

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

Friday, January 13, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Head of DC Guard losing job

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The head of the D.C. National Guard, Maj. Gen. Errol R. Schwartz, said Friday that he has been ordered removed from his command effective Jan. 20, 12:01 p.m., just as Donald Trump is sworn in as president.

Schwartz's forced departure will come in the midst of the presidential inauguration that he has spent months helping plan alongside D.C. police, the U.S. Secret Service and other top District of Columbia officials. He will turn over command to an interim as power transfers from one president to the next, and just before the inaugural parade marches down Pennsylvania Avenue.

"The timing is extremely unusual," Schwartz said in an interview Friday morning, confirming a memo announcing his ouster that was obtained by *The Washington Post*. During the inauguration, Schwartz would command not only the members of the D.C. guard but also an additional 5,000 troops sent in from across the country to help. He also would oversee military air support protecting the nation's capital during the inauguration.

"My troops will be on the street," Schwartz, 65, said. "I'll see them off but I won't be able to welcome them back to the armory." He said that he would "never plan to leave a mission in the middle of a battle."

Schwartz said he would oversee duties in a command center and then would depart at 12:01 p.m., retiring from the Army.

16 SEALs' medals upgraded

BY TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Eight upgraded Navy Crosses and eight upgraded Silver Stars were presented Friday to Navy SEALs at a ceremony held in Virginia Beach, Va., the Navy announced.

The SEALs, including active-duty and former members of East and West Coast Naval Special Warfare Commands, had been previously awarded medals. The upgraded awards are part of the Pentagon's review of all Silver Stars and service crosses awarded for actions in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001.

Two of the medals were awarded posthumously, including an upgrade from a Silver Star to a Navy Cross for Navy SEAL Charles Keating IV, who died May 3 during a firefight in northern Iraq against the Islamic State group. According to his Silver Star citation, Keating was honored for his role in assisting U.S. and peshmerga forces on March 4 fending off 100 Islamic State fighters.

"Today we honor some of our nation's finest heroes, not just for their individual acts of courage and bravery in the face of danger, but for the everyday selflessness that they and their peers demonstrate," Navy Secretary Ray Mabus said in a prepared statement.

The review, which Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced in February, looked at more than 1,100 Silver Stars and service crosses awarded since 2001. It was sparked by concerns that few Medals of Honor were awarded for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Last week, Mabus announced that two previous Navy Cross recipients, whose names have not been released, were being recommended to receive the Medal of Honor. The Navy also did not release the names of the recipients recognized at Friday's ceremony in Virginia Beach.

The Army has reviewed 785 Silver Star and Distinguished Service Cross awards. The Navy, including the Marines, reviewed 425 Navy Cross and Silver Star medals. The Air Force reviewed 147 medals, including 135 Silver Stars and 12 Air Force Crosses.

Additional upgraded awards are expected to be announced in the coming weeks, the service said.

The Navy Cross, the Navy's second highest decoration, is awarded for extraordinary heroism while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States, the Navy said in a statement about the awards. The Silver Star is awarded for gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States.

Air Force announces 12 medal upgrades

BY TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Air Force is recommending that 12 medals awarded to airmen be upgraded for their actions taken since 2001 in the war on terror, the service said Friday.

The upgrade of medals is part of a review by all of the services to determine whether airmen, sailors, Marines and soldiers who have fought in the war on terror were properly recognized for the efforts. The review was sparked by concerns that few Medals of Honor were awarded for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, in which millions of Americans have served.

In early 2016, Defense Sec-

retary Ash Carter said the review was targeting more than 1,100 Silver Stars and service crosses awarded for actions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Of those medals, the Army reviewed 785 Silver Star and Distinguished Service Cross awards. The Navy, including the Marines, reviewed 425 Navy Cross and Silver Star medals. The Air Force reviewed 147 medals, including 135 Silver Stars and 12 Air Force Crosses.

Maj. Bryan Lewis, an Air Force spokesman, said the service could not specify what the 12 upgrade recommendations were — whether all are upgrades from Silver Stars to the Air Force Cross or the review

concluded that some of those awards deserved upgrade to Medals of Honor.

An upgrade to a service cross is approved by a service secretary, whereas a Medal of Honor recommendation requires review by the White House.

Lewis said Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James is reviewing the recommendations now for action. James' term as Air Force secretary ends next week.

The Navy announced in December that two of its Navy Cross recipients would be recommended to receive Medals of Honor. Four Marines and a sailor also will be awarded medals upgrades Friday at a ceremony in North Carolina.

Killings of al-Qaida leaders in Syria surge

Associated Press

BEIRUT — The convoy of vehicles was driving on a dirt road in northwestern Syria when the aerial attack by the U.S.-led coalition struck, turning the vehicles into balls of fire and the people inside into unrecognizable, charred corpses.

Among the eight dead was Khattab al-Qahtani, a senior al-Qaida official from the Persian Gulf region with reported ties to Osama bin Laden, as well as a Syrian al-Qaida commander from the country's east and a militant belonging to the Turkistan Islamic Party, a faction of Chinese jihadis fighting in Syria.

The New Year's Day attack was the first in a wave of airstrikes that has targeted al-Qaida's affiliate in Syria at an unprecedented rate, killing more than 50 militants allied with the international terror group.

