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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Anthrax debacle deemed institutional failure

By **HEATH DRUZIN**

Stars and Stripes

A report released Thursday blames inadequate irradiation and testing procedures for Department of Defense labs inadvertently sending live anthrax to dozens of labs around the world over the past decade, though it does not hold anyone accountable for the embarrassing lapses.

“By any measure, this was a massive institutional failure with a potentially dangerous biotoxin,” Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work said in a media briefing Thursday. “We are shocked by these failures. DOD takes full responsibility for the failures.”

The Defense Department

investigation was initially triggered by a sample sent from the Army’s Dugway Proving Ground in Utah in April, but subsequent testing found that live anthrax had been sent to 86 facilities across the country and in seven foreign countries. Work said that number is likely to rise, because some samples that were sent to third-party labs have not been tracked down.

Dugway is the Department of Defense’s main production laboratory for anthrax.

While the report does not hold anyone accountable, there were alarming indications — including a high percentage of supposedly irradiated anthrax testing positive for live spores in the labs’ own checks — that the Dugway leadership should have

noticed, and the Army is investigating whether anyone needs to be punished, Undersecretary of Defense Frank Kendall said.

“That should have been a clear indication to them that something was wrong,” he said.

No one was sickened, but eight lab workers who came in contact with the spores were put on medication as a precaution, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that three laboratories be temporarily closed for decontamination.

The Pentagon then issued a moratorium on facilities sending anthrax samples, which will continue until new protocols are developed, Work said.

The report, which was compiled by a DOD review commit-

tee convened in May when the live anthrax shipments came to light, says staff appear to have correctly followed their own inadequate protocols. It seems to assign blame for the inadequate procedures on the greater scientific community’s lack of consistent standards for handling anthrax and the difficulty of killing the pathogen.

“A key finding by the committee is that there is insufficient technical information in the broader scientific community to guide the development of thoroughly effective protocols for inactivation of spores and viability testing of BA,” the report says.

druzin.heath@stripes.com

Purple Hearts hinge on FBI investigation

By **TRAVIS J. TRITTEN**

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Marine Corps said Friday that it is preparing Purple Heart packages for its four servicemembers killed in the Chattanooga, Tenn., shooting last week, but the decorations will depend on an ongoing federal investigation into the shooter.

So far, the FBI has said Mohamad Youssef Abdulazeez appeared to be a “homegrown violent extremist” who operated on his own, although its investigation is ongoing. The agency has not ruled out that the shooter had been radicalized by others.

New Purple Heart criteria passed by Congress in December requires the perpetrator of an attack be in contact or inspired by a terrorist group, and that could rule out the four Marines and the sailor who were

killed.

“The Purple Heart packages have been prepared but eligibility must be determined through the FBI’s investigation,” Marine spokesman Maj. Clark Carpenter said.

Abdulazeez shot up a strip-mall recruiting center before firing on the Naval Operational Support Center, killing Gunner Sgt. Thomas J. Sullivan, Sgt. Carson Holmquist, Staff Sgt. David Wyatt and Lance Cpl. Skip Wells.

The Navy said Friday it is following protocol and waiting for the outcome of the FBI investigation before compiling any medal paperwork for Petty Officer 2nd Class Randall Smith, 26, who was critically wounded and died later.

The FBI investigation results will go to an awards board in the Marine Corps and the Navy and will be weighed against medal criteria, according to a Penta-

gon spokesman. The board will make a recommendation to Navy Secretary Ray Mabus for a final determination.

Attacks on military personnel by lone gunmen are an increasing threat in the United States and have redefined the traditional battlefield, as well as the criteria for the Purple Heart, which is a symbol of combat sacrifice with roots in the Revolutionary War. The award comes with valuable, combat-related benefits for wounded servicemembers.

The expanded eligibility requirements have resulted in Purple Hearts for victims of the 2009 shooting by Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan at Fort Hood, Texas, and for victims of another deadly shooting that killed two soldiers outside a Little Rock, Ark., recruiting center.

