

STARS AND STRIPES®

Wednesday, July 26, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Trump bars transgender troops

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Wednesday he wants transgender people barred from serving in the U.S. military “in any capacity,” citing “tremendous medical costs and disruption.”

Trump’s announcement on Twitter would reverse the effort under President Barack Obama to open the armed services to transgender people. He did not say what would happen to transgender troops already in the military.

The president tweeted that he consulted with “generals and military experts,” but he did not name any. He said the military “must be focused on decisive and overwhelming victory and cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail.”

At the Pentagon, members of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis’ staff appeared to have been caught unaware by the tweets.

A Pentagon spokesman, Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, referred questions to the White House. The White House did not immediately respond to questions.

In a brief written statement, Davis said the Pentagon is working with the White House to “address” what he called “the new guidance” from the president. He said the Pentagon will provide revised guidance to Defense Department officials “in the near future.”

Transgender servicemembers have been able to serve openly in the military since last year, when former Defense Secretary Ash Carter ended the ban. Since last Oct. 1, they have been able to receive medical care and start formally changing their gender identifications in the Pentagon’s personnel system. Carter also gave the services until July 1 to develop policies to allow people already identifying as transgender to newly join the military. Mattis announced this month that

he was giving military chiefs another six months to conduct a review to determine if allowing transgender individuals to enlist in the armed services would affect the “readiness or lethality” of the force.

There are as many as 250 servicemembers in the process of transitioning to their preferred genders or who have been approved to formally change gender within the Pentagon’s personnel system, according to several defense officials.

The Pentagon has refused to release any data on the number of transgender troops currently serving. A Rand Corp. study estimated that there are between 2,500 and 7,000 servicemembers on active duty who self-identify as transgender and an additional 1,500 to 4,000 in the reserves. There are about 1.3 million troops in the military.

Trump’s decision drew swift outrage from LGBT groups and supporters. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, of Illinois, a double am-

putee veteran of the Iraq War, said that when her Black Hawk helicopter was shot down, she didn’t care “if the American troops risking their lives to help save me were gay, straight, transgender or anything else. All that mattered was they didn’t leave me behind.”

Matt Thorn, executive director of OutServe-SLDN, which represents the LGBT population in the military, said thousands have been serving without causing any issues.

“It’s an absolute absurdity and another overstep,” Thorn said. He threatened legal action if Wednesday’s decision is not reversed.

Some conservative organizations hailed the decision. Family Research Council President Tony Perkins applauded Trump for “keeping his promise to return to military priorities — and not continue the social experimentation of the Obama era that has crippled our nation’s military.”

Mattis orders review of mandatory training for troops

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has ordered a Pentagon review of the mandatory training and administrative requirements his troops face each year that cut into time that they could be spending to prepare for combat.

Mattis, a former Marine general who commanded troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, ordered the formation of a group to study policies — including a wide range of mandatory training programs — that could be adjusted to free up service-

members to focus more of their time “on the art and science of warfighting,” according to a memo that he sent Friday to top military service and combat command officials.

The idea is to scale back “mandatory force training that does not directly support core tasks” to “provide the military departments increased flexibility to organize, train and equip more ready and lethal forces,” Mattis wrote.

The group conducting the review is to be led by the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness alongside the vice chiefs of each service.

Anthony M. Kurta is performing those undersecretary duties now, as President Donald Trump’s pick for the position, Robert Wilkie, has not yet been confirmed by the Senate.

The group is also to look at retention and separation policies for servicemembers who cannot be deployed, hiring practices for the Defense Department’s civilian workforce and ways to increase military law enforcement agencies’ focus on counterintelligence, according to the memo.

The group will have until Dec. 1 to provide its recommendations to Deputy Secretary

of Defense Patrick Shanahan and Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Servicemembers undergo hours of wide-ranging mandatory training lessons each year, often in the form of standardized computer lessons or classroom lectures. The training varies by service, but typically includes topics such as anti-terrorism, suicide prevention, combating human trafficking, sexual harassment and assault prevention, and cybersecurity. It also could include briefs on social media policies, alcohol use and general vehicle safety.

Shipbuilding a challenge in boosting fleet

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Growing the Navy's fleet to 355 ships will likely require extending the service of current ships, reactivating vessels and investing heavily in the capacity of the country's seven primary shipbuilding plants, a panel of experts said Tuesday.

But the time frame for reaching that number, which the Navy announced in December as the absolute minimum number of ships required for its missions, is just as important as the means in reaching it.

"Both China and Russia have taken advantage of the United States' recent strategic focus on counterterrorism campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq to assume challenging profiles on the high seas," Jerry Hendrix, director of the defense strategies and assessments program at the Center for a New American Security, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee. "To head a future crisis off, the U.S. Navy must expand rapidly

enough to convince others that eventual military victory at sea is not even remotely possible. To accomplish this goal, the Navy must reach the 355-ship range within 10 years," he said.

The Navy's fleet now stands at 276 vessels.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the earliest the Navy could reach 355 ships is 2035 — provided funding remains constant for 18 years.

Ronald O'Rourke, a specialist in naval affairs with the Congressional Research Service, said that while ship construction cannot be "increased overnight," Congress has the option of fully funding additional ships in the near term — as early as the fiscal year beginning in October — with the understanding that construction would not begin until shipyards are able to begin.

