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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Panel: Aircraft oxygen-shortage fix stalled

Bloomberg

The Navy's hunt for a solution to its top aviation safety issue — oxygen deprivation and loss of cockpit cabin pressure in its training aircraft and fighters — is hampered by communications breakdowns between engineers and pilots, according to the Senate Armed Services Committee.

"While a lot of good work was being done and data being created and analyzed, those efforts are not always being effectively communicated down to the flightline, where the dangers" of oxygen-deprivation related physiological episodes, or PEs, "are most acute," the committee said in the report it released late Tuesday on its fiscal 2018 defense policy bill, S 1519.

The senators urged the Navy "to consider designating a single individual for each" aircraft class affected — F/A-18 Hornets and Super Hornets fighters, electronic jamming EA-18 Growlers and T-45 Goshawks

trainers — "to act as bridge between engineer and operator to ensure that a positive and frequent communications flow" increases as solutions are sought.

At the request of Republican committee member Roger Wicker, of Mississippi, the bill would authorize the Defense Department to launch a nationwide competition with a \$10 million prize to find a solution to the vexing and persistent problem. The Navy grounded its fleet of T-45s for two days in April — including those flown at Naval Air Station Meridian in Wicker's home state — over the safety issue.

All F/A-18 models, including the Super Hornet that President Donald Trump has championed, have shown steady annual increases in physiological episodes, according to service testimony in March. What's more, the data show that incidents of oxygen deprivation and cabin decompression have escalated in the last year while officials

work to determine the root cause.

Still, lawmakers continued this year to add Boeing F/A-18s over Trump's official budget request for 14. In its "unfunded list," the Navy suggested adding \$739 million for 10 more Super Hornets. The Senate panel's bill would authorize the 10, while the House Armed Services Committee added eight in its authorization bill, H.R. 2810.

"While the committee understands Navy senior leadership is focused on the issue" and a team has been in place since 2010 "to try and solve the issues, the committee is concerned that no solutions have been found at the same time that recent events indicate the situation may be getting worse," the Senate panel wrote.

It wouldn't be appropriate to comment on pending legislation, but "the Navy appreciates all support, tools and authority that can help resolve this issue, both today and in the future,"

Lt. Kara Yingling, a spokeswoman for the service, said in an email. If the provision calling for a contest becomes law, the "Navy will assess how best to employ such authority."

"Minimizing the risks of physiological episodes remains the top safety priority for Naval Aviation — and it will remain our top safety priority until we fully understand all possible causes and find solutions," she said. "This is a complex issue, one without a single cause, and therefore, without a single solution. We've established a dedicated team of professionals from various fields to attack this complex issue, and we will stay after it until we fix it."

The rate of reported occurrences of the physiological episodes per 100,000 flight hours almost doubled in the year ended Oct. 31 from the previous year on older F/A-18 models, according to Navy statistics provided to House Armed Services.

Lawmakers say declassify experiments on troops

BY NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Three lawmakers introduced a measure Wednesday to force the Defense Department to declassify records about chemical and biological testing that the government performed on servicemembers in the 1960s and 1970s, in an attempt to connect the affected veterans with benefits and health care from the Veterans Affairs Department.

The Defense Department conducted the land- and sea-based tests, known as Project 112 and Project SHAD — for Shipboard Hazard and Defense

— from 1962 to 1974 to learn the effects of chemical and biological agents such as nerve gas and E. coli. About 6,000 servicemembers were affected, according to the VA.

"Veterans were exposed to some of the most extreme and hazardous agents during the SHAD project and 112 and now suffer from debilitating health care conditions," said Ken Wiseman, associate legislative director with Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Rep. Mike Thompson, D-Calif., has been questioning the Defense Department about the testing since he was elected to the House in 1999, when a Navy

veteran who had been subjected to chemical agents asked Thompson to look into it.

Thompson said the Defense Department initially denied the testing took place, but admitted to it in the early 2000s when VA officials requested the department share information with them about possible exposure to warfare agents and who could've been affected.

The Government Accountability Office issued a report in 2008 stating the VA and Defense Department needed to do a better job of identifying veterans who were exposed to testing and notify them.

"For 40 years, they denied it

even happened, and for the last 10 years, they've been dragging their feet," Thompson said. "There's no reason they shouldn't be forthcoming with this information. It's imperative veterans and their families know what they were exposed to so they can get the help and peace of mind they deserve."

Thompson, along with Reps. Don Young, R-Alaska, and Walter Jones, R-N.C., introduced the measure as an amendment to the fiscal 2017 National Defense Authorization Act. Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., plans to introduce the same amendment to the Senate's version of the NDAA.

Humvee mishap leads to charges and a reprimand

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — The 173rd Airborne Brigade soldier charged in connection with the spectacular destruction last year of three Humvees that slipped free from their parachutes during a drop and plummeted to earth is not a parachute rigger. He is a Germany-based scout who'd been assigned to assist the brigade's Italy-based parachute riggers during the exercise, authorities said.

Already punished in connection with the incident is a soldier who was heard laughing and cursing as he shot video of the falling Humvees on April 11, 2016, at the Hohenfels training area. He has been reprimanded, Christian Marquardt, a 7th Army Training Command spokesman, said Thursday.