Both attackers had connections to al-Qaida.

tritten.travis@stripes.com

Turkey allows US to use key base for airstrikes

WASHINGTON — Turkey has agreed to let the U.S. military launch airstrikes against the Islamic State group from a key air base near the Syrian border, senior U.S. officials said Thursday, giving a boost to the U.S.-led coalition while drawing Turkey deeper into the conflict.

President Barack Obama and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan finalized the deal in a phone call Wednesday, officials said, following months of U.S. appeals and delicate negotiations over the use of Incirlik and other bases in Turkey. Frustrated by Obama’s focus on fighting the Islamic State group instead of Syrian President Bashar Assad, Turkey’s government had resisted the move, but in recent days a surge in Islamic State activity in Turkey has brought concerns about the militant group to the forefront.

From The Associated Press

Some 'sanctuary cities' fear immigration lawsuits

The Associated Press

HUNTINGTON BEACH, Calif. — The term "sanctuary city" has become a rallying cry for conservative Republicans seeking stiffer immigration laws. They characterize such places as havens where those in the country illegally are protected from immigration authorities.

The reality behind the phrase is that while some cities actively thumb their noses at federal immigration policies, many refuse to enforce them not because of any moral obligation to immigrants, but because they fear lawsuits.

Since the fatal shooting of Kathryn Steinle on a San Francisco pier allegedly by an immigrant who was released from jail even though U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement sought to deport him for a sixth time, the debate over how to handle cities and counties that refuse to cooperate with immigration authorities has reached a feverish pitch.

On Thursday, House Republicans passed a bill, which the White House threatened to veto, aimed at punishing cities that refuse to share information with federal immigration authorities. While the bill doesn't specifically address the release of immigrants sought by federal authorities for deportation, the Republicans are pitching other

legislation to do so.

The vote came after presidential hopeful Donald Trump attacked illegal immigration on the campaign trail.

While notably liberal San Francisco has openly declared itself a haven for all immigrants regardless of their legal status, some of the cities and counties that have stopped detaining immigrants for ICE are politically conservative and are not trying to shield residents from deportation.

The city of Huntington Beach, which is predominantly white and Republican, stopped honoring the hold requests last summer for purely legal reasons. A federal court ruling in Oregon said so-called immigration detainers, which ask local police to hold immigrants suspected of living in the U.S. illegally for up to 48 hours, were not sufficient reason to keep someone in jail.

"We don't have any policy or anything that prohibits our folks from interacting with ICE. We just follow the law," said police Chief Robert Handy, adding that his officers don't generally ask about immigration status because it doesn't relate to their cases, not because they're protecting anyone. "If they go get a warrant, we'll hold them in our jail. If they ask us to go help for a search warrant on a drug house, we're going to help them," he said.

La. police: Theater gunman was 'drifter,' planned to escape

The Associated Press

LAFAYETTE, La. — The family of the man who killed two people and wounded nine others before killing himself at a crowded showing of "Trainwreck" said he was mentally ill and so violent that they hid his guns and sought police help to keep him away, court documents show.

John Russel Houser, 59, stood up about 20 minutes into the movie and fired first at two people sitting in front of him, then aimed his handgun at others, firing at least 13 times, police said Friday.

Then he tried to escape, but when he spotted police officers outside, he turned around and pushed back through the fleeing crowd. The officers tailed him into the theater and heard a single shot before finding him dead inside, police said.

Houser earned degrees in accounting and law before he became estranged from his family years ago, and was staying at a Motel 6 in Lafayette before the attack.

He parked his 1995 blue Lincoln Continental — with a mismatched license plate — by the theater's exit door, and disguises including glasses and wigs

were found in a search of his motel room, police said.

"It is apparent that he was intent on shooting and then escaping," Lafayette Police Chief Jim Craft said.

The two fatalities were identified as Jillian Johnson, 33, and Mayci Breaux, 21. At least one of the wounded, ranging from their late teens to their late 60s, was in critical condition, Craft said. Two were released from the hospital.

Theatergoers said the gunman sat alone and said nothing before he stood up and opened fire at Thursday's 7:10 p.m. showing of "Trainwreck" at the Grand 16 theater.