The greatest challenge to reaching 355 ships is the nation's shipbuilding capability, said Eric Labs, senior analyst for naval forces and weapons at the Congressional Budget Office.

The workforce at the nation's five large shipbuilding plants and two smaller ones would need \$4 billion in infrastructure upgrades and a 40 percent increase in the overall workforce over the next five to 10 years, he said.

Construction of carriers and submarines would pose the greatest challenge for the shipbuilding industry, Labs said. The workload of submarine-building plants is already expected to double by 2021 with the scheduled construction of the Columbia-class subs beginning then.

Other panelists contended that extending the life of certain key aging ships and reactivating some in the so-called "Ghost Fleet" could close the gap to reach 355 until new ones are built.

The Navy is conducting a feasibility assessment for extending and reactivating ships, O'Rourke said. In particular, the Navy is looking at the Perry-class guided missile frigates, the youngest of which are 25 years old and have only a few years of scheduled service left.

Age and condition of ships are not the only considerations in the Navy's assessment, he said.

"If you were to bring them back, could they actually do something that needs to be done?" O'Rourke said. "We're not just chasing numbers for their own sake. We don't just bring ships back to put a mark on a chalkboard; you're doing it because you believe that ship in its reactivated capacity can actually do something of value for the Navy that's worth the cost you put into it."

Labs was less than optimistic on the feasibility of reactivation.

"The problem is that when the Navy knows it's going to retire a ship, they stop investing in the ship," Labs said. "They stop maintaining it well and efficiently."

And after bringing such a ship up to proper maintenance, its combat systems would likely need upgrading.

"All of that is going to take time and money and effort," he said.

Navy mulls giving 7th Fleet higher manning priority

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Sailors could see their chances of deploying to the 7th Fleet increase after Navy officials gathered recently to address personnel gaps in the region.

Officials from 7th Fleet, Naval Forces Japan, Pacific Fleet and Navy Personnel Command met at Yokosuka last week for a three-day summit to discuss the impact manning policies are having on the 7th Fleet's ability to complete its missions, along with possible solutions.

"We wanted to know how manning was affecting their ability to meet their mission tomorrow," Rear Adm. Richard Brown, head of Navy Personnel Command and deputy chief of Naval Personnel, told

Stars and Stripes after the summit wrapped up on Friday. "As in any year there are pressure and stresses on the manpower account. In a perfect world, we would have all the bodies we need to man the fleet. In reality, that is not the case."

Brown, who also spoke to USS Benfold and USS Antietam sailors about manning issues, wouldn't discuss specifics regarding personnel shortages but acknowledged strain on the fleet. He said a forward-deployed force like the 7th Fleet should have priority when it comes to stationing sailors.

"The [forward-deployed naval forces] are at the tip of the spear, and they have to be ready to fight tonight," he said. "We have to make sure they are manned correctly so they can do that."

The Navy has been making

efforts to add new sailors while retaining those already enlisted. The service's fiscal year 2018 budget aims to increase its rolls to 327,900 — about 4,000 more than FY 2017's final tally. The Navy also announced changes last month to its tenure policy, allowing some sailors to stay in the service longer without being promoted.

Lt. Cmdr. Curtis Mitchell, assistant chief of staff for 7th Fleet Manpower, Personnel and Admin, told Stars and Stripes on Wednesday that the fleet mostly lacks sailors with the highly technical skills vital to running ships.

"The fleet is mission capable, but across the waterfront they're experiencing some challenges, especially in the highly technical rates," he said. "Some of our biggest challenges over here are the highly technical

rates — your sonar techs is a tough one. The operations specialists — there is a couple different skills sets that some of those sailors have."

Brown acknowledged several factors affecting the 7th Fleet's manning. Forward-deployed forces have the same manning policies as stateside units; however, that model doesn't take into consideration that forward-deployed units have higher deployment tempos, shorter maintenance periods and less downtime between deployments, he said.

Brown also attributed manning issues to the fact that stateside-based sailors' tour lengths are often decided by their occupational specialty, with tours ranging from two to five years. Current Japan-specific policies generally cap tours at two or three years.

American-Japanese couple serves both nations — together

BY TYLER HLAVAC
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — While it's not unusual to see American servicemembers with Japanese spouses in Japan, couples like Brandon and Yuriko Reed are a lot less common.

Brandon, a Navy petty officer first class and religious program specialist, is married to Yuriko, a petty officer third class and intelligence specialist in the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.

The Reeds, who wed in 2012 and have two children, met while both were stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni. It was Brandon's first duty station and Yuriko's second, after a stint as a trumpet player at a Japanese base near Hiroshima. The couple met through mutual friends after Yuriko sought an American who could help her practice English.

Through careful coordination with their respective services, the Reeds managed to secure orders for both to be stationed at Yokosuka. Brandon said he and Yuriko are lucky that his job allows him to be stationed at any major Navy or Marine Corps base.

Because the JMSDF has no permanent installations outside of Japan, Yuriko is generally limited to just a handful of U.S. and Japanese bases in Japan.

