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Fitzgerald, McCain COs face homicide counts

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The former commanders of the two Navy destroyers involved in separate crashes last year that killed 17 sailors will face charges of negligent homicide, the Navy said Tuesday.

Cmdr. Bryce Benson, who commanded the USS Fitzgerald, and Cmdr. Alfredo Sanchez, former commander of the USS John S. McCain, are also being charged with dereliction of duty and “hazarding a vessel,” a Navy statement said.

Two unnamed lieutenants and one lieutenant junior grade from the Fitzgerald are facing similar charges.

In addition, one charge of dereliction of duty is pending referral to a forum for a chief petty officer who was aboard the McCain.

The decision to seek charges was made by Adm. Frank Caldwell, who was designated as the Consolidated Disposition Authority last year by Adm. John Richardson, chief of naval operations.

“Additional administrative actions are being conducted for members of both crews including non-judicial punishment for four Fitzgerald and four John S. McCain crewmembers,” the Navy said.

Last year was disastrous for the Navy. On Jan. 31, the USS Antietam ran aground near Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, and leaked more than 1,000 gallons of hydraulic fluid into Tokyo Bay. The ship’s commanding officer was relieved of command in March.

The USS Lake Champlain collided with a South Korean fishing boat in May near the east coast of the Korean Peninsula.

Then, on June 17, the Fitzgerald crashed into a civilian merchant ship about 60 miles southwest of Yokosuka, killing seven sailors. The ship’s commanding officer, executive officer and command master chief were relieved two months later.

On Aug. 21, the McCain collided with an oil tanker near Singapore, leaving 10 sailors dead.

In September, the Navy relieved Task Force 70 commander Rear Adm. Charles Williams and Destroyer Squadron 15 commander Capt. Jeffrey Bennett due to loss of confidence.

The Navy began a comprehensive review of its training, manning and procedures after the deadly crashes. The review’s many recommendations included improving training on seamanship, navigational skills and equipment aboard ships, as well as reducing fatigue and stress

among sailors and officers.

During a news conference in November, Richardson said the Fitzgerald and McCain collisions were “preventable.”

“The causes for the collisions included a failure to plan for safety, failure to adhere to sound navigational practices, failure to execute basic watch-standing principles, failure to properly use available navigation tools, failure to respond deliberately and effectively when in extremist of collision, a loss of situational awareness and high traffic density, failure to follow the international rules of the road and for John S. McCain, insufficient knowledge and proficiency of the ship’s steering system.”

The Navy’s investigative report said that many of the decisions leading to the Fitzgerald crash were the result of poor judgment and decision-making by the commanding officer.

Navy: Japan tours might grow to 4 years

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Navy wants sailors to spend more time on their overseas assignments, the service’s personnel chief said.

Vice Adm. Robert Burke, who serves as chief of naval personnel and deputy chief of naval operations, told sailors and family members at Yokosuka on Wednesday that Japan tour lengths could increase to four years.

Most overseas tours for military personnel have been capped at two or three years and that’s a problem, he said.

“A sailor gets [to Japan and] they’re taking 12 to 18 to learn their training and then maybe doing their job for a short month’s period of time before it’s time for them to move again,” Burke said. “That puts the commands in a state of continuously having to train up their people and not having a sea-

soned, experienced crew that can train up the new junior folks.”

Both single sailors and those with families would get four-year orders overseas, he said. Those already in Japan would keep the same rotation date but would be offered incentives to stay longer, such as extra pay or orders to a duty station of their choice after finishing their overseas tour.

Short tour lengths may have contributed to manning issues in the Japan-based 7th Fleet, which suffered collisions involving the USS Fitzgerald and USS John S. McCain that killed 17 sailors last year.

“There probably is a lower overall level of readiness that results from the higher level of churn that you get in the forward deployed naval fleet as opposed to the [U.S. mainland-based] forces,” said Bryan Clark, a senior fellow with the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments in Washington.

Burke said the 7th Fleet and other forward-deployed forces will be prioritized

when it comes to manning and that sailors completing basic training will receive orders to overseas forces before others.

The Navy touts overseas tours as a plus for sailors, suggesting that they tend to receive promotions faster than their stateside peers due to the high operational tempo of forward-deployed units. Some, however, say the work rate makes longer tours a hardship.

“For a sailor who may never have been to Japan before to be posted there for four or five years can be asking a lot, and the op-tempo can lead to significant burnout,” said Steven Stashwick, a lieutenant commander in the Navy Reserve who left active duty in 2015 after a decade as a surface warfare officer.

That’s especially true for operations specialists and sonar technicians who “find themselves on much more intense watch rotations than their stateside counterparts due to the nature of the waters and operations that the ships in 7th Fleet conduct,” he said.

USAF temporarily deploys 3 kinds of bombers to Pacific

The Washington Post

B-52 Stratofortress bombers began arriving Tuesday at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, temporarily providing the Pentagon with a rarity as tensions with North Korea percolate: three kinds of bombers in the Pacific.

The six B-52s and 300 airmen from Barksdale Air Force Base, La., will take over the U.S. military's continuous bomber presence mission in the Pacific from a unit of B-1B Lancer bombers at the end of the month, Air Force officials said in a news release. The mission, which has existed since 2004, is designed to reassure U.S. allies in the region and show strength against China, North Korea and other potential adversaries.