Houser "has a history of mental health issues, i.e., manic depression and/or bi-polar disorder," his family said in court documents in 2008, when he made violent threats in an effort to stop his daughter's wedding.

A judge granted the family's petition to have him involuntarily committed to a hospital as "a danger to himself and others."

Houser refused to back down after getting out, however, so his wife, daughter and other relatives also obtained a protective order preventing him from coming near them.

Ex-POW Bergdahl at scene of Calif. marijuana raid

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who was released after being held captive for five years by the Taliban, was present when a drug team raided a northern California marijuana-growing operation last weekend, according to multiple news reports.

The former POW was released last year in a controversial prisoner swap. He was charged with desertion and faces a court-martial stemming from his 2009 disappearance from his unit while serving in Afghanistan.

At the time of the California raid, Bergdahl was on authorized leave visiting friends in the area.

According to the Anderson Valley Advertiser, Mendocino County Sheriff Tom Allman said Bergdahl "readily produced his military ID," was not involved in the marijuana production and obeyed law enforcement as several arrests were made.

Bergdahl, who was not arrested, was transported at the

Pentagon's request to nearby Santa Rosa, Calif., where he was picked up by an Army escort and was transported back to his duty station near Washington, according to the report.

His Article 32 hearing is scheduled for September.

dickstein.corey@stripes.com
@CDicksteinDC

Hall ready to add four more

The Associated Press

COOPERSTOWN, N.Y. — Three dominated on the mound, the other excelled at three positions up the middle. Together, pitchers Randy Johnson, Pedro Martinez, John Smoltz and multi-talented Craig Biggio left a remarkable imprint on baseball.

Playing through an era tainted by steroids and dominated by offense — compliments of bulked-up sluggers, a smaller strike zone and smaller ballparks — the trio of pitchers combined for 735 wins, 11,113 strikeouts and nine Cy Young Awards. And the indefatigable Biggio became the only player in major league history with at least 3,000 hits, 600 doubles, 400 stolen bases and 250 home runs while being asked to play four positions in his 20-year career.

All four, elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in January, will be inducted Sunday in Cooperstown.

"I don't condone anybody doing anything bad as far as cheating the game," said Martinez, who joins former Giants right-hander Juan Marichal (1983) as the only natives of the Dominican Republic elected to the hall. "How did I feel pitching in the juice era? I wouldn't want it any other way. For me, there's no crying. I mean, as far as the way I did compete, I know I did it right. I did it the right way."

Johnson, Martinez and Smoltz were elected by big margins their first time on the ballot and represent the first trio of pitchers voted in together. Biggio made it on his third try.

The 6-foot-10 Johnson was an intimidating figure standing atop a pitching mound. During a 22-year career, spent mostly with the Seattle Mariners and Arizona Diamondbacks, the dominant left-hander with the imposing fastball won 303 games and five Cy Young Awards, including four in a row from 1999 to 2002 with the Diamondbacks.

A 10-time All-Star, the native of Walnut Creek, Calif. led his league in strikeouts nine times and had a career total of 4,875, second all-time only to Nolan Ryan. In 2001, Johnson was 3-0 in the World Series to help Arizona, in only its fourth year of existence, to the title. Small wonder he received 97.3 percent of the BBWAA vote, eighth-best all-time.

Still, it took time before everything

clicked for the man known as the Big Unit.

"The 10 years that I spent in Seattle was really like my apprenticeship, if you will, on understanding how to pitch and then somewhat evolving into the pitcher that I was going to become," said Johnson. "I was really coming into my own as a successful pitcher and being able to harness my fastball, and understanding what it took to pitch at this level.

"I didn't know I was going to be half as good as I turned out to be," added Johnson, who had three back surgeries, four knee surgeries and pitched his final season in 2009 with a torn rotator cuff.

Born on the outskirts of Santo Domingo, Martinez grew up with five brothers and sisters in a one-room home. Baseball became his escape. He signed with the Dodgers in 1988 and made his major league debut in September 1992 at age 20. The next season he was a regular in the bullpen, posting a 10-5 record in 65 games while striking out 119 in 107 innings, then was traded to Montreal after the season.