In the throes of a brutal civil war now in its sixth year, Syria has one of the larg-

est and most active concentrations of al-Qaida fighters in the world. The U.S.-led coalition has been targeting the extremist group for years, hunting some of its most senior officials, including members of the so-called Khorasan group, which Washington describes as an internal branch of al-Qaida that plans attacks against Western interests.

It's not clear what is behind the recent surge in targeted killings.

Analysts say that since al-Qaida began recruiting hundreds of fighters in Syria to expand its role in the country's civil war against President Bashar Assad's forces, informers might have infiltrated the group, which also has become more visible, setting up command centers and other outposts around northern Syria, making it easier to target.

"Had it not been for their agents, they wouldn't have been able to do anything," a

local al-Qaida commander told The Associated Press via text message from northern Syria. "They spray a product on top of the vehicle that cannot be seen with the naked eye but can be detected by the drone," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with the group's regulations.

The stepped-up attacks also could be linked to a cease-fire brokered by Russia and Turkey that went into effect on Dec. 30 and excludes the Islamic State group and Syria's al-Qaida affiliate, known as the Fatah al-Sham Front. Turkey and Russia back rival sides in the Syrian conflict, and their new push to try to end the war includes talks between the Syrian government and the opposition to be held later this month in Kazakhstan.

The intensified attacks also come at a time when the Islamic State group, an al-Qaida rival, is under intense pressure and is losing territory in Iraq and Syria.

VA to pay \$2B to vets affected by toxic water at Lejeune

BY NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs is preparing to give out an estimated \$2.2 billion during the next five years to thousands of veterans suffering from serious illnesses caused by contaminated water at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

A new VA rule published Friday will automatically grant disability compensation to Camp Lejeune veterans with adult leukemia, anemia, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Parkinson's disease and bladder, kidney or liver cancer. To be eligible, veterans must have served at the Marine Corps base a cumulative 30 days between Aug. 1, 1953, and Dec. 31, 1987.

The VA estimates approximately 900,000 active-duty, Reserve and National Guard veterans fit into that category.

The rule, which will go into effect in March, is the culmination of veterans struggling for years to get federal benefits. People serving at Camp Lejeune during that time were exposed to a metal degreaser and a dry-cleaning agent in the drinking water supply that served on-base homes, businesses, recreational facilities and the hospital.

When the rule goes into effect, it will be the first instance the VA has officially connected veterans to diseases that were caused by toxic environments within the U.S.

"This is historic," said Dr. Ralph Er-

ickson, who leads post-deployment health research at the VA. "It's a major first. Most presumptions in the past have been directed to exposures occurred during deployment. From my standpoint, I feel this is very much the right thing for us to be doing for veterans."

While Camp Lejeune veterans already could receive compensation for illnesses caused by the toxic water through the Camp Lejeune Act, the VA designating the diseases as service-connected enables veterans to receive benefits more quickly and requires less paperwork.

The VA established a work group in December 2015 to look into the issue. Since then, Camp Lejeune veterans' claims for compensation have been put on hold. As of Jan. 1, there were 1,419 claims related to toxic water at Camp Lejeune awaiting decisions on whether they are eligible.

Decisions on those claims will be made when the new rule goes into effect. Any Camp Lejeune veteran or survivor who applied for benefits before December 2015 and was denied will have to apply again.

The VA is estimating it will pay out nearly \$380 million to 19,500 veterans or their survivors in the first year the rule is in effect.

To apply for compensation, veterans need to show records that they served at the base during the given time and are diagnosed with one of the eight diseases.

The VA does not have authority to give

out benefits to family members who are affected with disease caused by the base water supply. However, family members can sign up for reimbursement of medical costs through the Camp Lejeune Family Member Program created in 2012.

While Erickson said the new rule is a "very big win" for veterans, there's some trepidation that not all of the veterans affected by the contamination are eligible for benefits.

In 2009, the National Research Council linked the water to 14 health conditions in veterans, and 15 conditions were part of the Camp Lejeune Act.

Using information from the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Institutes of Health, the World Health Organization and the National Academy of Sciences, the VA work group said it could connect only eight diseases.

Evidence for other health conditions was "not sufficient," the VA said.

The conditions not included in the new rule are breast, lung and esophageal cancers; scleroderma; renal toxicity; hepatic steatosis; female infertility; and miscarriage.

"It rarely happens that the VA does the right thing in total," said Rick Weidman, a leader with Vietnam Veterans of America. "So we're going to have to fight for any additional diseases, which we're perfectly prepared to do."

Lawmakers spar over fear of ‘warrior class’

By TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Rep. Steve Russell was not buying Democrats’ warnings about Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis’ military service.

The Oklahoma Republican, an Army Ranger who commanded infantry troops in Iraq, unloaded Thursday on lawmakers who were urging the House to reject a special legal exemption for Mattis to be defense secretary because it could undermine civilian control of the military.

Russell charged the Democrats with a bias against the “warrior class” in a fiery speech before the House Armed Services Committee. He called up other examples of military officers who served in civilian office under George Washington — and tangled with a Marine veteran Democrat who argued such examples date to a time when Americans also kept slaves.

“We hear the bland words ‘civilian control of the military’ as if somehow those American citizens who bore the brunt of service in battle are somehow no longer entitled to their citizenship and are forever imprinted with some mark of Cain,” Russell said.

Democrats could not stop the Armed Services Committee from approving the legal-waiver legislation Thursday afternoon, in a 34-28 vote that fell along party lines.