More serious consequences face Sgt. John Skipper, a scout with the Germany-based 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment (Airborne). Skipper, who had been detailed to assist the 173rd's 601st Quartermaster Company, based at Aviano Air Base, was charged in May with several counts of destruction of government property and making a false official statement.

Brig. Gen. Tony Aguto, 7th ATC commander, will decide whether the case proceeds to court-martial.

The charge of destruction of government property falls under Article 108 of the Unified Code of Military Justice, which prohibits damage, destruction, or loss, either "willfully caused by the accused" or as a result of negligence. The maximum punishments for each vary considerably. Destroying property valued at more than \$500 through neglect carries a maximum punishment of a year in prison, a bad-conduct discharge and forfeiture of all pay and allowances.

Willful destruction carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, a dishonorable discharge and forfeiture of all pay and allowances.

A Humvee can cost up to \$220,000.

Marquardt declined to say whether the government was alleging Skipper had acted willfully or negligently.

A video of the incident has been viewed more than a million times on YouTube.

The soldier who made the video is a sergeant assigned to the 7th ATC's Joint Multinational Readiness Center as an "observer trainer coach." His administrative letter of reprimand came from the JMRC commander, Marquardt said.

"The reprimand addressed the unprofessional comments the soldier made during the video, and the fact that he shared the video with others, which resulted in it being posted to social media by an unknown individual," Marquardt said in an email.

Thunderbirds, rare aircraft slated for British air show

BY WILLIAM HOWARD
Stars and Stripes

RAF MILDENHALL, England — Residents of Great Britain were greeted with a rare sight in the sky Monday of flyovers by the U.S. Air Force's Thunderbirds over popular sights like RAF Duxford, Stonehenge and Loch Ness.

The elite air acrobatics team toured several British landmarks and military bases in preparation for their first appearance in a decade at the Royal International Air Tattoo, the world's largest military air show, which takes place Friday through Sunday.

The squadron remained airborne throughout thanks to support from the 100th Air Refueling Wing stationed at Mildenhall.

This year's air show commemorates the Air Force's 70th birthday.

"We embrace a culture of innovation and dare to break barriers," U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Gold-

fein said in a statement. "It should come as no surprise that airmen are known for taking challenges and turning them into opportunities ... quite simply, it's in our DNA."

The Thunderbirds and an F-22 Raptor demonstration team are slated to take part in flying displays each day at the air show. There also will be static displays of current U.S. military aircraft, such as the B-52, the B-1, the C-17, the CV-22, the MC-130J, the F-16 and the P-8.

The B-1B Lancer long-range strategic bomber was last seen at the RIAT in 2009.

Also taking part in the air show will be World War II-era fighters, the Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawk and the North American P-51D Mustang.

RIAT is held every year at RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire. Aircraft from around the world are viewed by an average of 200,000 people.

Lawmakers grill official about Air Force's ties to defense firm

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Two Republican lawmakers questioned the Air Force's top civilian official on Wednesday about alleged improprieties in the way the service acquires multimillion-dollar aircraft.

Reps. Ted Budd and Walter Jones, both of North Carolina, said in a letter sent Wednesday to Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson that there may be a "serious, systemic problem" at an Air Force unit known as Big Safari.

The congressmen said their investigations reveal a potentially improper relationship between Big Safari and L3, a major defense contractor headquartered in New York. The unit, formally known as the 645th Aeronautical Systems Group, is based at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

The Air Force and L3 did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the allegations in the letter.

The lawmakers said they have found "significant revolving-door activity" between the Air Force unit and L3, a

term that typically refers to military and government workers being hired by a particular company.

The congressmen cited information from two Air Force officers about how the unit steered a 2014 contract to L3 for the sale of aircraft to Yemen. The officers, both majors, said a better aircraft from a company called IOMAX was available for \$15 million less, but the contract was awarded to L3 without competition.

IOMAX is located in Mooresville, N.C., which is part of Budd's congressional district. One of the majors is still on active duty and the other is in the Air Force reserve. Neither officer is employed by IOMAX, nor have they ever received compensation from the company, according to Budd's office.

The lawmakers also asked Wilson about a contract worth \$418 million that L3 won for the sale of border security aircraft to Kenya. The committee said L3 won the contract despite evidence the company has limited experience manufacturing this type of aircraft.

Quick action likely on new GI Bill

BY NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers will introduce legislation Thursday to secure college aid for reservists and reimburse veterans whose schools unexpectedly close, as well as do away with a 15-year time limit for veterans to use education benefits — changes that together create the largest expansion of veterans' education benefits since the Post-9/11 GI Bill was created nearly a decade ago.

The legislation represents an initial deal reached between House Republicans and Democrats, encouraged by veterans organizations that acted behind-the-scenes over the past several weeks to reignite support for it. Details were obtained by Stars and Stripes ahead of the Thursday rollout.

Ending the 15-year time limit for veterans to use their education benefits marks a shift from the GI Bill as a generational benefit to establishing it as “forever,” said Will Hubbard, vice president of government affairs for Student Veterans of America.

“We’ve been extremely vocal about removing the arbitrary

15-year time limit of using this earned benefit,” he said. “It will afford individuals who transitioned and either had a family or went right to work the opportunity to get an education. This gets to that ‘forever’ point because someone who gets out, they have an entire lifetime to use their benefit.”