The Reeds say the two sea services have a lot in common and share similar structures, despite the Japanese constitution forbidding the JMSDF from operating as a full-fledged navy. The services have similar ranking systems and ship-life cultures, although Brandon said the food is quite different on Japanese vessels.

The Reeds say they've also observed some key cultural

differences between the allies' naval forces. While both keep some degree of social separation between the ranks, Yuriko said those rules tend to be less strict in the JMSDF, owing perhaps to the fact that Japanese culture is quite communal compared with American individualism.

"In the Navy, you can't hang out with the officers, but in the Self-Defense Force, we go out drinking and hold welcome and farewell parties out of the workplace or even go fishing during their personal time," she said. "They are your bosses, but they are also like colleagues."

While the two maritime forces conduct similar training, Yuriko said the Navy differs because of its frequent deployments to conflict areas.

"We are just a self-defense force," she said. "We defend ourselves or protect other militaries. The fighting spirit is different since [the U.S. Navy] could be sent to a war zone any time."

Despite their cultural differences, the Reeds said sharing a military background helps their relationship.

"She understands — because she did go on a ship — that I have duty or I'm busy at work," Brandon said.

Yuriko said she empathizes with her husband's situation.

"Even if I don't hear from him, I don't get frustrated. I understand the military system," she said.

The Reeds plan to stay in their respective services — and in Japan — as long as possible, and will deal with any major career changes as they come.

"I want to stay in and retire," Brandon said. "We're going to see where I can get stationed first and then she is going to see if they'll let her go there."

"I love it here. I'll stay here 20 years if they let me. I love Japan."

Dad says ex-Marine son died fighting ISIS with Kurds

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — A former Marine believed so strongly in the war against Islamic State that he secretly traveled to Syria, where he was killed this month while fighting for a Kurdish militia group.

David Taylor, 25, a former Florida resident, had kept his plans to join the Kurdish group a secret from his family and only told a high school friend, whom he swore to secrecy. Taylor's father said Tuesday that he didn't even know of his son's plans until after he had arrived in Syria last spring and was training with the group known as YPG.

"I got an email and he said, 'Pops, don't worry. I'm with the YPG,'" David Taylor Sr. told The Associated Press from his West Virginia home. "He said, 'I'm doing the right thing. It's for their freedom.'"

Taylor Sr. said that when his son set his mind on something, he did it.

"There was no middle ground. He wasn't wishy-washy," the father said.

A Kurdish militia group released a video saying Taylor was "martyred fighting ISIS' barbarism" on July 16.

The U.S. State Department said in a statement that it was aware of reports of a U.S. citizen being killed while fighting in Syria but offered no further comment. Taylor's dad said the family was told about the death last weekend by a U.S. consular official.

Taylor's high school friend emailed the father after he learned of the death. The friend said Taylor told him during a visit to St. Petersburg Beach, Fla., in February that he believed ISIS needed to be stopped.

"One night he got drunk and told me of the atrocities he had witnessed in the Middle East during his time in the Marine Corps," the friend, Alex Cintron, wrote in an email to Tay-

lor's parents.

"He said to the effect that 'Isis was the bane of modern existence and needed to be stopped before they destroy any more lives and priceless works of human achievement,'" Cintron said in the email.

Taylor's father shared the email with the AP on Tuesday. Cintron didn't respond to a message for comment sent via social media.

Cintron said in the email that Taylor died from an improvised explosive device. The YPG video offered no details on how Taylor died.

Taylor grew up in Ocala, Fla., about 80 miles northwest of Orlando. He attended college in Florida and West Virginia before joining the Marines. He was deployed in Afghanistan, Japan and South Korea and spent time in Jordan before he was discharged last year, David Taylor Sr. said.

After his discharge, he came to the United States and visited family and friends in West Virginia, Philadelphia and Florida.

Last spring, he asked his father to drive him to the airport because he had decided to visit Ireland, where his family has ancestral ties.

Taylor Sr. received intermittent updates from his son about his travels in Europe until there was a period of silence for several weeks. Soon afterward, the elder Taylor received an email from his son, saying he had joined the Kurdish militia group.

The consular official told Taylor Sr. that the YPG is paying to transport Taylor's body back to the United States.

"He loved his country. He loved democracy," the father said. "He had a mission, to go over there and advance democracy and freedom like we have it over here. It came at a horrible price."

Nuclear worries rise as S. Korea marks anniversary of armistice

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Concern about North Korea's rapidly advancing nuclear weapons program rose Wednesday as officials prepared to mark the 64th anniversary of the armistice that ended the Korean War.

North Korea, meanwhile, threatened to strike "the heart of the U.S. with our powerful nuclear hammer" if the Americans try to provoke a regime change in Pyongyang, according to the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

The Washington Post reported that the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency has concluded that the North will be able to field a reliable, nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile as early as next year, a more rapid timeline than has been forecast.

The officials, who were familiar with the confidential DIA assessment, told the newspaper that North Korea has been able to validate its basic designs with an increased pace of testing in recent months, putting it within a few months of starting industrial production.

The findings came amid fears that the North was readying to conduct another missile test in connection with Thursday's planned commemorations of the armistice that was signed on July 27, 1953. Pyongyang often times its launches to coincide with high-profile events.