Mattis, who was picked to be defense secretary by President-elect Donald Trump last month, is widely considered one of the most talented generals of his generation. During a four-decade military career, he commanded the First Marine Division in Iraq and oversaw military operations in the Middle East until 2013 as the commander of U.S. Central Command.

The general has been retired less than the seven years required by federal law to hold the Cabinet post.

The full House was set to vote Friday on giving him a legal waiver and the top Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, Rep. Adam Smith of Washington, urged lawmakers to vote “no.” The full Senate on Thursday overwhelmingly approved the exception, 81-17, and was set to confirm Mattis when Trump takes office Jan. 20.

Like Mattis, Russell also knows about serving in battle. He commanded the Army’s 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry in Iraq, helping to capture Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, and retired as a lieutenant colonel.

“What are [Democrats’] real agendas?” Russell said during an Armed Services hearing. “Do the objectors instead wish they could say, ‘We are afraid of the warrior class, we’re afraid they might cause a war?’ Is that it?”

He chided fellow lawmakers for worry-

ing over military experience, saying veterans are more hesitant to get involved in conflict because they understand the costs of war.

“The greatest saber-rattling often seems to occur from bloviating politicians that have never worn the sword,” he said.

Russell cited numerous appointments of generals and servicemembers by President George Washington, a general during the Revolutionary War, and said 10 U.S. secretaries of state had senior military experience.

But Rep. Seth Moulton, D-Mass., a veteran who served as a Marine infantry platoon officer in Iraq, shot back against Russell.

“My colleague, a fellow warrior, Mr. Russell, raised in his very eloquent speech numerous examples of military leaders who have proudly served in our civilian government,” Moulton said. “Most of these are from the past. Some in fact served at time when we still had slaves.”

Democrats in the House and the Senate have voiced concerns that a Mattis waiver could erode civilian military control but the general remains deeply popular and is likely to be confirmed by the Senate.

He would be only the second career officer ever to receive a waiver. The first was Gen. George C. Marshall, who led the Pentagon in the early 1950s after being Army chief of staff during World War II.

Trump shrugs off contradictions from nominees

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump is shrugging off contradictions with his own Cabinet picks that have been on display during Senate hearings this week.

“All my Cabinet nominee are looking good and doing a great job. I want them to be themselves and express their own thoughts, not mine!” Trump said over Twitter early Friday.

The comment comes after members of Trump’s future Cabinet separated themselves from the president-elect on a series of issues, including Russia, torture and Muslim immigration.

Partly as a result, the nominees have gotten mostly gentle treatment from Senate Democrats who say they’ve found the Cabinet choices more palatable than the future president, himself.

“As I meet members of the Cabinet, I’m puzzled because many of them sound reasonable,” said Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the No. 2 Senate Democrat. “Far more reasonable than their president.”

Sen. Jeff Sessions, picked for attorney general, said he’s against any outright ban on immigration by Muslims, in contrast to Trump’s onetime call to suspend admittance of Muslims. Secretary of State candidate Rex Tillerson affirmed U.S. commitments to NATO and took a relatively hard line on Russia, both in contrast to Trump — though Tillerson irked GOP Sen. Marco Rubio by refusing to label Vladimir Putin a “war criminal.”

And CIA pick Rep. Mike Pompeo, R-Kan., affirmed his opposition to torture and said he would refuse any Trump order to torture, adding he could not imagine Trump would give such a directive. Trump, while campaigning, suggested bringing back waterboarding and more.

Tillerson’s nomination is in question in light of concerns from Rubio and others, but it looks like smooth sailing for Pompeo; retired Gen. James Mattis for Defense; and retired Gen. John Kelly for Homeland Security, among others.

“Pompeo’s very popular, Mattis, Kelly — these are popular selections,” said Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz.

Sessions was denied confirmation once before by the Senate, but that was three decades ago for a federal judgeship. This time around, the Alabamian is a sitting senator and was treated gently, for the most part, by his colleagues, even when Democrats brought up the racial issues that brought him down last time around. There was potential for drama as Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., broke with Senate tradition to testify against his colleague, but it came on the second day of the hearing after Sessions had finished testifying, so he was not even in the room.

“The purpose of confirmation hearings is to examine the record and views of potential nominees and I think that’s what these hearings are doing,” said Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas.

The outings also lack drama due to Democrats’ decision while in the Senate majority to lower the vote threshold for Cabinet nominees and others from 60 votes to 50, allowing Republicans to ensure approval as long as they can hold their 52-seat majority together.

DOJ says Chicago police officers use unreasonable force

The Washington Post

A sprawling federal investigation into the Chicago Police Department found that it “engages in a pattern or practice of use of excessive force,” Attorney General Loretta Lynch announced Friday.

In a scathing 161-page report, released while Lynch spoke at a news conference in Chicago, the Justice Department said investigators found the city’s police officers use force, “including deadly force, that is unreasonable.”

The 13-month investigation determined that this pattern was “largely attributable to systemic deficiencies” in the city and the police force, according to the report, which said the police department’s uses of force are unconstitutional. Investigators determined the Chicago police force has not provided officers with proper guidance for using force, failed to hold officers accountable for improper uses of force and has not properly investigated such incidents.

Vanita Gupta, head of the department’s Civil Rights Division, said Chicago officers were found to have shot people who posed no immediate threat and shocked people with Tasers simply for not following commands.

Gupta faulted the department for not adequately training its officers on using force, using decades-old videos that provided guidance inconsistent with current law and even the department’s own policies. And she said Chicago’s accountability system was “broken,” with officers rarely being held accountable for their misdeeds.