The B-52s and B-1s will be joined on Guam by three B-2 Spirit stealth bombers, which deployed last week from Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo. The bat-winged bomber arrived in what the Pentagon character-

ized as a short-term deployment, giving the Pentagon an unusually robust show of force this month on Guam until the B-1s return to Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D. The Pentagon last had three kinds of bombers deployed in the Pacific in 2016.

The deployments could have additional significance in the Pacific considering the planes' capabilities. The B-2 is the only U.S. bomber capable of carrying a nuclear gravity bomb. B-52s are capable of carrying smaller nuclear cruise missiles, while B-1s do not carry nuclear weapons as a result of the 2010 New START Treaty between the United States and Russia.

The deployment of the B-52s in the Pacific came at the same time that the Pentagon sent four other B-52s from Minot Air Force Base, N.D., to Britain. They will carry out training from RAF Fairford, reassuring allies in Europe.

Last week, Marine Lt. Kenneth McKenzie, the director of

the Pentagon's Joint Staff, told reporters at the Pentagon that it would be wrong to view the deployment of the B-2s "within the single lens of what it means to the Korean Peninsula." It affects allies across the Pacific, he said.

The B-1s have been involved in numerous shows of force against North Korea in the last few months, sometimes flying in formation with other aircraft from the United States, South Korea and Japan before dropping bombs on training ranges in South Korea.

North Korea's foreign minister, Ri Yong Ho, threatened in September to shoot down U.S. warplanes, even if they are not in North Korean airspace. He argued that President Donald Trump's tweets about the standoff between the two nations was tantamount to a declaration of war. U.S. officials said afterward that they would continue to use international airspace for missions.

Navy plans bonuses, promotions

BY TYLER HLAVAC

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Sailors can expect more promotions and re-enlistment bonuses as the service starts growing again, according to the Navy's personnel chief.

Vice Adm. Robert Burke, who also serves as deputy chief of Naval Operations, told sailors at the 7th Fleet headquarters in Japan this week that the days of pushing sailors out early are over. Navy chiefs want a force of 350,000 sailors to meet a 355-ship goal set by President Donald Trump. The service now has fewer than 320,000 active-duty personnel and 280 ships.

"All of our people policies have been aligned towards pushing people out of the Navy ... we've always needed to get smaller," Burke said.

Now the Navy will make it harder to leave, he said.

"Advancement opportunities are going to go through the roof," he said.

"We aren't where we want to be on manning, and we're going to continue to not be where we want to be until FY19 or FY20," he said. "We're catching up as fast as we can and we're going to get there."

The Navy plans to reach its goal by increasing the number of new sailors and retaining those already in uniform, Burke said.

The service recently abolished high-tenure limits and stopped letting sailors leave before their scheduled separation dates. Selective re-enlistment bonuses will help retain personnel in key jobs, Burke said.

Lack of funding had pushed the service into hard choices, but now the Navy needs an influx of sailors to fill gaps on ships, he said. The service usually adds 32,000 to 33,000 sailors a year but is planning to add 38,700 sailors this fiscal year and 40,000 in fiscal year 2019, Burke said.

"We're going to be ramping up like crazy," he said.

FEMA: Hawaii didn't need OK to retract alert

Associated Press

HONOLULU — The Federal Emergency Management Agency said the state of Hawaii didn't need federal approval to retract a cellphone alert mistakenly sent over the weekend warning of a ballistic missile attack.

Hawaii has had the authority to cancel or retract warnings since 2012, when it applied for access to the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System, FEMA said in a statement.

Hawaii Emergency Management Agency spokesman Richard Rapoza said Tuesday his agency asked FEMA for clarification on Saturday about whether rescinding an alert was an appropriate use of the

warning system.

Hawaii officials have said the process was one factor that delayed their retraction. Another was writing the cancellation notice, since a retraction script was not kept on file. The Hawaii agency didn't send a retraction until 38 minutes after the initial alert.

Rapoza said officials weren't clear on whether they could use the system to cancel the first alert.

"We didn't want to pile one mistake on top of another," Rapoza said.

Officials said a state employee clicked the wrong link and activated a real alert instead of an internal test when the mistaken message was distributed.

Hawaii is the only state that is set up to send cellphone alerts about the threat of an incoming ballistic missile. It's had the ability to do so since November, Rapoza said.

Hawaii is also the only state that has siren alerts that will be sounded specifically to warn of a ballistic missile threat. Hawaii started testing these sirens last month.

The state set up the ballistic missile warning infrastructure after North Korea demonstrated its ballistic missiles had the range to reach the islands.

Hawaii is home to key military bases and command centers, making it rich with potential targets for adversaries.

Doc: Trump did great on cognitive test

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump performed “exceedingly well” on a surprise cognitive screening test administered last week, his doctor said Tuesday as the White House continued to bat back questions about the president’s mental fitness for office.

Navy doctor Ronny Jackson, who administered Trump’s first presidential physical last week, said Trump received a perfect score on a test designed to detect early signs of memory loss and other mild cognitive impairment. He also reported the 6-foot-3 president weighed in at 239 pounds — three pounds heavier than he was in September 2016, the last time Trump revealed his weight to the public. That number puts Trump on the cusp of — but just under — the obesity mark.