After a four-year stint with the Expos that culminated with his first Cy Young Award — he was 17-8 with a 1.90 ERA in 1997 — and with free agency looming, Montreal traded its ace to Boston and he wasn't exactly happy.

"I wanted a team that would give me an opportunity to win, and Boston wasn't a team that looked anywhere near that they were going to win it, so I didn't think I was going to sign," Martinez said.

Boston general manager Dan Duquette had other ideas. He had acquired Martinez from the Dodgers while serving in the same capacity with the Expos and convinced the rising Dominican star to sign with the Red Sox.

The first Red Sox pitcher to be enshrined, Martinez signed for seven seasons that endeared him forever to the Boston faithful. He won 117 games and two Cy Youngs in hitter-friendly Fenway Park and, most importantly, helped Boston snap an 86-year jinx in his final year with the team. His seven shutout innings in Game 3 of the 2004 World Series on the road in St. Louis staked the Sox to a commanding 3-0 series lead en route to a sweep and the team's first title since 1918.

Martinez finished his 18-year career with a 219-100 record and 3,154 strikeouts.

Smoltz is the first player elected to the Hall of Fame with Tommy John arm surgery on his résumé. He won 213 games and saved 154, the only pitcher with 200 wins and 150 saves and the last of only 16 to reach 3,000 strikeouts, registering 3,084. He also was 15-4 in the postseason during a 21-year career spent almost entirely with the Atlanta Braves after being drafted and then traded by his hometown Detroit Tigers.

Through five surgeries, the hard-throwing right-hander persevered — from starter to reliever to starter again — as the Braves and their amazing pitching staff, which also included Hall of Famers Greg Maddux and Tom Glavine, won an unprecedented 14 straight division titles.

"I had to just really reinvent myself many, many times, and find ways to overcome," said Smoltz, who did not play in 2000 after undergoing ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) reconstruction on his right arm.

A native of Kings Park on New York's Long Island, Biggio was a football star in high school poised to make his mark as a running back in college when he decided to accept a partial baseball scholarship at Seton Hall.

In three collegiate seasons, he batted .342, hit 27 homers, drove in 148 runs, stole 90 bases and led the Pirates to their first Big East title. A first-round pick by the Astros in 1987, Biggio played just 141 minor league games over parts of two seasons before getting called up. He took over as Houston's regular catcher in 1989.

Two years later, he made his first All-Star team, then was asked to make the improbable transition to play second base in 1992 in an effort to lengthen his career. He appeared in all 162 games and made his second All-Star team.

Biggio, the first Astro elected to the Hall of Fame, said making the switch was by far the hardest thing he ever had to do in his career.

"We zipped up the catcher's gear and didn't look back," Biggio said. "I believed in myself and we made it work. I mean, it was never ever done in the history of the game, and that was kind of fun to kind of prove them (the critics) wrong a little bit."

Kershaw, Dodgers top Mets

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Clayton Kershaw pitched a three-hitter, retiring the first 18 batters in his second shutout of the season, as the Los Angeles Dodgers beat the New York Mets 3-0 on Thursday night.

Kershaw (8-6) now has thrown 29 consecutive scoreless innings — 14²/₃ less than teammate Zack Greinke — and 11 career shutouts. He was perfect until Curtis Granderson lined a leadoff single in the seventh inning.

The worst-hitting team in the majors was all but helpless against the three-time Cy Young Award winner. Kershaw struck out 11 and did not walk a batter. He has fanned 38 without a walk in his last three outings.

Cardinals 4, Royals 3: John Lackey threw seven strong innings after a shaky beginning, Trevor Rosenthal escaped his own jam in the ninth and St. Louis beat Kansas City.

Astros 5, Red Sox 4: Jose Altuve homered with one out in the bottom of the ninth, the last of his four hits, and Houston beat visiting Boston to extend its opponent's losing streak to a season-high eight games.

Twins 3, Angels 0: At Anaheim, Calif., Ervin Santana pitched eight innings of four-hit ball against his former team, and Minnesota snapped both its four-game skid and Los Angeles' seven-game winning streak.

