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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Ex-Army boss opposes Germany drawdown

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A large military drawdown in Germany would be a “colossal mistake,” says the former top Army commander in Europe about a possible scaling back of the U.S. presence on the continent at a time when Russia has become more assertive.

“We need what Germany gives us in terms of basing and access and the chance to train and prepare from excellent fixed installations and facilities,” said retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, who commanded U.S. Army Europe until late last year.

There are now about 32,000 permanently stationed American troops in Germany, which hosted the majority of the 300,000 troops stationed in Europe during the Cold War.

The Washington Post reported on Friday that the Pentagon

is analyzing the cost and effects of returning some or all troops in Germany to the U.S. or possibly sending some to Poland instead. The review began after President Donald Trump, who is at odds with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on a range of issues, expressed interest in withdrawing U.S. forces.

To pull out en masse would “throw away 70 years of effort and investment by allies as well as multiple administrations, Republican and Democrat,” Hodges said in an interview with Stars and Stripes. He expressed confidence that Pentagon planners would agree to keep troop levels in Germany on the current scale.

The Pentagon analysis is in the early stages, but word of the review comes a week before Trump heads to a meeting of NATO heads of state in Brussels. Trump’s ambivalence about maintaining a large number of servicemembers in Ger-

many adds another twist to what is already expected to be the most contentious NATO summit in years. Trump is expected at the summit to pressure allies he says don’t spend enough on defense.

“If this is just a negotiating tactic, then it is putting unnecessary strain on our alliance, the most successful alliance in the history of the world,” Hodges said. “The big winner in this sort of situation is (Russian President Vladimir) Putin.”

John R. Deni, an expert on European security at the U.S. Army War College, said a major force reduction in Germany would carry a large one-time expense. It could also have higher annual recurring costs over time compared with maintenance of current troop levels, he said.

A 2017 study by Deni argued that large continuous troop rotations from the U.S. to Europe cost more than forward basing

units.

“More importantly, large-scale redeployment of U.S. troops in Germany would likely embolden Russia in terms of its adventurist, intimidating foreign policy and make European countries more likely to side with Moscow in any number of diplomatic and political issues that matter to the United States,” Deni told Stars and Stripes.

Such a move would also “undermine our major comparative advantage vis-a-vis Russia and China — namely, our alliances — at a time when, frankly, we’re already in an undeclared cyberwar with Russia and, in many ways, we’re losing a strategic competition with China,” Deni said.

Hodges expressed confidence that “very smart and hard-working professionals” at the Pentagon were making the case for maintaining the U.S. military presence in Europe.

N. Korean activities putting pressure on US

By KIM GAMEL

Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Recent revelations suggesting that North Korea is pressing forward with its nuclear missile program increase pressure on

ANALYSIS the Trump administration to wrest concrete concessions and denuclearization timelines from the communist state.

A series of news reports, based on anonymous intelligence officials and satellite images, have added fodder to criticism that President Donald Trump gave away too much too soon in his unprecedented summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Skeptics say the North has no intention of giving up its hard-won gains in developing a nuclear weapon that could target the U.S. mainland and is trying to buy time to persuade Washington to ease punishing economic sanctions that have begun to bite.

The reports have emerged as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is believed to be preparing to resume negotiations with the North, three weeks after Trump met with the North Korean leader in Singapore.

In a sign the two sides are stepping up diplomacy, the U.S. ambassador to the Philippines, Sung Kim, led a delegation to the tense border area on Sunday in the highest-level meeting

with the North since the June 12 summit.

U.S. officials “met with North Korean counterparts in Panmunjom to discuss next steps on the implementation” of the declaration, a U.S. Embassy official said.

“Our goal remains the final, fully-verified denuclearization of the DPRK, as agreed to by Chairman Kim in Singapore,” the official said in an emailed statement, which referred to the initials of North Korea’s official name: the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

The wording dropped the usual reference to the “complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization.”

South Korean media reported

that the North Korean delegation to the hourlong talks was led by Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui.

Diplomatic gains have been marred by U.S. intelligence and satellite images suggesting that the North is moving ahead with its nuclear weapons programs despite Kim’s summit promise to work toward the “complete denuclearization” of the divided peninsula.

The Wall Street Journal reported Sunday that new satellite images show the North is completing a major expansion of a plant that makes solid-fuel ballistic missiles and re-entry vehicles for warheads that could potentially be used to strike the United States.