“The president’s overall health is excellent,” said Jackson, who predicted Trump would remain healthy for the duration of his presidency despite a diet heavy on fast food and an exercise regime limited to weekend golf outings.

“It’s called genetics,” Jackson said. “I don’t know. ... He has incredibly good genes and that’s just the way God made him.”

Presidents don’t typically sit for cognitive assessments during their periodic physical exams. But Jackson said Trump personally requested the test as he continues to face questions about his mental acuity for office. Such questions have escalated in the wake of an unflattering new book that paints Trump as a man-child who has trouble processing information and recognizing old friends.

The 71-year-old president performed “exceedingly well” on the test, Jackson said, receiving a perfect score.

“He’s very sharp. He’s very articulate when he speaks to me,” said Jackson, who works in close proximity to the president. Jackson accused doctors who have tried to diagnose Trump from afar of performing “tabloid psychiatry.”

Does US have a hypersonic spy plane? Lockheed is not talking

Bloomberg

For years, Lockheed Martin has been developing a successor to one of the fastest aircraft the world has ever seen, the SR-71 Blackbird, the Cold War reconnaissance craft that the U.S. Air Force retired almost three decades ago. Lockheed officials have said the hypersonic SR-72 — dubbed the “Son of Blackbird” by one trade journal — could fly by 2030.

But a rather curious talk last week at an aerospace conference by a Lockheed Skunk Works executive implied that the SR-72 might already exist. Referring to detailed specifics of company design and manufacturing, Jack O’Banion, a Lockheed vice president, said a “digital transformation” arising from recent computing capabilities and design tools had made hypersonic development possible. Then — assuming O’Banion chose his word tense purposely — came the surprise.

“Without the digital transformation the aircraft you see there could not have been made,” O’Banion said, standing by an artist’s rendering of the

hypersonic aircraft. “In fact, five years ago, it could not have been made.”

Hypersonic applies to speeds above Mach 5, or five times the speed of sound. The SR-71 cruised at Mach 3.2, more than 2,000 mph, around 85,000 feet.

Computer processing power and new tools allow for three-dimensional design of a scramjet engine, O’Banion said at the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics’ annual SciTech Forum near Orlando, Fla. Scramjet refers to engine combustion occurring at supersonic speeds, which adds to the engineering complexity.

Adding a little Hollywood to an engineering presentation, O’Banion likened the digital advances in 3D-design to the build process Tony Stark employs in the film “Iron Man.”

“We couldn’t have made the engine itself — it would have melted down into slag if we had tried to produce it five years ago,” O’Banion said. “But now we can digitally print that engine with an incredibly sophisticated cooling system integral into the material of the engine itself, and have that engine

survive for multiple firings for routine operation.”

The aircraft is also agile at hypersonic speeds, with reliable engine starts, he said. A half-decade before, he added, developers “could not have even built it even if we conceived of it.”

Of course, none of the Skunk Works executive’s talk confirmed that Lockheed Martin is preparing to turn over to the Pentagon a top-secret hypersonic aircraft, nor does it reveal how far the project may have progressed. It’s also unclear if such an aircraft would carry pilots or operate as a drone.

Lockheed declined to address O’Banion’s comments. The defense contractor “continues to advance and test technologies which will benefit hypersonic flight,” spokeswoman Melissa Dalton said in an email. “A Reusable Hypersonic System (RHS) is a far term solution that will be made possible by the path-finding work we are doing today.”

An Air Force spokesman said only that the military has no information on the project “at this time.”

Sources: White House directed Bannon silence

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Steve Bannon’s attorney relayed questions, in real time, to the White House during a House Intelligence Committee interview of the former Trump chief strategist, people familiar with the closed-door session told The Associated Press.

As lawmakers probed Bannon’s time working for President Donald Trump, Bannon’s attorney, Bill Burck, was asking the White House counsel’s office by phone during the Tuesday session whether his client could answer the questions. He was told by that office not to discuss his work on the transition or in the White House.

It’s unclear who Burck was communicating with in the White House. He is also representing top White House lawyer Don McGahn in special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation into contacts between the Trump campaign and Russia.

Tuesday’s conversations were confirmed by a White House official and a second person familiar with Bannon’s interview. They spoke only on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

On Wednesday, the AP also confirmed that Bannon will meet with Mueller’s investigators for an interview instead of appearing before a grand jury. A person familiar with that issue

confirmed the interview and said Bannon is expected to cooperate with Mueller. The person was not authorized to speak publicly about private conversations.

Burck didn’t respond to numerous phone messages left Tuesday and Wednesday. A spokeswoman for Bannon did not respond to multiple requests for comment. A spokesman for the special counsel’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Bannon refused to answer a broad array of queries from the House Intelligence Committee about his time working for Trump, leading the Republican committee chairman to authorize a subpoena.

Snow, record cold hit South

Associated Press

ATLANTA — The South awoke on Wednesday to a two-part Arctic mess. First came a thin blanket of snow and ice, and then came the below-zero wind chills and record-breaking low temperatures in New Orleans and other cities.

The snowfall sabotaged morning rush hour even before it began, sending cars crashing into each other on major thoroughfares throughout the region. Officials urged people to stay off the slick roads if possible and to bundle up and wear layers of clothing if they ventured outside.