Hubbard is optimistic the initial bipartisan agreement will lead to the bill’s quick adoption. Republicans and Democrats have compromised on other veterans issues this year that have resulted in new policy, including the creation of a faster firing process for Department of Veterans Affairs workers and an extension of the VA Choice Program.

Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn., chairman of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee and the lead sponsor on the bill, will schedule a hearing on it next week, Hubbard said. Rep. Tim Walz, D-Minn., the ranking Democrat on the committee, is a co-sponsor.

The chairman of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., told The Associated Press that he would introduce a companion bill. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., also

praised the bill as a major undertaking to modernize veterans’ education benefits.

A bipartisan group of 15 House lawmakers, as well as seven veterans organizations, were scheduled to introduce the bill Thursday afternoon.

Just two months ago, the House ceased discussions on GI Bill improvements and postponed a hearing following a rift between veterans groups about an idea to have new enlistees pay for the expansion with a \$100-per-month deduction from their basic pay. Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and the Veterans of Foreign Wars described it as a “tax on troops.”

The expansion is estimated to cost approximately \$3 billion.

The bill to be introduced Thursday proposes paying for the expansion by decreasing living stipend payments under the GI Bill to the amount active-duty servicemembers receive.

“It’s common sense,” Hubbard said. “While nobody loves any kind of discussion on that front, there’s a new political reality, and you can’t just make demands of Congress and expect it to get fixed. It doesn’t work like that anymore.”

Vesuvius advisory is issued

BY SCOTT WYLAND

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES — Navy hospital officials issued an advisory saying the Mount Vesuvius wildfires’ heavy smoke could pose a health risk, especially to children, the elderly and those with respiratory problems.

A series of fires have blazed across the mountain’s wooded slopes for several days, generating massive smoke clouds that some people mistook for a volcanic eruption. Authorities on Monday ordered residents and tourists to evacuate areas where the fires might spread.

The advisory recommends that children, the elderly and people with impaired breathing stay inside as much as possible until the smoke clears. It advises everyone to exercise indoors and keep windows closed and air-conditioning filters clean.

About 5,000 sailors are stationed in Naples, many of them with families.

Hospital officials couldn’t be reached to comment on whether more patients are being treated for smoke-related ailments.

Jenny Lyn, a base resident, said her eyes began burning when she walked her dog two nights ago.

“I ended up with a very bad headache from it, and it’s causing me to be stuffy,” Lyn said. “I haven’t had allergies here ever, so I assume it’s due to the air quality (because) of the fires.”

After the fire started, Amber Darren-Hall, whose husband is in the Navy, suffered a headache, congestion and swollen eyes.

“When I saw how bad the smoke was yesterday, I took some allergy medication,” she said. “Now I’m fine.”

Evacuation orders would affect very few sailors because the Navy bars them from living too close to Vesuvius, an active volcano that destroyed Pompeii in 79 A.D. However, the thick smoke potentially affects everyone who lives in the region, the health advisory says.

Cruz idea included in GOP health bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a high-stakes bid for conservative support, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has agreed to demands from Republican Sen. Ted Cruz, of Texas, to allow insurers to sell low-cost, skimpier plans as part of a new but still-reeling health care bill he was releasing Thursday, GOP aides said.

However, including that provision seems likely to alienate moderates and perhaps other conservatives as the party struggles to unite behind a plan to scuttle much of the Obama health care law. Sen. Mike Lee, of Utah, who’d partnered with Cruz, tweeted that the version they crafted wasn’t in the bill, adding, “Something based on

it has, but I have not seen it or agreed to it.”

Cruz’s original proposal would let insurers sell plans with minimal coverage as long as they also sell policies that meet strict coverage requirements set by Obama’s 2010 statute. Moderate Republicans have objected to the idea, arguing it would make policies excessively costly for people with serious illnesses because healthy people would flock to the cheaper coverage.

The maneuvering by McConnell, R-Ky., came as he unveiled his plan at a closed-door meeting of GOP senators. He was laboring to prevent losing a showdown vote next week on the legislation, a vote in which he has no margin for error. Because Democrats uniformly

oppose the effort, McConnell needs the votes of 50 of the 52 GOP senators to prevail, and two already seem certain to vote “no” — conservative Sen. Rand Paul, of Kentucky, and moderate Sen. Susan Collins, of Maine.

According to GOP aides and lobbyists, McConnell’s revamped bill includes what seemed a blow to moderates seeking to protect Medicaid, the federal-state program for the poor, disabled and nursing home patients.

They said the retooled measure retains McConnell’s plan to phase out the extra money 31 states have used to expand Medicaid under Obama’s statute, and to tightly limit the overall program’s future growth.

Removing munitions from Mosul is a daunting task

The Washington Post

After nine months of vicious street-to-street fighting to drive Islamic State out of Mosul, it could take many years more to fully remove explosives and other munitions from what was once one of Iraq's most populous cities, U.S. State Department officials said.

"When I look around the world, in some ways there's nothing like Mosul that we've encountered," said Stanley Brown, the director of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement. "The level of contamination, though ... we're talking years and maybe decades."

Over three years of occupation, ISIS mined and booby-trapped large sections of Mosul. Heavy combat also has littered the city with unexploded ordnance such as artillery shells and hand grenades. In the western reaches of the city, where the fighting was especially fierce, massive debris fields will need to be removed to clear the ground beneath.