Pirates 7, Nationals 3: Francisco Liriano allowed three hits over six-plus dominant innings and host Pittsburgh raced by Washington.

Diamondbacks 8, Brewers 3: Zack Godley struck out seven in six shutout innings in his major league debut, leading Arizona to a victory over visiting Milwaukee.

Mariners 3, Tigers 2 (12): Mike Zunino's RBI double in the top of the 12th inning gave Seattle a win over host Detroit.

Blue Jays 5, Athletics 2: Russell Martin homered, doubled and drove in three runs, Josh Donaldson went deep against his former team and visiting Toronto powered past Oakland.

White Sox 8, Indians 1: Jeff Samardzija, perhaps pitching for the final time with his current team, allowed one run in eight innings and Melky Cabrera homered from both sides of the plate, leading visiting Chicago to a victory over Cleveland.

Marlins 4, Padres 0: Tom Koehler threw seven strong innings, combining with two relievers on a three-hitter as Miami won its third straight on the road for the first time this season.

Yankees 9, Orioles 3: Jacoby Ellsbury finished a triple shy of the cycle and drove in four runs and Chase Headley hit a three-run double in the first inning as host New York completed a three-game sweep of Baltimore to bolster its spot atop the AL East.

Astros acquire Kazmir from Athletics

The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Scott Kazmir is heading to his hometown Houston Astros and into the thick of a pennant race, and the Oakland Athletics are starting their summer sell-off.

The A's began their expected changes leading up to the July 31 trade deadline, sending the left-hander to the Astros for a pair of minor leaguers Thursday in what could be the first of many significant deals across the majors in the next week.

Oakland received sought-after catcher

Jacob Nottingham and right-handed pitcher Daniel Mengden in the swap with its AL West rival — and the Astros got a top-tier starter as they chase a play-off berth in the season's second half. Houston hasn't been to the playoffs since being swept in the 2005 World Series by the Chicago White Sox when the Astros were still in the National League.

"He's consistently performed against really good competition," Houston general manager Jeff Luhnow said. "He's been in our division, we've faced him. We know how hard he is to go up against."

"Taking him out of the equation as somebody on the other side and putting him on our team I think is really going to help us. We're in a tight division battle with L.A. ... having Kazmir in our rotation will definitely help our chances."

The news caught the 31-year-old Kazmir by surprise. He was scheduled to start Thursday against Toronto and woke up preparing to play at least one more game in green and gold. Instead, Kazmir got a phone call from A's general manager Billy Beane and manager Bob Melvin informing him that he'd been traded.



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NASCAR's Gordon receives accolades, hometown parade

The Associated Press

PITTSBORO, Ind. — Jeff Gordon felt right at home Thursday back in small-town Indiana.

His parents, some of his longtime friends and even some of his former high school teachers were among hundreds of people lining the streets in Pittsboro to celebrate Gordon as he wraps up his final full-time season in NASCAR.

It was a fitting place for the biggest stop yet on his farewell tour.

Here, a short drive from Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Gordon honed his racing skills before he was old enough to obtain a driver's license. Here, he learned the importance of balancing weekend races with daily life. And now, three days before driving in his final Brickyard 400, Gordon came back to a community full of tall corn stalks, endless farming fields and dozens of mementoes bearing his well-known No. 24 to thank his biggest fans.

"This is very cool," Gordon said after participating in the short parade and brief awards ceremony. "Pittsboro is obviously very memorable to me because we lived here, raced out of here. Several years ago, they named Jeff Gordon Boulevard, so there have always been great experiences here. But to come here and have it be my last Brickyard 400, it's pretty overwhelming. It's putting a big smile on my face for the weekend."

The only thing that would make this weekend better would be reaching victory lane Sunday to become the first six-time winner on the speedway's historic 2.5-mile oval.

While the 43-year-old Gordon is not an

Indiana native by birth, he is one of the state's favorite sons.

His parents moved from California to Pittsboro when Gordon was a rising star on the teenage racing circuit. They wound up in a small, suburban community west of Indy that was willing to support their son's aspirations along with the importance of Midwestern values.