Dozens of accidents were reported in the metro Atlanta area, including one involving a salt truck and another involving a rapid-transit bus.

“Give crews the time and space they need to clear the accidents,” Natalie Dale, of the Georgia Department of Transportation, told WSB-TV. “If you can’t safely get out of your neighborhood, it’s best to stay put.”

The blast of cold air shattered records early Wednesday in Louisiana and Mississippi.

It was 21 degrees before dawn

Wednesday in New Orleans. That breaks the city’s record low temperature for the date, which was 23 degrees set in 1977.

In Mississippi, the temperature in Hattiesburg dipped to 13 degrees early Wednesday, breaking the previous record low of 14.

Gov. Nathan Deal issued a state of emergency for 83 counties, spanning much of central and north Georgia.

The same slippery conditions and dangerous wind chills swept across several southern states Tuesday, shutting down interstates, triggering highway crashes, closing airport runways and prompting widespread school closings. Snow fell in a wide band that stretched from southeastern Texas all the way to western Massachusetts.

Snow also was forecast Wednesday for parts of Alabama, where Gov. Kay Ivey shut down government offices as a precaution.

Many school districts in Louisiana were closed for a second straight day Wednesday as the precipitation gave way to single-digit wind chills that keep icy roads from thawing.

Walmart offers way to get rid of leftover opioids

Associated Press

Walmart is helping customers get rid of leftover opioids by giving them packets that turn the addictive painkillers into a useless gel.

The retail giant announced Wednesday it will provide the packets free with opioid prescriptions filled at its 4,700 U.S. pharmacies.

The small packets, made by DisposeRX, contain a powder that is poured into prescription

bottles. When mixed with warm water, the powder turns the pills into a biodegradable gel that can be thrown in the trash.

Research has shown that surgery patients often end up with leftover opioid painkillers and store the drugs improperly at home.

Walmart said the powder also works with other prescription drugs. The company said its pharmacy customers can request a free packet at any time.

Pope meets with abuse survivors during Chile visit

Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Chile — Pope Francis met on Tuesday with survivors of priests who sexually abused them, wept with them and apologized for the “irreparable damage” they suffered, his spokesman said.

The pontiff also acknowledged the “pain” of priests who have been held collectively responsible for the crimes of a few, Vatican spokesman Greg Burke told reporters at the end of the day.

Francis dove head-first into Chile’s sex abuse scandal on his first full day in Santiago that came amid unprecedented opposition to his visit. Three more churches were torched overnight, including one burned to the ground in the southern Araucania region where Francis planned to celebrate Mass on Wednesday.

Police used tear gas and water cannons to break up an anti-pope protest outside Francis’ big open-air Mass in the capital, Santiago.

Despite the incidents, huge numbers of Chileans turned out to see the pope, including an estimated 400,000 for his Mass, and he brought some inmates to tears with an emotional visit to a women’s prison.

But his meeting with abuse survivors and comments in his first speech of the day were what many Chileans, incensed by years of abuse scandal and cover-up, were waiting for.

Burke said Francis met with a small group of abuse victims after lunch, listening to their stories and praying with them. The spokesman gave no details, other than to say the pope “listened to them, prayed with them and wept with them.”

Earlier in the day, Francis told Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, lawmakers, judges and other authorities that he felt “bound to express my pain and shame” that some

of Chile’s clergy had sexually abused children in their care.

“I am one with my brother bishops, for it is right to ask forgiveness and make every effort to support the victims, even as we commit ourselves to ensuring that such things do not happen again,” the pope said.

Francis did not refer by name to Chile’s most notorious pedophile priest, the Rev. Fernando Karadima, who in 2011 was barred from all pastoral duties and sanctioned by the Vatican to a lifetime of “penance and prayer” for sexually molesting minors. Nor did he refer to the fact that the emeritus archbishop of Santiago, a top papal adviser, has acknowledged he knew of complaints against Karadima but didn’t remove him from ministry.

Karadima had been a politically connected, charismatic and powerful priest who ministered to a wealthy Santiago community and produced dozens of priestly vocations and five bishops. Victims went public with their accusations in 2010 after complaining for years to church authorities that Karadima had kissed and fondled them when they were teenagers.

While the cover-up continued to roil the church, many Chileans are still furious over Francis’ subsequent decision in 2015 to appoint a Karadima protege as bishop of the southern city of Osorno. Bishop Juan Barros has denied knowing about Karadima’s abuse but many Chileans don’t believe him, and his appointment has badly split the diocese.

Francis referred again to the scandal later in the day, addressing the hundreds of priests gathered in Santiago’s cathedral who have seen their influence and moral authority plummet as a result of the Karadima case and cover-up.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Pot shops found selling to underage buyers

OR PORTLAND — Oregon authorities said nearly 20 percent of state-licensed marijuana retailers in a recent undercover operation sold pot to underage buyers.

The Oregon Liquor Control Commission told The Oregonian/OregonLive that 16 of 86 shops sold pot to people under 21 during the December decoy visits.

The agency issued citations to the shops in a process that could result in fees or a temporary suspension of their licenses.

Woman breast-feeding in public gets apology

ND FARGO — The manager of a Chick-fil-A restaurant in Fargo has apologized for telling a breast-feeding mother to leave.