Pehr Lodhammar, the senior program manager for the United Nations Mine Action Service, or UNMAS, in Iraq said that the State Department's clearance estimate could be accurate, but added that his team

is still assessing explosive contamination levels in western Mosul.

"It's hard to grasp the scope," he said.

ISIS' grip on the city, which began in the summer of 2014, allowed the militants to experiment with, refine and even industrialize their improvised explosive devices. While the explosives in the weapons are relatively basic, their triggering devices are some of the most complex deminers have ever seen, according to U.S. and U.N. officials. They often involve multiple anti-tampering mechanisms and triggers that are undetectable to metal detectors, the officials said.

In addition to booby traps, the tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition fired by Iraqi and U.S.-led coalition forces are estimated to have had a roughly 10 percent failure rate, said Lodhammar, adding that ISIS, with its home-built munitions, had an even higher failure rate. That material will have to be disposed of and destroyed.

"It sounds like a nightmare problem for bomb disposal technicians," said John Ismay, a former Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal officer who is now a senior crisis adviser at Amnesty International.

Trump, Macron profess climate of common goals

Associated Press

PARIS — President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron set aside lingering differences on climate change during their meeting in France on Thursday, asserting that it shouldn't prevent them from working together toward a postwar road map for Syria and to enhance Mideast security.

Trump, standing alongside Macron at a news conference, said the two nations have "occasional disagreements" but that would not disrupt a friendship that dates back to the American Revolution. He remained noncommittal about whether the U.S. eventually would rejoin the global climate agreement that bears Paris' name, telling Macron, "if it happens, that will be wonderful, and if it doesn't, that will be OK, too."

Macron, playing host to Trump ahead of Bastille Day

celebrations, acknowledged sharp differences on the climate pact but said the two leaders could find other areas of cooperation. "Should that have an impact on the discussions we're having on all other topics? No, absolutely not," he said.

Trump arrived in the French capital on Thursday for a 36-hour visit to meet with Macron to tackle potential solutions to the crisis in Syria and to discuss broader counterterrorism strategies. Trump planned Friday to participate in Bastille Day celebrations and commemorate the 100th anniversary of the U.S. entry into World War I before returning to Washington.

The president landed amid questions about emails showing that his eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., welcomed the prospect of receiving Russian government support in last year's presidential campaign between his father and Hillary Clinton.

Massive iceberg breaks off from Antarctica, floats to sea

Los Angeles Times

Sometime in the last few days, a block of ice the size of Delaware broke away from Antarctica, and it is now floating freely in the Weddell Sea.

The iceberg, which at around 1 trillion tons is one of the largest on record, poses no immediate threat to sea levels. But scientists say the break may have altered the profile of the continent's western peninsula for decades to come and could offer a preview of what global warming might do to maritime ice shelves.

Scientists at Project Midas, a research team from Swansea University and Aberystwyth

University in Britain, first confirmed the break Wednesday using data from NASA satellites. They said they had been monitoring a rift in an ice shelf called Larsen C for years before it started to grow rapidly in January, increasing in length to about 120 miles and leaving the iceberg hanging by a thread of ice less than 3 miles wide.

"We have been anticipating this event for months, and have been surprised how long it took for the rift to break through the final few kilometers of ice," said Adrian Luckman, of Swansea University, the project's lead investigator.

What happens next to the iceberg is difficult to predict.

"It may remain in one piece but is more likely to break into fragments," Luckman said in a statement. "Some of the ice may remain in the area for decades, while parts of the iceberg may drift north into warmer waters."

There is still debate about whether man-made global warming played a role.

Martin O'Leary, a glaciologist at Project Midas, said that the process known as calving is a natural event. "We're not aware of any link to human-induced climate change," he said.

But scientists say the break has reduced Larsen C by more than 12 percent, which some worry could have a destabilizing

effect on the remainder of the shelf, among Antarctica's largest. Larsen C, which is nearly half a mile thick at its largest point, floats on the ocean at the edge of the Antarctic Peninsula, holding back a flow of glaciers that feed into it.

"As climate warming advances farther south, it will affect larger and larger ice shelves that currently hold back bigger and bigger glaciers, so their collapse will contribute more to sea level rise," said Eric Rignot, a University of California, Irvine glaciologist and research scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Mom wants apology over slide covered in poop

NH MANCHESTER — A woman said her 5-year-old son came down a slide at a McDonald's playground in New Hampshire covered in poop.

Justina Whitmore took to Facebook to recount the incident and complain that staff at a Manchester McDonald's didn't take the problem seriously and ignored her pleas for help. She wants an apology from the fast food chain.

Whitmore told WFXT-TV in Boston that she was eating when her son came over "covered in poop." It was unclear how the human waste got on the slide. Whitmore said her son had been playing tag with a boy who had a soiled diaper.

The restaurant owner told The Associated Press on Wednesday that they "looked into this matter and have taken all appropriate internal actions, as well as reiterated proper protocol with our team."

Man sentenced to 10 years in bayonet killing

SD RAPID CITY — A South Dakota man accused of stabbing another man to death using a bayonet was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Authorities accused Joseph Rich, 27, of killing Juan Legarda Jr., 21, on New Year's Day in Rapid City by stabbing him five times with the bayonet, a blade attached to the muzzle end of a gun.

The stabbing happened after Rich's brother became involved in a fight with other men outside Rich's home. Rich maintained he was protecting his home and family.