Congress to complete first step to end health care law

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Congress is on the cusp of completing the first — and by far the easiest — step toward gutting President Barack Obama’s divisive health care law.

Friday’s vote in the House would adopt a House-Senate measure to make it easier for a subsequent “Obamacare” repeal bill to advance through the Senate without the threat of a Democratic filibuster.

The legislation doesn’t need to be signed by the president and wouldn’t actually change a word of the hotly contested health care law. But its passage is crucial if Republicans controlling Congress are to keep their longstanding promise to scuttle the law, which has delivered health coverage to about 20 million people but is saddled with problems such as rapidly rising premiums and large co-payments.

The timetable for the upcoming repeal measure is uncertain, but Republicans want to pass it as quickly as possible. The pending legislation would allow a follow-up bill to pass without having to clear the 60-vote filibuster hurdle in the Senate, where Republicans control 52 seats and Democrats are gearing up for an epic battle.

After pressure from both President-elect Donald Trump and rank-and-file lawmakers, House GOP leaders are now promising to advance legislation to re-

peal the health law and replace it with something else in tandem.

“We have a responsibility to step in and provide relief from this failing law,” House Speaker Paul Ryan told reporters on Thursday. “And we have to do it all at the same time so that everybody sees what we’re trying to do.”

Trump is promising the public that he will sign legislation to repeal and replace the law soon. Republican leaders are trying to deliver, but it seems as if Trump may be overpromising, given the enormity of the task and the political stakes involved.

“He’s not a creature of this place so there’s always a bit of a learning curve,” said the No. 3 Senate GOP leader, John Thune of South Dakota.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., isn’t setting a timetable but said Thursday that the early repeal bill would “begin to make important progress” and that Republicans “plan to take on the replacement challenge in manageable pieces, with step-by-step reforms.”

“Repealing and replacing Obamacare is a big challenge. It isn’t going to be easy,” McConnell added.

McConnell spoke after the Senate approved the preliminary repeal measure by a near party-line 51-48 vote, drawing a Twitter thumbs-up from Trump: “Congrats to the Senate for taking the first step to #RepealObamacare — now it’s onto the House!”

Beijing vague in threats against THAAD system

Associated Press

BEIJING — China has a range of economic, diplomatic and military options to retaliate if the U.S. and South Korea proceed with deployment of an advanced missile defense system, experts said Friday, as Beijing remained vague in its threats against the plan.

Such steps could raise the stakes for Washington and Seoul in a controversial deployment that China regards as a major security threat, while complicating matters for South Korea as it faces domestic political divisions and significant public opposition.

China’s official Xinhua News Agency said Beijing and Moscow agreed to take “further countermeasures” in response to the plan during security talks between the two countries in Moscow on Thursday.

“The countermeasures will be aimed at safeguarding interests of China and Russia and the strategic balance in the region,” Xinhua quoted the agreement as saying.

The report gave no details, and a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman on Friday said only that China has a legitimate right to defend its security interests.

“China believes it is a serious threat to China’s security interests and for the region,” Lu Kang said at a daily briefing. “I believe that as long as our country has legitimate security concerns, it is understandable that necessary measures be taken to safeguard such interests.”

The proposed Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, radar system aims to guard against North Korean missiles, a threat that drew renewed attention after North Korean leader Kim Jong

Un announced in his annual New Year’s address that the country had reached the “final stages” of developing an intercontinental ballistic missile.

China has campaigned relentlessly against the deployment, warning of unspecified retaliation and leading to a sharp downturn in relations with Seoul. China said the system’s powerful radar can peer deep into its territory, allowing the U.S. to monitor flights and missile launches and potentially making it capable of launching a pre-emptive strike.

China’s efforts now could be bearing fruit, with a possible South Korean presidential contender, Liberal opposition politician Moon Jae-in, saying last month that THAAD’s security benefits would be outweighed by worsened relations with China and Russia.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Dog on snowy cliff sniffs out solution

UT SALT LAKE CITY — A search-and-rescue team hiked up a steep, snowy Utah mountain to try to rescue a dog that was stuck on a narrow ledge above a 50-foot cliff.

The Utah County Sheriff's Office posted a video Monday showing highlights of the Friday operation, but it ended without the animal getting off the mountain near Provo.

A rescuer rappelled down to try to lure the dog, named Mary, with food. It didn't work because Mary became skittish every time he got close. The team called off the rescue at nightfall and left her with food and hand warmers.

The saga had a happy ending the next day when her owners called to say Mary somehow made it down the mountain. She had cuts to her paws but was OK.

Man accidentally texts deputy about drug deal

LA PIERRE PART — Authorities say a Pierre Part man has been arrested after he accidentally texted an Assumption Parish deputy about an upcoming drug sale.

Sheriff Leland Falcon told local media the deputy received the text message Friday from Dwayne Paul Herbert, 39. In the "misdirected" message, Herbert arranged to deliver crystal methamphetamine to a predetermined location in Pierre Part.

The officer agreed to meet Herbert at the location and then mobilized the Narcotics Division to assist him.

Falcon said that when Herbert showed up, he was arrested. Deputies seized the crystal meth and two firearms.

Herbert has been charged with possession of metham-

phetamine with intent to distribute, possession of a firearm in the presence of a controlled substance and two counts of resisting an officer.