Macy Hornung said she was kicked out of the restaurant Saturday because she was breast-feeding her baby without a cover, even though she said she was being discreet.

North Dakota law enacted in 2009 allows women to breast-feed in public if they do it “in a discreet and modest manner,” though it doesn’t define what that means.

The restaurant owner “never gave me the chance to explain that my daughter will flail, scream and rip a cover off,” Hornung told KVLV-TV. “It causes even more frustration and a very angry baby, so it isn’t worth it to me.”

Police say drunk mom left kids to themselves

PA TAMAQUA — A Pennsylvania woman was arrested after one of her children reported she’d been drinking for three days straight

and police found her passed out on the couch, with her four kids left to fend for themselves.

Audrey Warner, 35, of Tamaqua, is charged with endangering the welfare of children.

Police said that when officers went to the house, they found three empty 20-ounce cans of alcohol. Warner’s 11-year-old daughter told police that her mother beat the children and made them stay in the attic. She said that when she tried to make breakfast for her siblings, they were told to “go back to bed.” The other children are 6, 5 and 2.

Police said the children were taken to their grandmother’s house.

Man awarded medal for thwarting knife attack

IL PEORIA — A central Illinois man was awarded the Carnegie Medal for thwarting a knife-wielding man who intended to kill people at a chess club session for children.

The Peoria Journal Star reported that Rep. Darin LaHood awarded the medal on Monday to James Vernon, of Morton. The medal is given to someone from the U.S. and Canada who risks their life while saving or attempting to save others.

Vernon was 75 at the time of the 2015 attack at the Morton Public Library. The Army veteran fought Dustin Brown, then 19, until the armed man was apprehended. Brown has been sentenced in the attack.

Inmate convicted for fatal injections dies

MS JACKSON — A Mississippi inmate convicted of giving fatal and illicit silicone buttocks injections to a woman has died at age 58.

An autopsy is to be conducted on the remains of inmate Tracy Lynn Garner after she

died Sunday, the Mississippi Department of Corrections said in a statement Monday announcing the death. Garner had served less than 3½ years of a life sentence.

Garner was convicted by a jury in 2014 of depraved heart murder in the death of Karima Gordon, a metro Atlanta resident who died eight days after receiving the injections in Jackson in 2012.

Dog missing for 5 days found alive under snow

ME BRYANT POND — A Labrador retriever survived being buried alive in the snow for five days.

The family of 13-year-old Sophie said the dog went missing on Jan. 4 and they were unable to find her despite pleas made on social media. Albert Silver said the family searched everywhere.

Sophie was found five days later, on Jan. 9, when someone saw her head poking through the snow on nearby property that had already been searched. A vet said that other than losing 5 pounds, the dog was in good shape.

Big rig driver not hurt in chicken-fried wreck

TX SALADO — The driver of an 18-wheeler escaped injury in a chicken-fried wreck in Central Texas.

The Texas Department of Public Safety said a tractor-trailer rig hauling frozen chicken caught fire Monday morning on southbound Interstate 35 near Salado. DPS officials said the driver noticed flames between the cab and the trailer and pulled over but was unable to put out the blaze.

Authorities are investigating what caused the fire that engulfed the rig and its chicken cargo.

Semitrailer crashes into school; 2 students hurt

MN LYLE — A semitrailer truck veered off a highway in southern Minnesota and crashed through the wall of an elementary school, injuring two children in a classroom.

School officials in Lyle, next to the Iowa border, said a driver and a child passenger in a vehicle hit by the semi also were injured. The semi driver rear-ended that vehicle on Highway 218 about 8:30 a.m. Tuesday, then ran off the highway and crashed into the school, with its cab landing inside the walls. The highway is about 100 yards from the school.

There was no immediate word on the conditions of those injured.

Police accuse man of stealing manhole covers

MA WEBSTER — Massachusetts police said they arrested a man accused of stealing seven manhole covers and putting traffic cones in their place.

The Telegram & Gazette reported that the Webster man was arrested Friday and charged with larceny.

Police said they received a call about 2:45 p.m. on Jan. 10 from a witness who saw the suspect taking a manhole cover in Webster. Authorities received several other calls about missing manhole covers, and they said they stopped a vehicle matching the witness’ description later that day.

Police said the suspect acknowledged taking the manhole covers and pointed officers to where he had sold them. Authorities recovered the covers from a Millbury salvage yard.

From wire reports

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Marrone has changed culture for Jags

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla.— Jacksonville's locker room was abuzz late last season. Four guys played table tennis while others crowded around a small table for dominoes. Two 80-inch televisions were tuned to a sports highlight show, and music blared from one corner of the room.

Doug Marrone, the team's offensive line coach at the time, walked through and shook his head.

"Can you believe this?" Marrone whispered.

The Jaguars were in the middle of a nine-game losing streak that would ultimately cost coach Gus Bradley his job. Marrone had watched from afar for two years, witnessing an atmosphere he felt was too loose, too laid-back and too lenient amid losing.

So when Marrone was hired to replace Bradley last January, high on his to-do list

was to change the culture in Jacksonville.

His success is one reason the Jaguars (12-6) are in the AFC championship game against New England (14-3).