Rich pleaded guilty to second-degree manslaughter in

May.

He was sentenced Monday to a decade behind bars and given credit for the half a year he's already spent in prison.

Museum's goddess of the sea sculpture beheaded

HI HILO — A Hawaii museum's beloved sculpture of the Hawaiian goddess of the sea has been beheaded.

The Hawaii Tribune-Herald reported the head of the goddess and the turtle she is depicted riding were removed from the sculpture during the weekend of June 24. The sculpture belongs to the Pacific Tsunami Museum in Hilo, which is asking for help in recovering the heads.

Marlene Murray, the museum's executive director, said it is strange that whoever did this did not just knock the heads off — they took them.

Dog home after 9 months alone in mountains

ID BOISE — A lost Boise dog is back home after surviving a harsh winter alone in the Idaho mountains for nine months.

Mo the dog had gone missing last September after wandering off during a hunting trip. Darwin and Cindy Cameron, of Boise, say they stayed in the area for three months to search for the dog with no luck.

The Idaho Statesman reported Cheri Glankler began caring for a dog that was found collapsed on a ranch in Horseshoe Bend in late June. She posted photos and videos of the dog on Facebook and commenters quickly began suggesting it may be Mo. Although the dog is still recovering from trauma, the Camerons recognized Mo and took her home.

Cutout of police cruiser slows down drivers

MA LAKEVILLE — A Massachusetts man has gotten drivers to slow down for years with the help of a life-sized cutout of a police cruiser posted in his driveway.

Kelly Tufts told WFXT-TV he got the life-sized Crown Victoria sign from a friend who owned a salvage yard. The sign is made of plywood and aluminum siding.

He puts it outside his Lakeville home on weekends and during holidays to slow down drivers in the area. The sign is reflective at night.

Tufts said town police are OK with the sign, but some passing drivers have made offensive hand gestures.

Man hospitalized after jumping from moving car

PA SCRANTON — Police said a Pennsylvania man suffered serious injuries after jumping from a moving car during a heated argument with his girlfriend.

State police told The Times-Tribune the 24-year-old jumped from the car as it was traveling 65 mph on Interstate 81 in Moosic on Monday.

Police said the man asked his girlfriend to stop the car, but he jumped before she could.

The man was taken to a hospital, where he is expected to recover.

State police are investigating the man's actions as an attempted suicide.

Restoration project yields centuries-old wine

NJ UNION — An ongoing restoration project at a New Jersey museum has unearthed cases of wine nearly

as old as the United States of America.

The Liberty Hall Museum in Union said it discovered almost three full cases of Madeira wine dating to 1796 while restoring their wine cellar. NJ.com reported the museum also found 42 demijohns — glass jugs that can hold gallons of spirits — dating to the 1820s.

Bill Schroh, director of operations at Liberty Hall, said it was the best wine to ship during the 18th century because it almost never spoils — if stored properly.

Liberty Hall President John Kean said he's sampled the wine, and he compared it to a sweet sherry.

Man faces fraud charge for claiming to be son

NC ASHEVILLE — A North Carolina man was arrested after police said he convinced an elderly man with dementia that he was the man's son and used the relationship fraudulently.

The Asheville Citizen-Times reported that Devontae Dequarius Gaines, 24, of Hendersonville was charged with obtaining property by false pretenses and exploiting a disabled or elderly person.

Police said last October, Gaines convinced a 74-year-old man suffering from dementia that the older man helped raise Gaines when he was a child. The two had never met.

Warrants state that because of the false relationship, Gaines was able to obtain \$300 and another \$93 in goods and services at a gas station.

It was not known if Gaines has an attorney.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Baseball finally pushing new stars

Associated Press

MIAMI — Bryce Harper, Mike Trout and Aaron Judge have become the face of baseball as a gleaming, modernist ballpark and a city known for its Latino culture host the All-Star Game for the first time. After decades of falling behind, the sport finally has stepped up its national promotion.

There's huge room for improvement: Not one player from baseball is among the 100 most famous athletes in the world.

LeBron James, Tom Brady and Tiger Woods dominate water-cooler talk far more than Max Scherzer and Chris Sale, the starting pitchers in Tuesday night's game at Marlins Park.

"I feel he's won 15 rings," Harper said of Brady on Monday. "If you win, you're going to get noticed."

Major League Baseball hopes to break into a wider public consciousness with this new generation — for the first time since at least 1961 there are no All-Stars with at least double-digit selections.

After Rob Manfred succeeded Bud Selig as commissioner two years ago, MLB required sponsors to market top talent. But the tradition-bound sport is still trying to rebound from a quarter-century of labor wars that ended in the late 1990s.

"Basketball players and the NBA set many trends and are relevant in pop culture. NFL dominates in the U.S. and the second-most popular sport is also football — college football.

"Baseball has the potential to be the cultural star in places like Latin America and Japan, where so many great players come from these days. But in the U.S. and in the Eurocentric, English-primary world, basketball, NFL, soccer, tennis and at certain times golf stars connect more with fans, especially younger fans, and sponsors who covet those fans," he said.