South Korea's military said it was maintaining readiness and monitoring the situation.

The agreement signed in the truce village of Panmunjom ended the fighting that pitted the U.S.-backed South against the Soviet and

Chinese-backed North, but the sides remained technically at war after failing to reach a peace treaty.

North Korea upped the ante on July 4 when it test-fired an ICBM that experts said demonstrated a range that would put it in reach of Alaska.

That capped an unprecedented number of missile launches and two underground nuclear tests since January 2016 despite tightened U.N. economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure.

Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, warned that North Korea is capable of "a limited missile attack" but insisted the United States was prepared to defend against it.

"They're clearly on a path to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile that can reach the United States and to match that with a nuclear weapon," he said over the weekend at the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado.

Dunford didn't rule out military options but said the consequences would be "horrific" and the best approach is to support Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's efforts to tighten the economic noose on North Korea.

South Korea held out hope that the North would respond to its proposal for new talks aimed at easing tensions and resuming reunions for families that were split by the war.

"North Korea has not yet given any response. The government will be waiting for their response calmly," Unification Ministry spokesman Baik Tae-hyun said at a press briefing on Wednesday. "The government will keep pursuing a peaceful Korean Peninsula without nuclear weapons and war."

Probe launched into wasted US funds

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The United States has launched a criminal probe into wasteful spending on Afghan National Army uniforms that cost American taxpayers some \$28 million during the last 10 years, a top U.S. oversight official for Afghanistan told lawmakers Tuesday.

It is too early in the investigation to determine if stupidity, corruption or a broken system led to the United States purchasing about 1.3 million uniforms for the Afghan army in a woodland camouflage pattern, owned by a Canadian company, instead of using one of 12 Defense Department-owned camouflage patterns, said John Sopko, the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction. The DOD-owned patterns would have been free for the Afghan army to acquire.

To date, the United States has spent about \$93 million on the Afghan uniforms, according to Sopko's investigation.

On Tuesday, Sopko called for a review of all contracts awarded by the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, or CSTC-A, which oversees Afghan uniform and equipment procurement.

The camouflage patterns on the uniforms in question appear to be inappropriate for combat regions throughout most of Afghanistan, of which only about 2.1 percent of the land is wooded, Sopko said.

CSTC-A officials failed to notify the Afghan defense minister that Defense Department-owned camouflage patterns, including several not in use by any American forces in Afghanistan, were available for the Afghan army, Sopko said. Instead, officials only showed the minister camouflage patterns owned by the Canadian company, HyperStealth.

Italy to boost penalty for drivers using phones

BY SCOTT WYLAND
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Servicemembers in Italy should think twice about using their cellphones while driving now that the penalties are likely to become much more severe.

Italy, like many other European countries, has banned hand-held devices behind the wheel since the 1990s. But a draft bill going through parliament will double current fines and add the forfeiture of the driver's license.

First-time offenders would immediately lose their licenses

for one to three months and pay as much as \$1,500 in fines.

A second offense would result in a suspended license for two to six months and a fine up to \$3,025.

Hands-free use with Bluetooth and earphones will still be allowed.

The new law would apply to the thousands of U.S. servicemembers and Defense Department employees who have Italian drivers' licenses.

A suspended license could cause problems for those who live off base and commute to their jobs, especially in areas

that lack public transportation.

At the Navy base in Naples, a sailor expressed support Tuesday for the pending law.

"I think things like that are a good idea," Petty Officer 2nd Class Kyle Olander said. "This is not the safest city to drive in."

Servicemembers are not allowed to use cellphones at all when they drive on any U.S. military base.

Current Italian law forbids drivers from holding phones, whether to chat, text, email or eye GPS mapping systems.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman sets apartment on fire trying to kill bug

KS TOPEKA — A woman tried to kill a bug with a cigarette lighter and wound up setting her apartment on fire, forcing an evacuation of the building and causing extensive damage.

Topeka Fire Marshal Mike Martin said the blaze, which caused \$140,000 in damages and the displacement of 17 people, resulted from an “occupant trying to kill a bug with a lighter.”

Monique Quarles said her daughter alerted her to the bug. “I found the bug, picked the bug up and I put it in my hand and lit it on fire,” Quarles said.

She then picked up her mattress to see if there were any more bugs. She saw one and tried to set it on fire. But her lighter “started sparking” and the box spring ended up in flames.

Man leaves baby in car he left for servicing

SC LEXINGTON — Authorities say a man left his 8-month-old daughter strapped in her car seat after dropping off his car to be serviced at Walmart.

Lexington County Sheriff's Capt. Adam Myrick said a store employee found the baby in the car after it had been parked for about 90 minutes at the store in Red Bank. Temperatures were well into the 90s Sunday, but Myrick said the baby is going to be fine. Myrick said Ca Mvuh, 48, has been charged with unlawful conduct toward a child.

Pot found in diaper; jail employee arrested

OK LAWTON — An employee of the Lawton jail was arrested after police say they found marijuana in a

diaper she carried into the jail.

The Lawton Constitution reported that the female employee of the Lawton Correctional Facility was arrested Saturday after other employees notified police that the woman had an odor of marijuana on her.