Man ticketed for car running in driveway

MI ROSEVILLE — A Detroit-area man has been ticketed for leaving a vehicle running unattended in his driveway as he warmed it up.

Nick Taylor, of Roseville, said the incident happened on a chilly morning earlier this month. He said he went inside his home and left his car running for about 5 minutes. When he went back outside, he had received a \$125 fine for a local ordinance violation of leaving a motor vehicle unattended.

Roseville Police Chief James Berlin is standing by the officer who issued the ticket, saying it's a public safety issue because a thief easily could have taken the car.

Zoo announces births of 3 maned wolf pups

AR LITTLE ROCK — The Little Rock Zoo has announced the births of three maned wolf pups.

The zoo said Wednesday that one male and two female pups were born Dec. 21 and now weigh about 2 pounds.

Carnivores curator Debbie Thompson at the zoo said it'll be about six more weeks before the pups are on regular display, but visitors might see them briefly as their mother moves them to a nearby hut or back to her den.

The pups are covered in black fur with white-tipped tails, but when adults, they will have a red coat, tall, erect ears, a pointed muzzle with white-tipped tails and long slender black legs.

Car vandalism suspect ID'd by his man bun

PA PITTSBURGH — Police said a man bun helped people in one Pittsburgh neighborhood identify the man who was vandalizing their cars.

WTAE-TV reported that Isaac Gettleman, 22, is facing 36 counts of criminal mischief.

Police said various surveillance cameras captured images of a man wearing his hair in a bun while kicking the sides of cars and jumping onto their side-view mirrors on the city's South Side.

Gettleman lives in the same neighborhood, which led fellow resident Erin Catalina to wonder, "What motivates someone to do that, I have no idea." She was referring to the vandalism, not Gettleman's hairstyle.

Teen rescued after locking self in cell

IL JOLIET — A teenage girl who slipped into an abandoned Illinois prison for an urban adventure ended up serving a short sentence when she accidentally locked herself inside a cell.

Illinois State Police said two teenage girls entered the Joliet Correctional Center through a hole in its fence Monday.

Joliet Fire Department Battalion Chief Mike Stromberg said the teens were exploring the suburban Chicago prison that's been closed since 2002 when one of them locked herself inside a cell.

The other girl got firefighters to the site, and they used a sledgehammer to break through a brick wall to free her companion.

Stromberg told The (Joliet) Herald-News she spent 45 minutes in the cell.

State Police said the teens will face trespassing charges.

Man: Cops mistook cat litter for meth

TX CYPRESS — A Houston-area man said sheriff's deputies conducted faulty field tests on cat litter they found in his vehicle, which they believed was methamphetamine.

Ross Lebeau was charged with possession of a controlled substance following the Dec. 5 traffic stop, but court documents show the case was dismissed last week because the material was not an illicit substance.

Lebeau told the Houston Chronicle that his father had placed the cat litter into the sock as a way to absorb moisture and to keep the car's windows from fogging.

The Harris County sheriff's office says deputies smelled marijuana and conducted a search. Officials said marijuana was found in the console and Lebeau never identified what was in the sock.

Note in trash helps cops ID suspect

VT WOODSTOCK — A woman's penchant for recycling and a crumpled note in her trash have helped police identify a suspect in a Vermont bank robbery.

Gail Dougherty, of Woodstock, found the note inside a paper coffee cup Jan. 4 and planned to put the cup in her recycling bin. The note said, "THIS IS A ROBBERY GIVE ME THE MONEY QUIETLY AND NO ONE WILL GET HURT." A robbery happened at the local bank earlier that day.

The Valley News reported DNA samples from Dougherty's home matched that of Adam Kniffin, 28, who was dating the family's housekeeper.

From wire reports

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Mentors meeting disciples in playoffs

Associated Press

Tony Dungy learned a critical lesson during his Hall of Fame coaching career. When facing your mentor — or someone you guided yourself — take pride, enjoy the atmosphere.

Then forget all about it.

This weekend, Bill Belichick will work against his former offensive assistant, Bill O'Brien, when the Patriots host the Texans in the divisional round. Dan Quinn, once Pete Carroll's assistant, will lead his Falcons against Carroll's Seahawks.

Last Sunday, it was Giants coach Ben McAdoo against his former boss in Green Bay, Mike McCarthy.

"If you are not careful, you can go against tendency," says Dungy, who coached a bunch of times against one of his mentors, Denny Green. "I would think, 'Denny knows this about me and so I better not do it.' You can talk yourself out of doing what you do best and try to win with what you do second or third best and that doesn't work. You have to be smart about it.

"Everybody knows you in the league and you know everyone, but some people know you a little more. If you are not careful, you can definitely fall into not being yourself and not doing what you do. Denny always preached that to me: 'Go down with your best guns firing' and I had to remind myself of that when playing against those guys."

O'Brien has had tougher assignments than taking his Texans to New England in the playoffs; he took over at Penn State after the scandal. But in the pros, trying to outfox Belichick in Foxborough is a monu-

mental task.

O'Brien prefers to concentrate on — and use — everything he learned while with the Patriots rather than weigh how big the challenge is.

"When you're fortunate enough to work there as a coach, as a personnel guy or whatever your role is there," O'Brien says, "if you're smart, you take advantage of knowing that you're working in a great place and it is a little bit of a classroom, especially when you're working for him. ... You learn about motivation. You learn about personnel evaluation. You learn about putting a roster together and putting a team together. Just a lot of different things that help you in your career ... wherever you coach after that."