Judge beat hometown slugger Giancarlo Stanton and the rest of the field to win Monday night's Home Run Derby at 5-year-old Marlins Park, a sleek retractable-roof ballpark with splashes of Joan Miro colors, a Red Grooms home run sculpture and a Clevelander night club with a swimming pool just beyond the left-field wall. MLB hopes to continue momentum from the Chicago Cubs' first title since 1908, which drew the highest television rating for the World Series in a dozen years.

"We know that fans connect locally every day with the teams that they root for and love, and our job is to try to highlight the performances to make it a national story as much as possible when we have that," said Tony Petitti, MLB's chief operating officer. "We were really fortunate last fall. We had an incredible national story in the Cubs."

MLB's "This Time It Counts" promotion

'The doomsday atmosphere has been around since I was a kid. Baseball doesn't need to be cooler. It doesn't need to be hipper. It doesn't have to be more fast-paced.'

Jeff Berry

46-year-old co-head of CAA Baseball, which advocates for MLB and the union to work with businesses to fund an increase in scholarship limits for NCAA Division I baseball and softball

has been scrapped after 15 years. The World Series will start at the home of the pennant winner with the best record, not the league that prevails in the All-Star Game.

The league and many of its national sponsors are featuring players in marketing campaigns. Still, baseball players say athletes in other sports are seen far more often in commercials.

"Football is football. You can't even really compare yourself. It's just everybody loves football America. That's just the way it is," said Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Clayton Kershaw, who praised MLB for doing the best it can.

Judge, the 6-foot-7 larger-than-life New York Yankees rookie who leads the big leagues with 30 home runs, was celebrated by MLB with a Judge-Con promotion in on Monday in which the sport enlisted actors and comics to dress as judges and make appearances throughout New York City.

David Matranga, of PSI Sports Management, which represents Judge, says the 25-year-old outfielder has kept his mind on pitchers, not corporate pitches.

"We've had quite a few offers from various markets and brands. It just keeps coming every day," Matranga said. "He's got a lot of people pulling at him but right now Aaron just wants to keep his focus on the Yankees."

Partly because of the busy schedule — 162 games in 183 days — baseball players don't have much time for marketing during the season. And when it comes to viewers, clicks and retweets, MLB often lags in recent decades, when the NFL and NBA have connected far better with younger audiences.

ESPN's 2017 ranking of the 100 most famous athletes, based on endorsements, social media following and internet search popularity, has Cristiano Ronaldo first, followed by James, Barcelona's Lionel Messi, tennis star Roger Federer and golfer Phil Mickelson. Brady is the top NFL player at 21 after leading New England to five Super Bowl titles.

"It seems like baseball players tend to have a little bit more regional coverage," Giants catcher Buster Posey said.

Equipment companies have a larger audience to sell basketball sneakers, tennis equipment and golf gear than baseball spikes. Trout became the first baseball player since Ken Griffey Jr. to have his own signature cleat. In the same period, Nike has had 21 signature NBA players, and Bryant is Under Armour's sole signature MLBer.

Scott Boras, whose clients include Harper and Bryant, maintains MLB would rather strike deals with sponsors, causing players to receive less money than they would had they made in their own deals. The NFL has a joint licensing agreement with a business company of the players' association. The NBA and its players' union had a joint licensing deal that expired at the end of June.

"Baseball is the polar opposite of the other leagues," Boras said. "Instead of promoting players and advancing players' rights and values in the sponsorship market, MLB wants to work to take away the incentive of the player to participate in these rather time-consuming events. They want to keep the revenue."

Not true, countered Bob Bowman, MLB's president of business and media.

"We have set aside a significant percentage, 15, 20 percent of contracts, to activate around players," he said, "We require players to be utilized in every national deal we do now, since Rob Manfred became commissioner."

Another issue is who gets touted. Washington manager Dusty Baker said discussion of baseball's best must widen.

"Just to have diversity you've got to add a Latin player," said Baker, who is black.

Jeff Berry, co-head of CAA Baseball, said the best marketing strategy would be for MLB and the union to work with businesses to fund an increase in scholarship limits for NCAA Division I baseball (currently 11.7 per team) and softball (12). That would create a bigger audience from youth.

"The doomsday atmosphere has been around since I was a kid," the 46-year-old Berry said. "Baseball doesn't need to be cooler. It doesn't need to be hipper. It doesn't have to be more fast-paced."

Venus, Muguruza into Wimbledon final

Associated Press

LONDON — All these years later, Wimbledon still brings out the best in Venus Williams.

With her latest display of gutsy serving and big hitting, Williams beat Johanna Konta 6-4, 6-2 on Thursday to reach her ninth title match at the All England Club and first since 2009.

At 37, Williams is the oldest Wimbledon finalist since Martina Navratilova was the 1994 runner-up at that age.

Williams also stopped Konta's bid to become the first woman from Britain in 40 years to win the country's Grand Slam tournament.

"I couldn't have asked for more, but I'll ask for a little more. One more win would be amazing," Williams said. "It won't be a given, but I'm going to give it my all."

She will be seeking her sixth Wimbledon championship and eighth Grand Slam singles trophy overall. Her most recent came in 2008, when she defeated her younger sister, Serena, for the title at the All England Club. A year later, she lost the final to Serena.

In the time since, Williams revealed that she was diagnosed with Sjogren's syndrome, which can sap energy and cause joint pain. As time went on, there were questions about whether she might retire, especially

after a half-dozen first-round losses at major tournaments. But she kept on going, and lately has returned to winning.