If Gordon didn't understand those principles before arriving in Indiana, he did by the time he started racing stock cars.

After winning one race with a daring late move, Gordon's stepfather forced him to hand the winner's trophy to the second-place finisher and told him: "That's not how we race."

Gordon never made that mistake again and his genteel approach to racing has won over fans throughout Indiana — and beyond.

"I think it's pride, pride to have somebody from a small town do as good as Jeff's done and to be the kind of a man, the gentleman that he is," 78-year-old Pat McClain said.

In Indiana, there couldn't be a better combination.

From Milan's Bobby Plump to Martinsville's John Wooden, from Bedford's Damon Bailey to Rushville's Tony Stewart, every little town seems to have a story — and a celebrity. Bears quarterback Jay Cutler hails from Santa Claus. Boston Celtics coach Brad Stevens played prep basketball in Zionsville and college basketball at DePauw in Greencastle. And everyone knows Larry Bird is from French Lick.

But Gordon has become one of the state's best ambassadors, which is why

everyone wanted to share the stage with him Thursday.

Pittsboro Police Chief Christi Patterson named Gordon an honorary police officer and presented him a real badge. Tri-West superintendent Rusty King gave Gordon a plaque of the diploma he earned in 1989 with an inscription that read in part, "to our most famous graduate."

Town officials handed Gordon the proclamation papers from county and state leaders declaring Thursday as Jeff Gordon Day, and Indiana Gov. Mike Pence presented Gordon with the Sagamore of the Wabash award — the highest state honor for a civilian.

"He may not have been born in Indiana. But as his parents told me, he came here as soon as he knew about it," Pence joked. "He is a Hoosier through and through."

This year's farewell tour has included some memorable stops including driving the pace car in May's Indianapolis 500. The No. 24 will be on the hood of the pace car Sunday, too.

Yet after 92 Sprint Cup wins, four titles and five victories down the road at Indianapolis, the Rainbow Warrior saved his most emotional moments for his hometown crowd.

"This has been one of the best days of my life and I say that sincerely," Gordon said, his voice cracking, "because I not only get to see what Pittsboro's meant to me, I get to see what Pittsboro's meant to you by the way you've come out and supported me. This to me is a very, very special day."

Defending Tour champ Nibali wins 19th stage

The Associated Press

LA TOUSSUIRE, France — An angry Chris Froome accused Vincenzo Nibali of "unsportsmanlike" behavior after the defending Tour de France champion accelerated away when the race leader stopped with a stuck wheel on the toughest Alpine climb on Friday.

Nibali, who went on to win Stage 19, said Froome tore into him verbally at the finish.

"He was very angry but that's his problem," the 2014 Tour winner said.

Froome said a stone or piece of asphalt jammed between his brake and rear wheel on the Col de la Croix de Fer climb, forcing him to pull up momentarily to unjam it. While Froome stopped, Nibali rode away.

Stopping short of saying Nibali should have waited for him, Froome said: "It was almost as if my mechanical (problem) provoked his attack."

At the finish, Froome added, "I told him exactly what I thought of him."

Nibali's win on the exhausting Alpine stage rescued what has otherwise been a disappointing Tour for the Italian.

There were also fireworks in the race and another spectator incident appearing to involve Froome.

On the stage's final climb to the La Toussuire ski station, Nairo Quintana launched his most sustained and telling attack against Froome, and this time got the better of the 2013 champion.

Showing for the first time at this Tour that he's not untouchable, Froome chose not to stay with the Colombian, his closest rival, as he accelerated away and started eating into the British rider's overall race.

Froome said he preferred to save energy for Saturday's last Alpine stage, which features two very hard climbs. Froome's lead of 2 minutes, 38 seconds over Quintana, down from 3:10 at the start, should be enough to get the British rider through the last competitive day in the Alps before the final stage to Paris on Sunday, which is largely ceremonial and won't change the overall podium standings.

Still, the smaller cushion will force Froome to watch Quintana very carefully on Saturday's two very tough climbs and means he cannot afford a bad day.