Perhaps the more intriguing matchup of mentor vs. disciple is Carroll and Quinn. Both have highly successful defensive backgrounds. Both are what is often termed a "players' coach," with approaches far from the old-school totalitarianism often found in football. Yes, still.

Even though he's the NFL's oldest coach, Carroll is more in tune with today's athlete than most of his peers. He drew laughs when he stuck the needle into his former assistant leading up to Saturday's game.

"We always placed all the focus on Dan when he was here and we hope you will continue to do that there," he laughingly told Atlanta media. "He really should be the center of the storm there. Just keep pumping him up.

"He's awesome. He's a great guy to work with. He's a great coach, great in relating to the players, and real fun to be around."

That might sound like gratuitous coach-speak, except from Carroll it's genuine.

Oddly, it's the Falcons' offense that could be the difference maker against Seattle.

"I never intended to have Seattle East, I wanted to create our own Atlanta," Quinn says. "Of course, I learned fantastic lessons from my time with Pete and (general manager John Schneider), and the players there, for sure. But one of the best pieces of advice was, 'Hey, Q, do it your own way and let it rip.' That came from Pete, and I've tried to really stay true to that."

NFL coaching trees are such that it's rare when any game doesn't feature someone who worked for someone. Perhaps the ultimate mentor/student matchup came in the 2007 Super Bowl: Dungy vs. Lovie Smith. That also was the first time an African-American was the head coach in the NFL's title game — times two.

It was fulfilling yet awkward for Dungy, whose coaching disciples include Herm Edwards, Jim Caldwell, Mike Tomlin, Leslie Frazier and Smith, among others.

"There's the other side: It is really tough on you when you're the mentor," Dungy says. "Of course you want your team to do well, but you have a strong feeling for those guys, too, and a sense of pride when they do well."

O'Brien has done well, winning two AFC South crowns despite quarterback issues. Quinn won the NFC South in his second season in charge. McAdoo ended the Giants' four-season non-playoff run in his first year as head man.

Now the challenge is catching up with their mentors' trophies.

Bryant, Cowboys get another shot at Packers

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Dez Bryant still gets stopped all the time by people who are sure the officials blew the replay on the Dallas receiver's famous catch that wasn't in a playoff loss at Green Bay two years ago.

And the 2014 All-Pro figures if the Cowboys go on to win the Super Bowl as the top seed in the NFC, that play will be what fans want to talk to him about. Even if he wins another Super Bowl next year. And so on.

"Even if we were to win four or five Super Bowls, people still going to be like, 'He still caught it,'" Bryant said Thurs-

day. "That's what it's going to be."

The Cowboys (13-3) get a divisional-round rematch with the Packers on Sunday, this time at home. And while Bryant knew from the moment Green Bay (11-6) beat the New York Giants last weekend in the wild-card round that the disputed play would dominate the conversation, he's playing the part that coach Jason Garrett would prefer.

"I don't even care," Bryant said when asked if that moment was his first thought after the Packers won. "That was 2014. There's no extra motivation, there's no nothing. If there's

any motivation it's just to prepare better than the last time."

The most notable change for the Cowboys since then is at quarterback, with rookie Dak Prescott winning 11 straight games in the regular season to take Tony Romo's job once Dallas' 10-year starter was ready to return from a preseason back injury.

Back then, Romo gambled on fourth-and-2 from the Green Bay 32 with 4½ minutes remaining. Bryant made a leaping grab over Sam Shields around the 2 and lunged for the end zone. What happened with the ball will be debated forever, some saying Bryant had con-

trol throughout the catch, others saying the ground jarred it loose briefly.

Referee Gene Steratore had the only opinion that mattered, and he ruled upon review after the play was called a reception that Bryant didn't control the ball all the way through the catch. Two years later, people are still dissecting the replay. Garrett isn't among them.

"There's a guy named Dean Blandino up in New York," Garrett said, referring to the NFL's head of officials. "He's a great guy to ask. He's a great conversationalist and he's very informed in these situations. If you get a chance, reach out to him."

Rams make history by hiring Sean McVay

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles Rams have made Sean McVay the youngest head coach in modern NFL history, and he appears to be getting some experienced help.

The Rams on Thursday hired McVay, who turns 31 on Jan. 24. Several hours later, ESPN.com reported the Rams have finalized a deal with 69-year-old Wade Phillips to be their defensive coordinator, although the team declined to confirm it.

McVay has been the Washington Redskins' offensive coordinator since 2014. He will replace Jeff Fisher, who was fired 13 games into the Rams' homecoming season in Los Angeles, and interim head coach

John Fassel, who led the Rams to a 4-12 finish in their 13th consecutive non-winning season.

"The accomplishments and success that he has had in less than a decade in our league are impressive," Rams owner Stan Kroenke said in a statement. "We are confident in his vision to make this team a consistent winner and we will all continue to work together to achieve our ultimate goal, bringing a Rams Super Bowl championship home to Los Angeles."

McVay spent the past three seasons as Jay Gruden's offensive coordinator with the Redskins. He has been an assistant since 2010 in Washington, where he worked with Gruden and Bill Callahan to build a prolific offense led by quarter-

back Kirk Cousins.

McVay's most important task is likely to be the transformation of No. 1 overall pick Jared Goff into a star after his rough rookie campaign behind a struggling offensive line.

"Really happy for Sean McVay!" Cousins tweeted.