DOD eyes more immigrant housing

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Officials with the Defense, Homeland Security and Health and Human Services departments are considering more military bases along the U.S. southern border as locations to house undocumented immigrants as the Pentagon prepares to accept detainees at two installations in Texas, a Defense Department spokesman said Monday.

The Pentagon has received formal requests from the DHS and HHS in recent weeks to provide room to house as many as 32,000 detained immigrants on its bases, said Army Col. Rob Manning, a Pentagon spokesman. Officials from the departments are studying military posts in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and California to house some of those immigrants, he said.

The Defense Department has already identified two Texas installations where it will house some of the immigrants, Manning said. Goodfellow Air Force Base in central Texas will be used by HHS to house detained

unaccompanied minors — children younger than 18 who have crossed the border without family members. The Army's Fort Bliss, along the state's borders with New Mexico and Mexico, will house detained families.

So far, no detained immigrants have been transferred to any Defense Department facilities, Manning said. The Pentagon will be prepared to house at least a portion of those immigrants who DHS and HHS officials plan to move to military facilities by no later than Aug. 14, he said.

Manning said he was not certain if construction of temporary facilities — such as tents — had begun at either location.

It was not immediately clear Monday precisely how many individuals the federal agencies intend to place at each location.

Homeland Security officials have asked the Pentagon to be prepared to provide up to 12,000 beds for detained immigrant family members, indicating in a memorandum to the DOD that it intended to hold up to 4,000 individuals in a single location.

HHS officials have requested

space to house up to 20,000 unaccompanied minors, but they have not provided final guidance on exactly how many children they will hold on military posts, Manning said.

The Pentagon has faced criticism, including from members of Congress, for agreeing to provide the land to house detained immigrants and other measures that President Donald Trump's administration has asked the military to carry out — including sending National Guard troops to the border and deploying nearly two dozen uniformed military lawyers to work as special assistants to U.S. attorneys prosecuting illegal-immigration cases.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has pushed back against such critiques, especially the housing of detained immigrants, who have been held on military posts in the past.

"Providing housing, shelter for those who need it is a legitimate governmental function," Mattis said June 26. "This one — I recognize the political aspects of it, but for us it's a logistics support effort."

Navy, allies hold drills in North Atlantic

By SCOTT WYLAND
Stars and Stripes

The United States and nine allied countries are working to improve their combined tactics to combat submarines in the North Atlantic, where Russia has increased its undersea activity this year.

The 12-day Dynamic Monogoose is NATO's latest anti-submarine warfare exercise aimed at strengthening allied teamwork above and below the water. The drill comes as a resurgent Russia has deployed more submarines in the region than at any time since the Cold War, Adm. James Foggo, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa, said in an interview last month.

The exercise enables allied navies to see their strengths and weaknesses in linking air, surface and undersea defenses, Navy officials said. The larger strategy is to better unify NATO's anti-submarine forces to deter Russia and other potential adversaries, according to analysts.

"No single nation can combat global threats alone," said Lt. Fiona McCoy, who's in charge of the 20-person U.S. team participating in the exercise. "By exercising the coordination, command and control relationships... we can continue to build our combined capability to rapidly respond to any emerging regional threat."

Exercises like this are important because Russian submarines are growing in capabilities as well as in numbers, said Michael Petersen, director of the Naval War College's Russia Maritime Studies Institute.

"In a potential conflict, Moscow has been very clear about using its submarine force to strike high-value ships such as aircraft carriers, as well as important land-based sites such as command and control nodes and ports," Petersen said.

"NATO navies have obviously taken notice of this and are practicing to deter and defeat those missions."

Airman praised in parking snafu

By LEON COOK
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — When Col. Kenneth Moss, commander of the 374th Air-lift Wing, arrived at Yokota's Enlisted Club for a morning meeting last Thursday and discovered a car parked in his reserved space, it seemed like an airman was about to have a very bad day.

"I thought that was pretty bold, so I parked in front of the car until my meeting was over," Moss said via email Monday.

At the home of U.S. Forces Japan and 5th Air Force in Tokyo, prime parking is reserved for top military leaders at clubs and other facilities such as the gymnasium and commissary.

Yokota doesn't have parking fines, but military discipline means the reserved spots are usually vacant, even on busy days when carparks around them are at capacity.

