's the one thing that I regret the most.

"Kind of seeing it come into the league and making All-Pro this rookie year, it definitely means a lot."

It's the first time since 1981 that so many first-year players made the team. Back then, it was future Hall of Famers Lawrence Taylor and Ronnie Lott, and 1980 Heisman-winning running back George Rogers.

For the first time, the nationwide panel of 50 sports writers

and broadcasters who regularly cover the NFL voted for specific positions on the offensive line, a flex player on offense, a fifth defensive back, a punt returner and a special teamer.

Other first-timers include Arizona running back David Johnson (flex); Denver cornerback Chris Harris Jr. (DB); and New England's Matthew Slater (special teamer).

One other unanimous pick is Baltimore placekicker Justin Tucker.

With only seven repeaters from last season's squad, the All-Pro Team has a decidedly new flavor not only in alignment, but makeup. Not surprisingly, the Cowboys have the most players selected with five: Elliott, the league's leading rusher; linebacker Sean Lee;

and offensive linemen Tyron Smith (left tackle), Travis Frederick (center) and Zack Martin (right guard).

Kansas City is next with four: Hill, tight end Travis Kelce, safety Eric Berry and cornerback Marcus Peters.

Ryan, the league's top passer (117.1 rating, 38 touchdowns, 7 interceptions), is one of three Falcons, joined by edge rusher Vic Beasley Jr., the NFL's sacks leader with 15½, and wide receiver Julio Jones.

"There are so many things that don't show up on the stat sheet," Falcons coach Dan Quinn said of Ryan. "How many people he's affected on our team. He's a fantastic teammate. That's one of the highest praises you can give to a ballplayer."

Thomas, Moore share lead at Kapalua

Associated Press

KAPALUA, Hawaii — The surf, the sun and endless views of island paradise can make the SBS Tournament of Champions feel like a working vacation. Ryan Moore and Justin Thomas were among those putting the emphasis on work at Kapalua.

Thomas prepared more diligently than he did a year ago, particularly on straightening out his driver. He has made 13 birdies in two rounds, making seven of them Friday for a 6-under 67. That was enough to share the lead with Moore, who birdied four of his last five holes for a 67.

They were at 12-under 134, one shot ahead of Patrick Reed (65) and Jimmy Walker (70).

Moore, coming off a Ryder Cup debut that elevated his stature, said it could be easy to fall into the trap of island life. He has worked that out of his system.

"If I'm at a golf tournament, I'm here to golf and I'm here to play a golf tournament," he said. "Doesn't mean I can't go

hang out with my son and play on the beach for a few minutes afterward, but I'm not going to do anything to wear myself out and exhaust myself so the next day I'm tired on the golf course. Everything I do, and all the decisions I make, are to play a tournament. But it is easy to let that other side of it happen."

He poured in a 25-foot birdie on the 12th hole, and work felt easier. Moore twice hit wedges to tap-in range for birdie as part of his strong finish.

Thomas knows when it's time to play on the beach. That's usually in the Bahamas, with plenty on Instagram as evidence when he's on Spring Break or celebrating a buddy's birthday. He said he prepared more this time for the first PGA Tour event of the year, and the he's getting the result he expects.

Asked the difference between his preparations this year and last year, when he finished 19 shots out of the lead, Thomas said, "I just prepared, actually."

"I obviously practiced and prepared last year, but I just didn't as much as I should

have," he said. "I didn't take it like a normal event. I mean, this is a great, great opportunity to win a golf tournament. This is your best chance. You only have to beat 30 people, or however many it is. They're all great players, but I'll take my chances over 32 versus 144 every single week."

They weren't the only players on their games.

As many as six players were tied for the lead at one point on another picturesque afternoon along the rugged coast of Maui. One of them was Hideki Matsuyama, going for his fourth straight victory worldwide, until he tried to clear the gorge on the 17th from thick rough and paid for it. He made double bogey, and a birdie on the last hole for a 68 — his 12th straight round in the 60s on the PGA Tour — left him three shots behind.

Reed is still struggling with an illness and learned the limits of what he can do when not playing so well. He hit every green in regulation for the first time in his PGA Tour career

and missed only one fairway.

Walker, who had a two-shot lead after the opening round, saw too many putts burn the edge of the cup. He finally dropped a shot on the 17th when he choked down to the shaft of a wedge from thick rough and didn't reach the green. A birdie on the final hole still kept him in the mix to atone for a playoff loss at Kapalua two years ago.