The Rams made the eye-catching move on the same day that the Chargers announced their relocation to Los Angeles to share the Rams' \$2.6 billion stadium. The Chargers are still without a coach, and the Rams grabbed some of their headlines by snagging one of the most interesting names on the coaching market.

"I am incredibly honored by this opportunity," McVay said in a statement, thanking

Kroenke and Rams chief operating officer Kevin Demoff. "Collectively, we are committed to building a championship-caliber team, and I'm excited to start that process and make our fans proud."

McVay wowed the Rams' top brass during two recent interviews, but he is an unorthodox choice for the franchise, which hasn't taken many extraordinary risks during Kroenke's tenure.

While McVay is respected as an up-and-coming NFL mind, he has understandably meager experience, including none as a head coach at any level of football.

Lane Kiffin was 31 years old when the Oakland Raiders hired him in January 2007.

Alford scores career-high 37 points as UCLA cruises

Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — Bryce Alford's teammates were setting picks to spring him late in a game that was long over.

No offense intended. They were just trying to help him to reach that double-digit three-point plateau. Alford fell one short — about all he didn't accomplish on this magical shooting night.

Alford scored a career-high 37 points, hitting nine of UCLA's school-record 19 three-pointers, and the fourth-ranked Bruins beat Colorado 104-89 on Thursday.

The old record for the Bruins (17-1, 4-1 Pac-12) was 18 in the season opener against Pacific.

Alford was 11-for-18 from the field, including 9-for-14 from three-point range. He was pushed farther and farther out by the Buffaloes defense, but kept hitting deeper and deeper shots. Alford's previous best was 31 points against Oregon on Feb. 27, 2014.

"I wanted him to get 40," teammate Lonzo Ball said. "But 37, that's a lot of points."

Alford had seven of his nine three-pointers in the sec-

ond half to tie a career high. This one, his dad/coach will recognize.

When Bryce Alford made nine against SMU on March 19, 2015, one was awarded on a goaltending call. So, his father playfully doesn't count it.

This time, he has no choice.

"He got me, the most I ever made as a player was eight," Steve Alford said. "I always thought I had him. I was not giving him the SMU game, but I have to give him this."

No. 5 Gonzaga 93, Loyola Marymount 55: Przemek Karnowski scored 17 points and the host Bulldogs remain the nation's only undefeated Division I basketball team.

Zach Collins scored 15 points and Silas Melson added 13 for Gonzaga (16-0, 4-0 West Coast), which has the nation's longest winning streak at 16 games. Six Zags scored in double figures.

No. 16 Arizona 91, Arizona St. 75: Lauri Markkanen scored a career-high 30 points and Kadeem Allen added 18 for the host Wildcats.

Arizona (16-2, 5-0 Pac-12) turned the first of two regular-season games in this rivalry

into a laughter from the opening tip.

Iowa 83, No. 17 Purdue 78: Peter Jok scored 29 points with eight assists and six rebounds and the host Hawkeyes rallied from a nine-point half-time deficit.

Freshman Tyler Cook had 16 points for Iowa (11-7, 3-2 Big Ten), which beat a ranked team at home for the second time this season.

No. 18 Wisconsin 89, Ohio St. 66: Bronson Koenig scored 21 points as this host Badgers recovered from a poor shooting performance four days earlier.

Wisconsin (14-3, 3-1 Big Ten) shot 39 percent from the field on Sunday, including just 2-for-14 from three-point range, as Purdue snapped the Badgers' nine-game winning streak.

No. 20 Notre Dame 67, Miami 62: V.J. Beachem sank the go-ahead basket and made the clinching steal as the visiting Fighting Irish rallied from a four-point deficit in the final 2½ minutes.

Notre Dame (15-2, 4-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) outscored Miami 10-1 down the stretch to earn its sixth straight victory.

Its four league wins have been by a total of 18 points.

No. 21 Saint Mary's 74, Portland 33: Calvin Hermanson scored a career-high 27 points for the visiting Gaels.

Jock Landale added eight points and 10 rebounds for Saint Mary's (15-1, 5-0 West Coast Conference), which led by as many as 44 points. Evan Fitzner also had eight points. Hermanson was the only Gael in double figures.

No. 22 Cincinnati 66, SMU 64: Troy Caupain scored 16 points and helped the Bearcats blunt the Mustangs' comeback.

Cincinnati (14-2, 4-0) won a matchup of the last two unbeaten teams in American Athletic Conference play, taking its seventh straight game overall. Gary Clark led Cincinnati with 18 points, including two threes that matched his career high.

Utah 86, No. 25 USC 64: Devon Daniels scored 17 points and the host Utes earned their first win against a ranked team this season.

Utah overcame a sluggish start and throttled the Trojans for the final 35 minutes of the game.

Knicks blast past Bulls, snap 3-game skid

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Carmelo Anthony had 23 points, nine rebounds and six assists, Derrick Rose and Joakim Noah delivered big games against their former team, and the New York Knicks beat the short-handed Chicago Bulls 104-89 on Thursday night.

Rose scored 17 points in his return to Madison Square Garden after skipping the last game here, and Noah finished with 12 points and 15 rebounds as the Knicks snapped a three-game losing streak. Rookie forward Mindaugas Kuzminskas had a season-high 19 points.

The Knicks bounced back from a loss at the buzzer in Philadelphia on Wednesday to win for the first time this season on the second night of back-to-back games.