The ping pong table was the first to go. Dominoes followed. The locker room stalls were overhauled, too, with Marrone mixing and matching position groups and putting certain players next to veteran leaders and/or NFL role models.

"We definitely threw a tantrum," Pro Bowl defensive tackle Malik Jackson said. "Went in there and talked to him about it. Definitely wasn't happy. I learned just to be quiet, you know, and go with the flow. He's been at it longer than I have, and I'm just the football player. He says do this and I go do it. Just learn to follow him, and I'm glad I did."

Marrone saved the most significant changes for the practice fields.

Marrone, top executive Tom

Coughlin and general manager Dave Caldwell wanted a much tougher and more physical team. They drafted bruising running back Leonard Fournette and fiery left tackle Cam Robinson to complement a defense that was significantly beefed up in free agency with the addition of All-Pro pass-rusher Calais Campbell, Pro Bowl cornerback A.J. Bouye and veteran safety Barry Church.

They also designed an off-season program that was more grueling than most players had experienced. Marrone's message was clear: Go hard or go home.

"You remember guys in camp talking about this took a few years off their lives," Jackson said. "It's pretty funny just to see us now. I guess he does know what he's doing."

The Jaguars were in full pads nearly every day during training camp, a tortuous stretch in draining heat and humidity

that left rookies and veterans questioning the process and wondering if it would pay off. It was the NFL's version of boot camp. Break them down, then build them up.

It ultimately brought players closer, making them accountable to each other and causing them to care more for each other. Winning was the final piece, and thumping Houston 29-7 in the season opener was all the proof players needed.

"It was the toughest training camp I've ever been a part of," said linebacker Paul Posluszny, in his 11th season. "Coach Marrone would talk to us and say, 'Listen, I have a plan and you have to trust me.' With that, guys were able to say, 'OK, we haven't gotten what we wanted in years past doing things a certain way, so we have to buy in, trust the head man and know that that'll bring us success when it's time.'"

Resilient Vikings have taken a cue from Zimmer

Associated Press

EDEN PRAIRIE, Minn.— Mike Zimmer was already smiling more than usual, sporting a relaxed look of satisfaction rarely revealed in public during the NFL season, when he really let his guard down a few minutes into his postgame news conference deep inside Minnesota's still-buzzing stadium.

"Hey, let's open these things up!" Zimmer blurted out mid-sentence, prodding a Vikings official to push the button that removes the window shades and allows the premium ticket-holders in an adjacent lounge to peer in the room.

His wish to interact with the customers who cheered the Vikings on to a last-play divisional round victory was granted.

Zimmer then proceeded to slowly and rhythmically clap above his head, dignifying the ritual "Skol" chant performed by the purple-clad fans at

each game honoring the area's Scandinavian heritage and the team's nickname.

"You deserve it!" Zimmer said, again interrupting his own answer to acknowledge the crowd.

From peers around the league to players in the locker room to people up and down the organization, there's a strong sentiment that Zimmer has earned this, too, pulling within one win of a Super Bowl appearance.

The way the Vikings finished their 29-24 victory over New Orleans on a last-chance 61-yard touchdown pass from Case Keenum to Stefon Diggs suggested they're on some kind of charmed path, an uncharted territory for this championship-deprived franchise. Zimmer, for his part, has experienced his own share of painful setbacks.

After being passed over for so many head coaching vacancies during a six-year run as Cin-

cinnati's defensive coordinator, Zimmer nearly canceled a second interview in Minnesota in 2014 after a different team that considered him chose a different candidate. He ignored the discouragement in his head, instead accepting the offer to become the ninth head coach in team history at age 57.

"Sometimes you wonder, but I have a lot of confidence in myself," Zimmer said at his introductory news conference at team headquarters. "I feel like I was destined to do this."

That first season, the Vikings improved by two wins to finish 7-9 with rookie Teddy Bridgewater forced into action ahead of schedule at quarterback and running back Adrian Peterson absent for all but one game because of the child abuse case and subsequent NFL discipline dispute he was involved in. In 2015, they went 11-5 and ended Green Bay's four-year hold on the NFC North title.

The potholes in the road were

waiting, though.

Blair Walsh's 27-yard field-goal try went wide left at the end of the one-point wild-card loss at home to Seattle.

The 5-0 start in 2016 was washed away by a torrent of season-ending injuries, including Bridgewater, Peterson and several offensive linemen.

Offensive coordinator Norv Turner resigned the day after Zimmer had the first of eight eye surgeries to address a torn retina.

The first quarter of the 2017 season brought knee injuries to quarterback Sam Bradford and running back Dalvin Cook, who needed reconstructive surgery to repair a torn ACL.

The Vikings didn't blink, though, particularly with the experience of 2016 so fresh. Case Keenum deftly took over for Bradford, and Jerick McKinnon and Latavius Murray became a productive backfield tandem.

NHL roundup

Nash's goals lead Rangers' rout of Flyers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Henrik Lundqvist and Brady Skjei sat inside the Rangers' dressing room after shellacking the Flyers, and surprisingly enough, their conversation was all about defense.

Even after Rick Nash scored twice in New York's 5-1 win over Philadelphia, the Rangers were most pleased by what happened in their own end.

"We both said that was our best collective defensive game in a long time, and we end up scoring five goals," Skjei said.