Lawton police officer Derrick Kuhlman said the woman handed officers a diaper that included a bag containing marijuana. Kuhlman said the diaper had been in the woman's pants.

Boxes slow rescue attempt in deadly blaze

MA FALL RIVER — Firefighters in Massachusetts said they had difficulty battling a blaze that killed a 74-year-old woman and attempting a rescue because her home was crowded with boxes blocking them.

The woman was found in bed in her Fall River home early Sunday and taken to a hospital, where she was pronounced dead. She was identified as Lillian Cordeiro.

Fire Capt. Neil Furtado told The Herald News the three-story home was packed with so many boxes that firefighters were afraid the floor might collapse.

Furtado said an extension cord likely caused the fire.

French teens accused of burglarizing cars

NJ SECAUCUS — Ten French teenagers are accused of burglarizing 12 vehicles while on vacation in New Jersey.

The teens, who range in age from 13 to 17, were arrested in Secaucus early Saturday.

Police Capt. Dennis Miller told The Jersey Journal the teens were staying with adult guardians at a motel. Miller said several vehicles were broken into early Friday and an officer

on patrol Saturday saw a large group of juveniles walking between cars with flashlights.

The 10 are charged with burglary and conspiracy to commit burglary. Three also are charged with theft and one is charged with receiving stolen property.

Naked man arrested after chasing seagulls

MI PETOSKEY — Authorities said a man was arrested after being spotted chasing seagulls while naked on a popular northern Michigan beach.

State police said troopers responded Sunday afternoon to the beach at Petoskey State Park after witnesses reported seeing the 22-year-old Ann Arbor man chasing birds. They told police he also ran to a paved parking lot and jumped into it as if he were diving into water.

Police said the man may have consumed LSD earlier in the day. He was taken to a hospital for treatment of injuries.

Cops: Gun pointed at girlfriend after rejection

AK FAIRBANKS — A man who is accused of pointing a loaded gun at his girlfriend after she rejected his marriage proposal has been charged with felony assault, Alaska State Troopers said.

Miguel Angel Serrano-Moya's girlfriend of three years told troopers he became enraged when she turned him down and pointed his loaded pistol at her, The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reported.

The woman told state troopers she ran out the back door of the Fairbanks roadhouse they were at and hid in bushes before a friend found her. A passing motorist picked them up.

Serrano-Moya, 25, was

charged with felony third-degree assault, misdemeanor fourth-degree weapons misconduct and misdemeanor fourth-degree criminal mischief.

Deputy fired after taking naked photos on duty

FL VERO BEACH — A Florida sheriff's deputy was fired after authorities say he took partially naked photos of himself while on duty at a county courthouse.

Indian River County spokesman Eric Flowers said in a news release that Lt. Macen LeVan was fired July 19.

Flowers said an internal affairs investigation began in April after an employee complaint on another matter. Investigators took LeVan's cellphone to look for specific messages. That's when authorities found the photos, which included 120 explicit photos.

The investigation found LeVan was sending photos to other consenting adults.

Sheriff Deryl Loar said LeVan, an 18-year veteran of the department, “willfully neglected” his courthouse duties.

Rare tortoise stolen from shelter is found

NY NEW YORK — New York City police have found a rare tortoise that was stolen from an animal shelter.

Police announced Tuesday they have recovered the African spurred tortoise named Millennium that was stolen from the Alley Pond Environmental Center last week. Investigators said an anonymous caller told police he received the animal in a tortoise trade in Connecticut.

Authorities said the man called police when he realized he had a stolen tortoise.

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Prescott in firm control of Cowboys

BY SCHUYLER DIXON
Associated Press

OXNARD, Calif. — Dak Prescott climbed the stairs to the VIP tent that once served as Tony Romo's perch for interviews at training camp, facing a phalanx of cameras similar to the one his predecessor and the longtime Dallas starter used to see.

It's Prescott's job now, and the second-year star quarterback has the attention to prove it.

"Last year I came in and I was just trying to figure everything out," Prescott said on the opening morning of camp in California.

"Everything I do (now) they're watching. Not just you guys but my teammates, the coaches as well. But that's fun to me. That's something that I embrace."

An afterthought this time a year ago as a fourth-round pick and third-teamer behind Romo and Kellen Moore, Prescott's outlook first changed when Moore broke an ankle in a training camp practice. Then Romo went down with a back injury in the third preseason game.

Prescott answered with one of the best rookie seasons in

NFL history, leading the Cowboys to the top seed in the NFC at 13-3 before a divisional play-off loss to Green Bay.

Romo was relegated to the backup job when he was healthy again, and is now preparing for his debut in the TV booth as the lead analyst for CBS after Dallas released him. The Cowboys went 1-11 without an injured Romo in a last-place 4-12 season the year before Prescott arrived.

"A lot more comfortable than I ever thought I would be this time last year or beyond not having Romo," said owner and general manager Jerry Jones, who gave Romo the first \$100 million contract in franchise history four years ago. "So that has everything to do with the year that Dak had and more importantly the way Dak is approaching this year."

Last year, Prescott bristled at the idea of "vanilla defenses" when he was coming off two strong preseason showings — the week before Romo got hurt. This year, he figures to hear the term "sophomore slump." He'll shrug at that, too.