Her resurgence began in earnest at Wimbledon a year ago, when she made it to the semifinals. Then, at the Australian Open in January, Williams reached the final, where she lost to — yes, you guessed it — her sister. Serena is off the tour for the rest of this year because she is pregnant.

"I missed her so much before this match. And I was like, 'I just wish she was here.' And I was like, 'I wish she could do this for me,'" Williams said with a laugh. "And I was like, 'No, this time you have to do it for yourself.' So here we are."

On Saturday, the 10th-seeded American will participate in her second Grand Slam final of the season, and 16th of her career, this time against 14th-seeded Garbine Muguruza, of Spain.

"She knows how to play, especially Wimbledon finals," Muguruza, the 2015 Wimbledon runner-up and 2016 French Open champion, said about Williams. "It's going to be, like, a historic final again."

Muguruza overwhelmed 87th-ranked Magdalena Rybarikova of Slovakia 6-1, 6-1 on Thursday.

Williams arrived in England a few weeks after being

involved in a two-car accident in Florida; not long afterward, a passenger in the other vehicle died. At her initial news conference at Wimbledon, a tearful Williams briefly left the room to compose herself after being asked about the crash.

She has tried, coach David Witt said, to "just focus on the tennis."

In the semifinals, it was Konta who had the first chance to nose ahead, a point from serving from the opening set when it was 4-all and Williams was serving down 15-40.

Williams erased the first break point with a backhand winner down the line, and the second with a 106 mph second serve that went right at Konta's body. It was a risky strategy, going for so much pace on a second serve, but it worked. That opened a run in which Williams won 12 of 13 points.

She wouldn't face another break point and produced another impressive second serve — in the second set, at 103 mph, it went right at Konta, who jumped out of the way.

Konta played quite well, especially early, and finished with more winners, 20 to 19, each greeted by roars from the Centre Court spectators.

"They could have really been even more boisterous. I thought the crowd was so fair. And I know that they love Jo, and she

gave it her all today," Williams said. "It's a lot of pressure. It's a lot of pressure. I thought she handled it well. I think my experience just helped a lot."

This was her 10th semifinal in 20 Wimbledon appearances; Konta had never been past the second round at the grass-court tournament before this year.

In the other semifinal, Muguruza won 15 of the first 20 points en route to a 5-0 lead. Even though Rybarikova entered having won 18 of her past 19 grass-court matches, mostly at lower-level tournaments, she suddenly looked a lot more like someone whose career record at Wimbledon before last week was 2-9.

"Not my best day," Rybarikova said. "But she didn't give me much chance to do something."

Muguruza won the point on 19 of 25 trips to the net and had a 22-8 edge in winners.

That earned the 23-year-old Muguruza a berth in her third career Grand Slam final, second at the All England Club. She lost to Serena Williams with the title on the line at Wimbledon in 2015, then beat her at Roland Garros last year.

"I'll have to ask Serena for some pointers," Venus Williams said. "Serena's always in my corner. And usually it's her in these finals, so I'm trying my best to represent 'Williams' as best as I can."

Froome cracks on climb; Aru takes Tour lead

Associated Press

PEYRAGUDES, France — Chris Froome cracked during a grueling climb to the finish and lost the overall lead in the Tour de France to Fabio Aru on Thursday after a demanding stage won by Romain Bardet.

Froome's Sky teammates had perfectly controlled the race until the final kilometer leading to the ski station of Peyragudes, but the three-time champion was dropped in a final section that featured slopes with a 20 percent gradient.

Bardet won Stage 12 ahead of Rigoberto Uran and Aru, who seized the race lead from Froome by six seconds. Bardet is

third overall, 25 seconds off the pace.

Team Sky had dominated the stage until the final 350 meters, when Aru made his move. Froome was only able to follow his Italian rival for a few meters before he cracked, and crossed the line in seventh place, 22 seconds behind Bardet.

Bidding to become the first Frenchman to win the Tour since Bernard Hinault in 1985, Bardet was the strongest in the brutal incline and described his third stage win on the Tour as "an immense joy."

He said he had visited the ski station with his parents to scout out the final climb.

"I knew it could suit me," he said. "I was patient. I made the difference on the final

hill. There was not much to do before that with the wind and the Sky train."

Aru had trailed Froome by 18 seconds at the start of the stage.

"It's one of the most beautiful things that can happen to you in life, wearing the yellow jersey," said Aru, who rides for the Astana team. "Clearly, it won't be easy to defend it. There are still nine more stages. We'll do our best."

The final of the six ascents on the menu of the 133 miles stage between Pau and the ski station was too difficult for Froome, who had worn the yellow jersey over the previous seven stages.

US men's soccer team edges Martinique

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Jordan Morris put the United States back on track in the CONCACAF Gold Cup.

Morris' second goal of the game broke a tie in the 76th minute, and the U.S. edged tiny Martinique 3-2 Wednesday night after wasting a two-goal lead against a team that is not even a member of FIFA.

That hardly mattered to Jordan and his teammates, though, who rebounded from a disappointing 1-1 tie against Panama in their tournament opener last weekend.

"It's all about team, all about the three points," Morris said after the Americans improved to 31-1-4 during the Gold Cup group stage.

Martinique "made it very tough for us," Morris added. "It was a battle all night."