As for Nibali, he said he didn't see that Froome had pulled up on the Croix de Fer ascent, even though television images appeared to show him looking back over his left shoulder at the Team Sky rider before accelerating away from him.

Nibali said he was speaking to a teammate, not looking back at Froome, and that he always had planned to attack on that climb.

Nibali also said he was "very disappointed" at the way Froome spoke to him at the finish and that, as far as he was concerned, no rule says other riders must wait when a race leader has an accident.

On the final climb to La Toussuire, the Italian overtook French rider Pierre Rolland. Sweat pouring off his legs, he rode solo to the finish, with the cross from the chain around his neck in his mouth at the end.

Riding with the No. 1 bib as the defending champion, Nibali has had a tough Tour, unable to match Froome. He started the day in seventh place, 8:04 behind. But with the time clawed back on his winning ride, Nibali jumped to fourth place, now 6:44 behind Froome.

Swimming world's missing big names

The Associated Press

Michael Phelps isn't the only big name missing from the world swimming championships that began Friday in Kazan, Russia.

Along with the 18-time Olympic gold medalist, Aussie sprinter James Magnussen, Yannick Agnel of France, South Korea's Park Tae-hwan and Kylie Palmer of Australia won't be competing in the last major international meet before the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games. Also missing is Japanese star Kosuke Hagino and Swedish veteran Therese Alshammar.

The absences will likely set the stage for lesser-known talent to emerge a year before the Rio Games.

"By no means is it going to be a perfect representation of what the Olympics are going to be next year," U.S. sprinter Nathan Adrian said.

Phelps didn't swim at the 2013 worlds in Barcelona, having retired the previous year after the London Olympics. He qualified in three events a year ago for Kazan, but was banned from worlds as part of his punishment by USA Swimming for a second drunken driving arrest last fall.

While the rest of the world is tuning up for Rio, Phelps will be competing at the U.S. national championships in Texas at the same time.

Magnussen, the two-time defending 100-meter freestyle champion, is recovering from left shoulder surgery. Agnel, the defending 200 free champion, withdrew citing illness. Park is serving a doping suspension, while Palmer withdrew as the result of a positive drug test at the 2013 worlds. Hagino broke his right elbow recently, while Alshammar has a herniated disc.

Without Phelps, the U.S. men's team will be led by Ryan Lochte, who has a much lighter schedule than usual. He will swim just two individual events — 200 free and 200 individual medley — and possibly some relays.

"We have a bunch of veterans and a bunch of youth," Lochte said. "We're going to have our work cut out for us but we're Team USA. We can handle the job."

Unlike other countries, the U.S. comes into worlds without benefit of recent national championships or trials meet. The squad was selected based on results at the Pan Pacific Championships.

"It's going to be a challenge for this group," U.S. men's coach Dave Durden said. "We're going to have to create a little bit of a psychological edge. We haven't had our time to shine yet this year like a lot of other countries."

The U.S. men will be looking to avenge their disqualification in the 4x100 medley relay from two years ago, when Kevin Cordes dove in too early on the

breaststroke leg. Cordes is on the roster again.

Agnel's absence could cost France chances at winning medals in the 400 free and 400 medley relays. France won the 400 medley relay two years ago after the U.S. got disqualified.

China's Sun Yang is set to swim in the 200, 400, 800 and 1,500 freestyles coming off his doping violation last year. He owns the world record in the 1,500, and is ranked in the top 10 in his other three events.

On the women's side, Katie Ledecky and Missy Franklin are the biggest stars of the U.S. team. Ledecky won four gold medals and set two world records at the 2013 worlds; Franklin earned a record six golds while swimming seven events.

Ledecky recently graduated from high school and is deferring college until after the Rio Games. Franklin recently turned professional after two years of college.

"It's about trying to get faster," Ledecky said. "I'm very motivated."

Katinka Hosszu of Hungary, nicknamed "Iron Lady" for her herculean schedule, is ranked in the world's top 10 in six different events, although she had not revealed her plans ahead of the meet.

The eight-day swimming competition runs Aug. 2-9 at Kazan Arena, a soccer stadium transformed by the addition of two temporary pools and a 12,000-seat capacity.