Prescott won NFL Offense

Rookie of the Year honors over backfield mate and NFL rushing leader Ezekiel Elliott because he led the Cowboys to a franchise-record 11 straight wins.

The former Mississippi State standout, the first drafted quarterback in seven years for Dallas, tied Ben Roethlisberger's rookie record of 13 wins and set rookie marks in passer rating (104.9) and fewest interceptions (four, to go with 23 touchdowns).

"He's got an insatiable appetite to want to be the best, to improve," executive vice president of personnel Stephen Jones said. "I can assure you there are 16 teams on our schedule this year that have watched every play that Dak ran and they are going to have all sorts of things that are going to challenge him. He knows that."

Receiver Dez Bryant, a 2014 All-Pro when Romo led the Cowboys to just their second playoff win since their most recent Super Bowl 22 years ago, is growing weary of Romo questions, declaring the Cowboys are "Dak's team."

Bryant raves about Prescott's leadership skills, illustrated when he coaxed Bryant and El-

liott into film rooms for extra study during the offseason at the team's new practice facility in suburban Frisco.

"I just like the way he handles his business," Bryant said. "That's why he's a great football player, just because of who he is as a person. The thing that he's got, you can't teach. We respect that. We're going to follow that."

Prescott's busy offseason included cheering with unbridled joy when the Mississippi State women's basketball team ended UConn's 111-game winning streak at the Final Four in Dallas.

He signed several endorsement deals and headlined youth camps in his hometown of Haughton, Louisiana, and the Dallas area. But with off-field issues dominating headlines for the Cowboys, Prescott quietly wrapped up the offseason by working out in Florida.

"There's a lot that went on in the offseason, but it means absolutely nothing," he said. "The only thing that matters is what I do and this team does next."

And it's his team, not Romo's.

Elbow injury sidelines Djokovic for season

Associated Press

Novak Djokovic will sit out the rest of this season because of an injured right elbow, meaning he will miss the U.S. Open and end his streak of participating in 51 consecutive Grand Slam tournaments.

"It is the most important for me to recover, to be able to play injury free for as long as possible, to compete in the sport that has given me so much, the sport I love," Djokovic said Wednesday. "Of course I want to return to the winning form, to win again, to win the trophies. But now it is not the time to talk about it. At this point, I'm focusing on recovery."

Until now, Djokovic has never missed a major tournament since he entered his first, the 2005 Australian Open. That is the third-longest active run among men and seventh-longest in history.

In that time, the 30-year-old Serb has won 12 Grand Slam titles, including the U.S. Open in 2011 and 2015.

"The remarkable series has come to an end," Djokovic said. "My body has its limits, and I have to respect that and be grateful for all that I have achieved so far."

He said that Andre Agassi, who he recently began working with on a part-time basis, will be his coach when Djokovic returns to the tour next year. He plans to start with a tuneup tournament ahead of the Australian Open in January.

"He supports my decision to take a break, and remains my head coach," Djokovic said. "He is going to help me get back into shape and bounce back strong after the recovery period."

Djokovic made his announcement via Facebook, his website and at a news conference in Belgrade, Serbia.

Djokovic's last match was on July 12, when he stopped playing during his Wimbledon quarterfinal against Tomas Berdych because of the elbow. Djokovic said that day he was in pain when he hit serves and forehands.

At the time, Djokovic said he had been struggling with the elbow on his racket-swinging arm for about 1½ years and so far had opted against having surgery — and he reiterated Wednesday that he does not need an operation.

But he also said then that he would seriously consider taking a prolonged break.

Since winning the 2016 French Open to complete a career Grand Slam and become the first man in nearly a half-century to win four consecutive major trophies, Djokovic's form has dipped. He has fallen from No. 1 to No. 4 in the ATP rankings and failed to defend any of those titles.

Ledecky loses first worlds swim race

BY PAUL NEWBERRY

Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary — Katie Ledecky surged to the wall.

Someone else was already there.

For the first time ever at the world championships, Ledecky knows what it's like to lose.

Bidding to become only the second female swimmer to win six golds at a single worlds, Ledecky settled for silver in the 200-meter freestyle Wednesday evening when Italy's Federica Pellegrini surged to a stunning victory on the final lap.

Pellegrini, the world-record holder, avenged a close defeat at the hands of Ledecky two years ago in Kazan, Russia. This time, it was the Italian touching first in 1 minute, 54.73 seconds.

Ledecky and Australia's Emma McKeon tied for the silver at 1:55.18.

"I knew it was going to be a tough field and that I'd have to have a really good race and I just didn't really have it today," Ledecky said. "I can't complain really with the silver medal."

While Pellegrini covered her

mouth in delight and climbed atop a lane rope to celebrate, Ledecky stared blankly at the scoreboard.

She had never seen a "2" beside her name at the world championships.

But there it was in Budapest, where Ledecky's unbeaten streak in the second-biggest swimming competition after the Olympics finally came to an end.

"I didn't really feel at the end that I had that extra gear that I normally have," said the 20-year-old from the Washington suburbs. "I didn't really see much for the last 50, so I was just trying to put together a good race."