Failing to break through in the first half, the U.S. built a 2-0 lead on goals by Omar Gonzalez in the 53rd minute and Morris in the 64th.

But Martinique, a French overseas department, tied the score on a pair of goals by Kevin Parsemain in the 66th and 74th minutes. The first was

a shot from the edge of the arc that took a bounce and went in off goalkeeper Brad Guzan's left arm. The second was a shot by Johan Audel that hit a leg of Parsemain, who was down on the field, and deflected in over Guzan, who had stopped Parsemain's initial attempt.

Morris got his fourth international goal just 98 seconds later. He spotted Gyasi Zardes streaking in on the left side, and Zardes laid the ball back for the 22-year-old forward, who scored with a right-footed shot from just past the penalty spot.

"They didn't stop running, didn't stop playing," Gonzalez said. "We need to be smarter, more focused throughout the entire game."

The U.S. completes group play Saturday in Cleveland against Nicaragua, which lost to Panama 2-1 earlier Wednesday.

"We're certainly guilty of making the game a lot more difficult on us than it needed to be," said U.S. coach Bruce Arena, who thought his team played well.

The Americans improved 5-0-5 since Arena returned

for a second stint as national team coach, replacing Jurgen Klinsmann.

Using a mostly junior varsity lineup in the tournament, the U.S. leads Group B with four points, ahead of Panama on goal difference. Martinique is third with three, followed by Nicaragua with none. The top two teams in each of the three groups advance to the quarterfinals along with the two best third-place teams.

"I saw a lot of good performances out of some of our players. A lot of positives there," Arena said. "One of the things we're trying to do in this tournament is really look at some players in our pool that we haven't seen much of and help us make some decisions for qualifying in September and October."

One of just three holdovers from the starting lineup last weekend, Gonzalez scored his second international goal after Martinique failed to clear Kellyn Acosta's corner kick. Paul Arriola's deflected shot from outside the penalty area was parried by goalkeeper Kevin Olimpa and fell to the defender, who poked in the rebound with

his left foot from 4 yards.

Morris doubled the lead when second-half substitute Alejandro Bedoya passed to Eric Lichaj running down the right flank, Lichaj crossed and Morris redirected the ball in.

Midfielder Cristian Roldan made his U.S. debut and defender Justin Morrow his first international appearance in 4½ years as Arena made eight lineup changes. Lichaj had not played for the national team since May 2016.

The U.S. and Martinique had met just once before, with the Americans winning 2-0 in the group stage of the 2003 CONCACAF Gold Cup.

Martinique is part of Windward Islands and has a population of just 385,000. As an overseas department of France, it is not eligible for World Cup qualifying or other events governed by FIFA.

"A lot of pleasure from this game. Too bad that we got scored on right after coming back," Martinique coach Jean-Marc Civault said through a translator. "Honestly, the U.S. was superior in keeping the ball, but I'm very proud of my players' performance."

Ball puts up double-double in NBA Summer League game

Associated Press

Lonzo Ball's dud of a debut is long forgotten. And on Wednesday night, so were his Big Baller Brand sneakers.

Now he has the best game of the NBA Summer League — and another playoff game for a chance to top it. Ball had 36 points, 11 assists, eight rebounds and five steals to lead the Los Angeles Lakers to a 103-102 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers in their opening game of the tournament stage.

The No. 2 overall draft pick came back from a one-game absence — and did so wearing Nike Kobe AD sneakers instead of a pair from the line that his father, LaVar, is marketing for \$495 a pair. Then he

brought the Lakers back from a 15-point deficit to claim a spot in the round of 16 on Thursday against No. 2 seed Cleveland.

Asked why he changed sneakers, Ball said it was "Mamba mentality," referring to Kobe Bryant's nickname.

Ball was having an up-and-down start to his pro career in Las Vegas. He was 2-for-15 from the field in an opening loss, responded with a triple-double in another loss, then sat out the third game with a sore groin as critics said he was avoiding having to face No. 5 pick De'Aaron Fox in that game against Sacramento.

The tournament began Wednesday with eight games, featuring the Nos. 9-24 seeds. The top eight seeds earned

byes into the second round Thursday.

In other action:

Warriors 77, Timberwolves 69: Patrick McCaw scored 26 points, Jordan Bell had another big defensive effort and Golden State won its opening game of the tournament stage.

Suns 97, Jazz 81: No. 4 pick Josh Jackson had 21 points and 15 rebounds to power 13th-seeded Phoenix into a round of 16 matchup with unbeaten Memphis.

Kings 69, Bucks 65: Skal Labissiere had 19 points and nine rebounds, Georgios PapaGiannis added 17 points and 13 boards, and short-handed Sacramento advanced with its first victory.

Pelicans 105, Hawks 95:

Quinn Cook had 26 points, seven assists and five rebounds as New Orleans picked up its first victory after three losses.

Nuggets 87, Rockets 81: Torrey Craig had 27 points and 11 rebounds off the bench to lead Denver to its first victory and a spot in the second round.

Heat 89, Wizards 88: Justin Robinson made a go-ahead jumper with 11 seconds remaining to send No. 12 Miami into a second-round matchup with the unbeaten and fifth-seeded Los Angeles Clippers.

Trail Blazers 88, Bulls 77: Jake Layman scored 22 points, Jarnell Stokes had 16 points and 17 rebounds, and Portland set up a meeting with top-seeded Toronto.