Dwyane Wade scored 22 for the Bulls, who were missing star swingman Jimmy Butler, Nikola Mirotic and Denzel Valentine, all because of illness. They dropped their third straight.

Playing without starting forward Kristaps Porzingis, New York won for just the second time in 11 games.

Warriors 127, Pistons 107: Klay Thompson returned from a one-game absence for rest and had 23 points as Golden State got more balanced scoring to beat visiting Detroit.

Stephen Curry scored 24 points, Kevin Durant had 25 points, nine assists and six rebounds, and Draymond Green dished out 13 assists for his fifth game in the last eight in double digits.

Marcus Morris scored 21 points to lead the Pistons.

Mavericks 113, Suns 108: At Mexico City, Deron Williams had 23 points and 15 assists, and Dallas defeated Phoenix in the fourth NBA regular-season game played in Mexico.

Williams shot 9-for-15 from the field in a matchup of struggling Western Conference teams. Harrison Barnes added 22 points and Dirk Nowitzki scored 18 for the Mavericks, who broke a three-game losing streak. Devin Booker scored

29 of his 39 points in the fourth quarter for the Suns. Tyson Chandler had 14 points and 19 rebounds against his former team.

Dallas and Phoenix are tied for the worst record in the West at 12-27.

Nuggets 140, Pacers 112: Nikola Jokic had 22 points and 10 rebounds, and Denver ended a five-game losing streak by beating Indiana in the NBA's Global Games series at London's O2 Arena.

Wilson Chandler added 21 points, and Danilo Gallinari had 18 for the Nuggets. They outscored the Pacers 39-20 in the third quarter, shooting 73.7 percent in the period to put it away.

Denver trailed only once, when Kevin Seraphin gave the Pacers a 31-30 lead early in the second quarter, and finished with a season high in scoring.

Spurs 134, Lakers 94: Kawhi Leonard had 31 points despite sitting out the fourth quarter, and host San Antonio set several season highs in rolling past Los Angeles.

San Antonio rebounded from a last-minute loss to Milwaukee on Tuesday with its highest point total and largest margin of victory this season. The Spurs also set a season high by shooting 61 percent from the field.

Pau Gasol had 22 points, nine rebounds and six assists in 26 minutes. Tony Parker and LaMarcus Aldridge added 13 points apiece.

Pelicans 104, Nets 95: Tyreke Evans scored a season-high 29 points and New Orleans, playing without All-Star big man Anthony Davis, handed host Brooklyn its eighth straight defeat.

Terrence Jones added 24 points and 12 rebounds for New Orleans (16-24), which improved to 6-13 on the road by winning both games during its stay in New York City.

Jrue Holiday scored 21 and Solomon Hill had 14 points and 10 rebounds for the Pelicans, who closed the game on a 13-1 run.

Predators knock Rask from game, outlast Bruins

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Nashville Predators know they need to start making a move up the Western Conference standings.

They hope winning back-to-back games for the first time since Dec. 19 and 20 is a start.

Filip Forsberg scored with 2:24 left in the second period, and the Predators beat the Boston Bruins 2-1 on Thursday night after Bruins All-Star goalie Tuukka Rask was knocked out of the game.

"It was a test for us, and we showed up and we played our hearts out and got two points and that's what we came here to do," Forsberg said.

It was a costly game for each team with Rask playing only 12:49 before going to the locker room, while Nashville defense-

man Roman Josi, whose slap shot hit Rask in the throat, played 5:52 before taking a high hit from Anton Blidh that pushed his stick into his own face.

"I thought it was late and dirty," Nashville coach Peter Laviolette said about Blidh's hit.

Rask, named an All-Star on Tuesday for the first time in his career, took a puck off Josi's slap shot near the bottom of his mask at his neck. Rask immediately shook off his right glove and pulled his mask off. Once he got up, Rask skated to the bench and went straight to the locker room. He was replaced by Zane McIntyre.

"He wasn't well enough to come back, and we'll see moving forward how he does," Bruins coach Claude Julien said.

Austin Watson also scored a goal for Nashville, and Juuse Saros made 35 saves to improve to 4-3-1.

Flyers 5, Canucks 4 (SO): Claude Giroux scored the only goal in the shootout to lift host Philadelphia over Vancouver.

Wild 7, Canadiens 1: Eric Staal and Jordan Schroeder scored 39 seconds apart in the second period, Nino Niederreiter had two goals, and host Minnesota overwhelmed Carey Price and Montreal.

Lightning 4, Sabres 2: Ben Bishop made 24 saves in his return after missing nine games with a lower-body injury, Ondrej Palat had two goals and an assist, and host Tampa Bay beat Buffalo.

Senators 4, Penguins 1: Mike Condon made 29 saves to help hos Ottawa beat

Pittsburgh.

Stars 5, Red Wings 2: Defensemen John Klingberg and Stephen Johns scored goals 49 seconds apart in the second period and host Dallas topped Detroit.

Ducks 4, Avalanche 1: John Gibson made 33 saves two days after he recorded a shutout, and Jakob Silfverberg scored for a second straight game as visiting Anaheim climbed into sole possession of the Pacific Division lead.

Oilers 3, Devils 2: Leon Draisaitl scored in overtime and had two assists and host Edmonton beat New Jersey to snap a two-game losing streak.

Kings 5, Blues 1: Jake Muzzin and Tanner Pearson scored two goals apiece in hos Los Angeles' fourth victory in six games.