Jordan Spieth also was in the mix, but only briefly. The defending champion ran off nine birdies, five of them after taking a double bogey on the par-3 eighth hole. But he hooked a tee shot into the hazard on the 17th, hit his next into another hazard and missed a 4-foot putt to take triple bogey. Spieth shot a 69 and was seven shots back and sounded as though his tournament was all but over.

"I'll struggle for the next couple hours getting over 17 kind of throwing me out of the tournament," Spieth said.

Jason Day, the world No. 1 who is playing for the first time since September, had a 69 and was five shots behind.

Mariners acquire Gallardo from Orioles for Smith

Associated Press

SEATTLE — The Mariners landed another option for their pitching rotation on Friday, acquiring right-handed pitcher Yovani Gallardo from the Baltimore Orioles for outfielder Seth Smith.

Seattle also will receive \$2 million from the Orioles, equalizing the 2017 salaries of the players.

The acquisition of another potential starter was high on Seattle's list of needs after the Mariners traded Taijuan Walker to Arizona in November. Gallardo was 6-8 with a 5.32 ERA in 23 starts last year with the Orioles, a season that included a lengthy early season stint on the disabled list due to shoulder issues. Two seasons ago Gallardo was 13-11 with a 3.42 ERA in 33

starts with Texas.

The cost for Seattle was significant but fills Baltimore's need for another corner outfielder. Smith was one of Seattle's more consistent hitters during his two seasons and was expected to be a platoon outfielder for them again this year.

In other MLB news:

■ The Royals have acquired right-hander Nathan Karns from the Seattle Mariners for outfielder Jarrod Dyson, solidifying a pitching staff that lost workhorse Edinson Volquez to free agency.

The 29-year-old Karns was 6-2 with a 5.15 ERA in 15 starts and 22 appearances last season. He got off to a 5-1 start with a 3.43 ERA but struggled the rest of the season, and missed the final two months with a lower back strain.

Sarkisian keeps focus on Alabama players

TAMPA, Fla. — Newly elevated Alabama offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian is trying to keep the focus on Alabama's players and the national title game.

Facing dozens of reporters and cameras, Sarkisian fielded questions for an hour Saturday at the championship game's media day. He replaced Lane Kiffin a week before the top-ranked Crimson Tide's Monday game against No. 3 Clemson.

He mostly said questions about his battle with alcoholism were "for another time."

He said he already knew the Crimson Tide's offense after spending the season as an offensive analyst, but he didn't know the players very well.

France wins second Hopman Cup title

PERTH, Australia — Kristina Mladenovic and Richard Gasquet clinched France's second Hopman Cup title, beating Americans CoCo Vandeweghe and Jack Sock 4-1, 4-3 in the deciding mixed doubles match in the tournament final on Saturday.

Earlier, Vandeweghe beat Mladenovic 6-4, 7-5 after Gasquet saved a match point in the third-set tiebreaker and held on for a 6-3, 5-7, 7-6 (6) win over Sock to give France the early lead in the exhibition tournament.

The U.S. has won the Hopman Cup a record six times in the tournament's 29-year history.

Grizzlies rally, top Warriors in OT

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Rarely did Stephen Curry, coach Steve Kerr and the rest of those 73-win Warriors have to stop and re-evaluate things last season. Until they lost the NBA championship to LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers, of course.

Golden State sure is taking inventory now, having squandered Curry's 40-point performance and a 24-point lead in the second half of a 128-119 overtime loss to the Memphis Grizzlies on Friday night.

"There's no panic at all. You go through these hiccups, these road bumps and it pokes air out of the balloon a little bit, but that's what the regular season's for," Curry said. "Last year, I don't think we had many opportunities to kind of self-assess and look ourselves in the mirror and see where we

were at, just riding that wave."

Kevin Durant had 27 points and 13 rebounds but missed five free throws in the Warriors' sixth defeat of the season. The Grizzlies handed Golden State a 110-89 loss on Dec. 10.

Cavaliers 116, Nets 108: LeBron James scored 36 points, carrying the team while Kyrie Irving and Kevin Love had slow starts in their return to the lineup, and Cleveland beat host Brooklyn.

Clippers 106, Kings 98: Austin Rivers scored 24 points and visiting Los Angeles won its third straight game by defeating Sacramento.

Rockets 100, Magic 93: Ryan Anderson had 19 points, all in the second half, and Eric Gordon scored 17 off the bench as Houston extended its winning streak to seven games with a victory over host Orlando.

Lakers 127, Heat 100: Lou Williams scored 24 points and Luol Deng added 19 points and 14 rebounds as Los Angeles topped visiting Miami for only its fourth victory in 20 games.