Ledecky had been 12 of 12 over the last three championships, including three golds in this stately European capital. But her most audacious schedule yet — six freestyle events covering distances ranging from 100 meters (on a relay) to 1,500 (the grueling metric mile) — finally caught up with her along the banks of the Danube.

"It happens," said Ledecky, who will be a heavy gold medal favorite in her last two events, the 800 free and 4x200 free

relay. "It happens to every athlete at some point. I know this race will really motivate me moving forward and the rest of the week as well."

Of course, losing to Pellegrini was hardly an embarrassment.

The 28-year-old became the first swimmer in the history of the championship to capture seven medals in a single individual event. Pellegrini's incredible run in the 200 free began at the 2005 worlds in Montreal, where she grabbed a silver. She was third in 2007 at Melbourne, then won the event at back-to-back worlds, including a world-record performance in 2009 (1:52.98) that still stands from the rubber-suit era.

Pellegrini was runner-up at the last two worlds, finishing behind Franklin in 2013 at Barcelona and Ledecky two years ago.

Now, the Italian is back on top.

"I honestly thought the one to win the race would be Katie," Pellegrini said.

"And," she quickly added, "it wasn't."

McKeon got off to a blistering start, making the first turn

more than a half-second below the world-record pace, while Ledecky — normally a slow starter because of her distance background — was lagging in fifth.

Ledecky rallied to second by the midway point, and was just one-hundredth of a second behind the Aussie when they made the final flip. But the two leaders, having spent so much energy dueling with each other, didn't have anything left for the final lap.

Pellegrini sure did.

Her closing 50 was a blistering 28.82 — nearly a full second faster than both Ledecky and McKeon.

"Everything seemed to be in slow motion to me in the water," Pellegrini said. "At 150 meters on the turn we were all there, so I closed my eyes. But I didn't think I was ahead in the last strokes. I was seeing the splashes ..."

She paused for a moment, as if trying to convince herself that it really happened.

"It's incredible," Pellegrini said. "I didn't believe I would make it. I still can't believe it."

Lesnar on Jones fight: 'Anytime, anywhere'

BY GREG BEACHAM

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — If Jon Jones is really interested in taking on Brock Lesnar in a UFC superfight, Lesnar will be ready to roll.

Jones is preparing for his rematch with Daniel Cormier in the main event of UFC 214 this weekend, but he made headlines during a recent Facebook Live chat by saying he would love to take on Lesnar, who is back in professional wrestling after his return to the octagon at UFC 200 last year.

Jones added that he thought Lesnar would never accept such a fight, which would certainly be one of the biggest events in mixed martial arts history.

When Lesnar was contacted

by The Associated Press for a response Tuesday, the former heavyweight champion made his willingness clear.

"Would I fight Jon Jones? Anytime, anywhere," Lesnar said. "Right now he should be worried about D.C. on Saturday night."

With that statement, Lesnar also indicated he is at least contemplating a return to the sport in which he won the UFC title in just his fourth professional fight.

Lesnar is a friend and supporter of Cormier, who has reigned atop the light heavyweight division for two years during Jones' numerous troubles outside the cage.

Jones beat Cormier in their first meeting in January 2015, but was stripped of his 205-

pound title after his involvement in a hit-and-run accident in New Mexico. The fighters were slated for a rematch at UFC 200 last July, but Jones was pulled from the bout and hit with a yearlong suspension for failing a doping test.

Lesnar beat Mark Hunt at UFC 200 in a unanimous decision that was changed to a no-contest after Lesnar also failed a doping test. He also received a one-year suspension from the Nevada Athletic Commission, but could return to MMA after completing the ban.

Any potential fight with Jones couldn't happen until the 40-year-old Lesnar's WWE contract ends next year, but Lesnar's stardom hasn't dimmed in the wrestling ring or in the octagon, where he remains ar-

guably the most popular fighter in UFC history.

Lesnar and Jones would stand to make extraordinary paychecks from a superfight. Jones, still widely considered the top pound-for-pound fighter in MMA despite his troubles, would have to move up to heavyweight, a transition that Jones has long contemplated.

"He's a massive dude," Jones said in his Facebook chat. "It would be a massive draw, really big for the sport. It would be a great challenge. That's a big old boy. I doubt Brock Lesnar would take that fight, though. I definitely wouldn't try to wrestle with him the whole time. I'm not going to tell you what I would do."

Cards' Bader scores winner in debut

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Harrison Bader started the day in Memphis and ended it sliding across home plate with the game-winning run for the St. Louis Cardinals in his major league debut.

"I don't know if I'd say I dreamed about that moment, because that would be a little weird, but definitely just saw the perfect opportunity," Bader said after doubling to lead off the ninth inning and scoring on Jedd Gyorko's short sacrifice fly in a 3-2 win over the Colorado Rockies on Tuesday night.

"It was awesome," Bader said. "It was a dream come true, for sure."

Bader got the news of the surprise call-up on Tuesday morning when the Cardinals decided to place Dexter Fowler on the 10-day disabled list with a strained left wrist. The 23-year-old from Bronxville, N.Y., taken in the third round of the 2015 amateur draft, made the four-hour drive to St. Louis in a car service with his dad,

Louis, who happened to be visiting him at the Triple-A Redbirds.