Jordan Weal put Philadelphia up 1-0 before Nash, J.T. Miller, Paul Carey and Michael Grabner combined to make it 5-1 by the end of the second period. Nash had the first and last goal for the Rangers.

"That's a testament to us playing good structurally," Skjei said. "Good team defense first leads to good looks offensively. It was a good game all

around."

New York snapped a three-game skid and improved to 23-17-5. Lundqvist made 25 saves for his 20th win of the season and 425th career victory. Lundqvist became the first goaltender in league history to win at least 20 games in each of his first 13 seasons.

Philadelphia dropped to 20-16-8 with its first loss in four games. Brian Elliott gave up five goals on 21 shots before being replaced by Michal Neuvirth in the third period. Neuvirth stopped eight shots.

"We weren't competitive enough," Flyers forward Wayne Simmonds said.

Entering their first meeting of the season, New York and Philadelphia were on significantly different trajectories. The Flyers had won four straight by an aggregate 21-11 margin, while the Rangers had scored two or fewer goals in eight of their last 10 games.

Predators 1, Golden Knights

O: Juuse Saros made 43 saves and Kevin Fiala scored eight minutes into the third period for host Nashville.

Nashville played its first game in a week and has won three straight. The shutout was the third of the season for Saros and the fourth of his career.

Blues 2, Maple Leafs 1 (OT): Alexander Steen tied it with 57 seconds left and Vince Dunn scored 1:43 into overtime, lifting St. Louis over host Toronto.

Connor Brown put Toronto ahead on a short-handed breakaway midway through the third period, but Steen scored with goalie Carter Hutton pulled for an extra attacker by backhanding Alex Pieterangelo's rebound past Frederik Andersen.

Sharks 3, Coyotes 2 (SO): Joe Pavelski scored the only goal of the shootout to lift visiting San Jose over Arizona.

Pavelski scored on San Jose's first attempt, and Sharks goalie Aaron Dell was perfect through three rounds in his

first NHL shootout. Dell also had 30 saves.

Stars 4, Red Wings 2: Jason Spezza responded to being benched by scoring two tiebreaking goals on power plays, helping Dallas beat host Detroit.

Spezza scored on a lunging one-timer below the left circle with 5:52 left in the second period. His first goal came on a redirected shot midway through the first.

Devils 4, Islanders 1: Damon Severson scored twice 1:26 apart in his team's three-goal second period, and visiting New Jersey ended a six-game skid.

Kyle Palmieri and Taylor Hall also scored for New Jersey, which was 0-3-3 since beating Detroit at home on Dec. 27. Keith Kinkaid, getting the start after Cory Schneider was a late scratch due to illness, stopped 25 shots.

Australian Open

High-seeded players fend off surprising challenges

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — It was quite a predicament for Grigor Dimitrov, still basking in his triumph at the ATP Finals as he entered his second-round match at the Australian Open against a young American who had never won a tour-level match before qualifying for the first major of the season.

Mackenzie McDonald is ranked 186th and played college tennis at UCLA. He had never played anyone ranked better than No. 69 before facing the third-seeded Dimitrov on Wednesday.

McDonald broke Dimitrov's serve three times in the fourth set and pushed the fifth beyond

12 games — there's no tiebreakers in fifth sets at the Australian Open — before his first double-fault of the set suddenly gave Dimitrov a match point.

Dimitrov finished it off 4-6, 6-2, 6-4, 0-6, 8-6 as midnight approached.

Second-seeded Caroline Wozniacki had to save two match points and come back from 5-1 down in the third set to beat 119th-ranked Jana Fett 3-6, 6-2, 7-5. Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, a 2008 Australian Open finalist, rallied from 5-2 down in the fifth to overcome Denis Shapovalov 3-6, 6-3, 1-6, 7-6 (4), 7-5.

And 38-year-old Ivo Karlovic overcame Yuichi Sugita 7-6 (3), 6-7 (3), 7-5, 4-6, 12-10.

Rafael Nadal, the 2017 run-

ner-up, didn't risk any close calls. The top-ranked Spaniard made only 10 unforced errors and had just one hiccup — dropping a service game while serving for the match — in a 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (4) win over Leonardo Mayer.

In the match preceding Nadal and Mayer on Rod Laver Arena, Wozniacki felt like she was "one foot out the tournament" before winning six straight games to advance.

She'll next play No. 30 Kiki Bertens.

After his enthralling comeback victory over Shapovalov, highlighted by a between-the-legs shot on an important point, Tsonga will meet 17th-seeded Nick Kyrgios in what shapes up to be an entertaining third-

round encounter.

Kyrgios had a 7-5, 6-4, 7-6 (2) win over Viktor Troicki, overcoming audio problems at Hisense Arena and complaining to chair umpire James Keothavong, who ended up turning off his microphone and later being hit in the head by a wayward tennis ball.

At the other end of the experience spectrum, 15-year-old qualifier Marta Kostyuk followed up her first-round win with a 6-3, 7-5 victory over wildcard entry Olivia Rogowska.

The Australian Open junior champion, who entered the season-opening major ranked No. 521, became the youngest player since Martina Hingis in 1996 to win main draw matches in Melbourne.

Koreas forming unified team

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — The rival Koreas agreed Wednesday to form their first unified Olympic team and have their athletes parade together for the first time in 11 years during the opening ceremony of next month's Winter Olympics in South Korea, officials said.