Celtics 110, 76ers 106: Avery Bradley had 26 points and nine rebounds, and Boston rallied in the fourth quarter to beat visiting Philadelphia.

Knicks 116, Bucks 111: Carmelo Anthony had 26 points and 10 assists, including a clutch three-pointer late in the fourth quarter, and New York stormed back from 18 down to beat host Milwaukee and stop its six-game losing streak.

Wizards 112, Timberwolves 105: John Wall had a season-high 18 assists and scored 18 points to help Washington beat Minnesota for its ninth straight win at home.

Reimer helps Panthers shut door on Predators

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — James Reimer's third straight start was a surprise for the goaltender.

Reimer made 28 saves, Jonathan Marchessault scored in the third period and the Florida Panthers beat the Nashville Predators 2-1 on Friday night.

Reimer got the start when Roberto Luongo experienced some upper-body discomfort during warmups. Luongo then left the bench during the first period and was ruled out for the game. Bobby Segin, a former UConn goalie and now an account executive for the Panthers, was the emergency goalie.

"It's a little tough, but at the same time you don't have much time to get nervous," Reimer said. "You just get in there. I try to prepare like I'm playing every night. It's just another game. As a team, I thought we played phenomenal."

Luongo is day to day, according to Panthers interim coach Tom Rowe.

"That's the great thing about having the goalies that we have. They're both terrific," Rowe said.

Greg McKegg also scored for the Panthers, and Jaromir Jagr got his 1,137th career assist on

Marchessault's 12th goal of the season.

The Panthers held a moment of silence before the game for the victims of the shooting earlier in the day at the Fort Lauderdale airport.

Craig Smith scored for Nashville, and Juuse Saros stopped 32 shots. The Predators have lost five of their last seven games.

"They were a little bit quicker than us to start the game," Predators coach Peter Laviolette said. "Our speed picked up as the game went on but they got the jump on us early on."

Nashville was coming off a 6-1 victory at Tampa Bay on Thursday night.

"I don't know if it was the travel or the back-to-back games," Predators center Ryan Johansen said. "It took us a while to get going."

Marchessault gave the Panthers a 2-1 lead when his odd-angle shot from along the boards just outside the right circle got past Saros with 9:53 left in the third.

"I got lucky, but it's a big goal and it's a big two points," Marchessault said. "(Luongo) going out like that, it was really weird, but (Reimer) did such a good job."

Maple Leafs 4, Devils 2: Nazem Kadri sparked his team's four-goal first period with a power-play score, leading visiting Toronto past New Jersey.

Kadri and Tyler Bozak each had a goal and an assist, Auston Matthews scored his 21st goal and fellow rookie Connor Brown embarrassed Devils goaltender Cory Schneider with a short-handed goal while helping the Maple Leafs to their sixth win in seven games (6-0-1).

Avalanche 2, Islanders 1 (OT): Nathan MacKinnon scored 4:43 into overtime, and Colorado got its first win at home in more than seven weeks by beating New York.

MacKinnon also assisted on Gabriel Landeskog's first-period goal, and Calvin Pickard finished with 35 saves for Colorado.

Ducks 3, Coyotes 2 (OT): Ondrej Kase scored at 4:24 of overtime, sending host Anaheim past Arizona.

Kase was stopped by Mike Smith, but the goaltender bobbled the puck and Kase swiped it from him in the crease and swept it into the open net, handing the Coyotes their ninth straight loss. Joseph Cramarossa and Chris Wagner scored

for Anaheim, and John Gibson stopped 21 shots. The Ducks have won three in a row and four of five.

Martin Hanzal and Oliver Ekman-Larsson scored for Arizona, and Smith finished with 32 stops.

Blackhawks 2, Hurricanes 1: Scott Darling made a season-high 39 saves, Jonathan Toews and Artemi Panarin scored and host Chicago held on for its second straight win.

Darling, who backs up Corey Crawford, faced Carolina for the second time in a week in the Blackhawks' second home game in two nights after beating Buffalo 4-3 in overtime on Thursday. The consecutive wins against the Sabres and Hurricanes come in the aftermath of a 1-4-1 slump.

Canucks 4, Flames 2: Markus Granlund had two goals and an assist, Ryan Miller made 44 saves and host Vancouver earned its sixth straight victory.

Michael Chaput and Loui Eriksson also scored for Vancouver in the opener of a home-and-home series that ends Saturday night in Calgary. The Canucks have their longest winning streak since December 2013.