His mom, Janice Baio, and sister, Sasha, caught a flight from New York's LaGuardia Airport about 5 p.m. and got to Busch Stadium in the fifth inning, in time for his third at-bat.

Bader started in center field and hit seventh. He doubled down the left-field line on a 95 mph fastball from lefty Jake McGee (0-1) in the ninth. Bader was batting .403 (29-for-72) with 10 homers against lefties at Triple-A this year.

Greg Garcia sacrificed as Bader took third, and Gyorko hit a fly near the right-field line that Carlos Gonzalez caught 248 feet from the plate. The speedy Bader slid across jubilantly as Gonzalez's one-hop throw went slightly up the third-base line.

"Game's on the line," Bader said, "so kind of do-or-die moment. As soon as you see that ball make any contact with the glove, you just put your head down and run in a straight line."

Rockies manager Bud Black could not fault Gonzalez.

"CarGo made a strong throw, but the hop just wasn't right," Black said.

Cardinals third-base coach Mike Shildt did not hesitate to send Bader.

"We have to take a chance and then trust in the speed," Cardinals manager Mike Matheny said. "Jedd got enough and Bader did the rest. It was, I'm sure, a first game he'll never forget."

Cardinals rookie Paul DeJong hit a two-run homer in the first, his 13th of the season and seventh in July. Gerardo Parra had a sacrifice fly in the seventh off Kevin Siegrist, and Trevor Story tied the score in the eighth against Matt Bowman with his 14th homer.

An inning later, Bader crossed the plate and then jumped into the arm of waiting teammate Matt Carpenter.

"He was right there," Bader said. "So that was pretty cool."

Roundup

Yanks' Frazier hits into rare RBI triple play

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Todd Frazier got a welcoming introduction from the public-address announcer, a shout-out from the Bleacher Creatures and a warm ovation from his new fans.

Then, with a bunch of family members and friends packed in the stands, he stepped up to the plate with the bases loaded, hoping to do something really special in his home debut at Yankee Stadium.

Oh, he did.

Frazier had an unforgettable first at-bat wearing the pinstripes, grounding into a rare run-scoring triple play as the New York Yankees beat the Cincinnati Reds 4-2 Tuesday night.

"I might've set a record," Frazier said. "Got to be a record."

"Can laugh about it now. At the time, I was pretty upset," he said. "It was just unbelievable. Hopefully, that doesn't ever happen again."

Rookie Jordan Montgomery took a no-hit try into the sixth

inning, and Didi Gregorius hit his third homer in two games to boost the AL East contenders.

Last-place Cincinnati lost for the 10th time in 12 games.

Back in the Bronx for the first time since the All-Star break, the Yankees brought along Frazier and relievers David Robertson and Tommy Kahnle, all acquired last week in a trade with the Chicago White Sox.

Mariners 6, Red Sox 5 (13): Jean Segura rolled an RBI single up the middle with two outs in the 13th inning to cap a two-run rally and give host Seattle a victory over Boston.

Cubs 7, White Sox 2: At Chicago, Willson Contreras drove in four runs and Carl Edwards Jr. provided some timely relief for the Cubs.

Ben Zobrist reached four times from the leadoff spot as the Cubs won for the ninth time in 11 games since the All-Star break.

Astros 5, Phillies 0: Derek Fisher drove in two runs just hours after arriving in Phila-

delphia and Charlie Morton (8-4) gave up three hits in seven innings and struck out nine for visiting Houston.

Brewers 8, Nationals 0: At Washington, Travis Shaw, Eric Thames and Manny Pina homered, and Zach Davies (12-4) gave up three hits in 7²/₃ innings for Milwaukee.

Blue Jays 4, Athletics 1: Cesar Valdez (1-0) allowed one run and five hits in a career-high six innings to win for the first time since defeating Houston in his major league debut on May 3, 2010 for host Toronto.

Rays 5, Orioles 4: Tim Beckham's three-run homer capped a five-run second inning off Wade Miley (4-9) and host Tampa Bay stopped a five-game losing streak.

Royals 3, Tigers 1: Whit Merrifield homered on the first pitch, and Danny Duffy (7-6) allowed just one run and six hits in 6¹/₃ innings for visiting Kansas City.

Indians 11, Angels 7 (11): Edwin Encarnacion hit a grand slam in the 11th inning as host

Cleveland, which wasted a seven-run lead, beat Los Angeles for its fifth straight win.

Rangers 10, Marlins 4: Joey Gallo homered twice, Mike Napoli and Rowned Odor also went deep, and host Texas slugged past Miami.

Braves 8, Diamondbacks 3: Mike Foltynewicz went six strong innings to win again, Kurt Suzuki homered twice and visiting Atlanta beat Arizona.

Mets 6, Padres 5: Yoenis Cespedes had three RBIs and finished a single shy of the cycle to lift visiting New York past San Diego.

The Mets won for the sixth time in seven games.

Giants 11, Pirates 3: Madison Bumgarner allowed one run in five innings for his first win of the season, and host San Francisco beat Pittsburgh.

Dodgers 6, Twins 2: Chris Taylor hit two run-scoring doubles and host Los Angeles became baseball's first team to reach the 70-win mark with a victory over Minnesota.