The agreements still require approval from the International Olympic Committee. But they are the most prominent steps toward rapprochement achieved by the Koreas since they recently began exploring cooperation during the Olympics following a year of heightened tension over the North's nuclear weapons program.

During their third day of talks at the border in about a week, senior officials reached a package of agreements including fielding a joint women's ice hockey team and marching together under a blue and white

"unification flag" depicting their peninsula in the opening ceremony, Seoul's Unification Ministry said.

A joint statement distributed by the ministry said the North Korean Olympic delegation will travel to South Korea across their heavily fortified land border before the Feb. 9-25 Pyeongchang Games. It said the delegation will include a 230-member cheering group, a 30-member taekwondo demonstration team, journalists, athletes and officials.

Ahead of the Olympics, the Koreas will hold a joint cultural event at the North's scenic Diamond Mountain and have non-Olympic skiers train together at the North's Masik ski resort, according to the statement. It said the North also plans to send a 150-strong delegation to the Paralympics in March. The North earlier said it would send a 140-member art troupe.

The agreements are highly symbolic and emotional. But it's still not clear how many North Korean athletes will come to Pyeongchang because none are currently qualified. South Korean media have predicted only up to 10 North Korean athletes will end up being covered by an additional quota from the IOC.

A pair of North Korean figure skaters qualified for this year's Olympics, but North Korea missed a deadline to confirm their participation. The IOC said recently it has "kept the door open" for North Korea to take part in the games. IOC officials are to meet with sports and government officials from the two Koreas and officials from the Pyeongchang organizing committee in Switzerland on Saturday.

The two Koreas have sent joint teams to major international sports events twice previously, both in 1991.

Wash. St. QB Hilinski dies at 21

Associated Press

PULLMAN, Wash. — Washington State quarterback Tyler Hilinski has died from an apparently self-inflicted gunshot wound, police said.

Hilinski, 21, was discovered in his apartment after he didn't show up for practice Tuesday. A rifle "was recovered next to Hilinski and a suicide note was found," according to the Pullman Police Department.

"We are deeply saddened to hear the news of Tyler's passing," Washington State coach Mike Leach said in a statement. "He was an incredible young man and everyone who had the privilege of knowing him was better for it. The entire WSU community mourns as thoughts and prayers go out to his family."

Hilinski was the presumptive starting quarterback going into next season. He started Washington State's Holiday Bowl loss to Michigan State after senior Luke Falk was unable to play due to a wrist injury.

Hilinski appeared in eight games during his sophomore season, throwing for 1,176 yards and seven touchdowns. His most memorable outing came in the second week of the season when he led Washington State from a 21-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat Boise State 47-44 in triple overtime. Hilinski threw for 240 yards and three touchdowns coming off the bench, and was carried off the field after the victory.

His only start came in the bowl game against Michigan State, although he played extensively in a loss to Arizona.

Washington State's players took to social media in reaction to Hilinski's death.

"Ty you were a great teammate, friend, brother anything we needed you to be. You brought smiles to the people around you. I am sorry I could not be there for you when you needed a smile for yourself. Love you man," defensive back Skyler Thomas wrote on Twitter.

NBA roundup

Pelicans get past Celtics in OT

Associated Press

BOSTON — Anthony Davis and the New Orleans Pelicans eventually were too big for the Boston Celtics.

Davis had 45 points and 16 rebounds as he and DeMarcus Cousins controlled the lane and led the Pelicans to a 116-113 overtime victory on Tuesday night, ending the Celtics' seven-game winning streak.

"It was a great win for us. They tested us," said Davis, who just missed matching the 48 points he scored Sunday during a win in New York.

Cousins added 19 points and 15 rebounds, and Jrue Holiday scored 23 points. The trio combined for all 12 Pelicans points in OT as New Orleans handed the Celtics their first loss of 2018.

Ian Clark added 15 points for

the Pelicans, whose size inside ended up prevailing in overtime when Boston's barrage of three-pointers stopped falling.

Kyrie Irving led Boston with 27 points, 24 after halftime as the Celtics rallied from a 12-point deficit and led by as much as five late in regulation.

"For some reason tonight, the whole game we were a little careless. It just carried over there at the end," said Al Horford, who had 14 points and nine rebounds. "We thought we had it. It just got away from us."

Magic 108, Timberwolves 102: Evan Fournier scored a season-high 32 points to help host Orlando break a seven-game losing streak.

D.J. Augustin added 11 points and three assists in the fourth quarter, when the Magic scored 35 points after trailing by two through three.

Nuggets 105, Mavericks 102: Nikola Jokic scored 29 points and grabbed a season-high 18 rebounds, Gary Harris hit two late free throws and host Denver led by as many as 23 points before holding on for a victory over Dallas.

Harris finished with 25 points and Will Barton added 22 for the Nuggets, who won for just the second time in six games.

Trail Blazers 118, Suns 111: Damian Lillard scored 31 points and host Portland snapped a three-game losing streak with a victory over Phoenix.

CJ McCollum had 27 points, including six 3-pointers, and the Trail Blazers led by as many as 27 points in third quarter.

Devin Booker had 43 for the Suns, who have lost three straight and five of their last six.