While Moss was inside, somebody snapped an image of his car blocking the airman's vehicle and posted it on a military Facebook group, prompting hundreds of comments and speculation that somebody was in for a rough time. However, when Moss got back to his car and spoke to the airman in his spot, he decided the enlisted man had made the right call.

"An airman and his wife had left their car there after having drinks the night prior and didn't want to be irresponsible," Moss explained.

Moss did not identify the air-

man. "Parking that way allowed me to thank an airman and his family as well as uncover a problem," he said.

It turned out that not only had the couple made the responsible choice in not driving after enjoying a few drinks but the space wasn't even marked as reserved when they'd parked.

In a process that Moss said "set up an airman to fail," the wing commander's parking space was marked with both a curbside label and a removable sign hanging from a frame. But the curbside label had fallen off, and the sign is hung only when the commander has official business at the club.

"The signs were placed after the car was already in the spot, so the airman did nothing wrong," Moss said.

Trump's former lawyer says family comes first

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President Donald Trump's longtime personal lawyer, who once said he would do anything to protect the president, told ABC News in an interview released Monday that he now puts "family and country first."

In Michael Cohen's first interview since federal agents raided his home and hotel room as part of a probe into his personal business dealings, he was asked what he would do if prosecutors forced him to choose between protecting the president and protecting his family.

"My wife, my daughter and my son have my first loyalty and always will," Cohen told ABC's George Stephanopoulos in an off-camera interview that was reported on "Good Morning America." "I put family and country first."

Stephanopoulos said he asked Cohen repeatedly if he was considering cooperating with prosecutors in their probe. Cohen responded that if he is charged with anything he would defer to his new lawyer in the case, Guy Petrillo, for advice.

Cohen was also asked how he might respond if the president or his legal team came after him and tried to discredit the work he did for Trump over the

last decade.

"I will not be a punching bag as part of anyone's defense strategy," Cohen said. "I am not a villain of this story, and I will not allow others to try to depict me that way."

Cohen was Trump's self-described fixer and a key player in the Trump Organization for more than a decade, regularly berating reporters and threatening lawsuits against anyone who posed a challenge to his boss. In April, he tweeted: "I will always protect my POTUS."

A day later, the FBI raided his home, office and hotel room as part of a probe by federal prosecutors in New York into his personal business dealings.

Investigators are also looking into a \$130,000 payment made as part of a confidentiality agreement with porn actress Stormy Daniels, who alleges she had an affair with Trump in 2006, which Trump denies. Cohen in the past has said that payment was made on his own initiative. In the ABC interview, he said he couldn't comment, on advice of his lawyer.

Cohen also told ABC he did not agree with Trump's recent tweet repeating Vladimir Putin's claim that Russia did not interfere in the election.

FBI arrests man in July 4 attack plot in Cleveland

The Philadelphia Inquirer

PHILADELPHIA — An Ohio man arrested Sunday for allegedly plotting a Fourth of July terrorist attack in Cleveland also planned to detonate a truck full of explosives on Labor Day in Philadelphia, according to court filings.

Demetrius N. Pitts, 48, of Maple Heights, Ohio, described Philadelphia as his hometown and the city he knew best, according to an affidavit filed Monday charging him with attempting to provide material support to terrorists.

In meetings last week with an undercover FBI agent posing as an al-Qaida operative, Pitts allegedly laid out a list of Philadelphia landmarks that he considered high-value targets for an attack, including City Hall and the William J. Green Federal Building at 6th and Arch streets, a location he dubbed the "goody spot" for an attack because it would "hit 'em in the gut."

Federal authorities declined to discuss Monday how far along

they believed Pitts was in planning his purported terrorist strikes or whether they believed he had the capability of pulling off attacks in Philadelphia or in Cleveland.

FBI agents arrested him Sunday, just days before a July 4 attack he was planning on a downtown Cleveland park — the site of the city's annual fireworks display. He discussed potentially detonating a van packed with explosives or sending remote control cars packed with bombs and shrapnel toward the children of U.S. military officers attending the city's Fourth of July parade.

According to his arrest affidavit, Pitts came to the FBI's attention last year through several violent posts he made on Facebook under the online moniker "Abdur Raheem Rahfeeq."

In one post, he allegedly threatened violence against U.S. military personnel who had killed Muslims in the Middle East. In another, he purportedly expressed a desire to join al-Qaida and attend a foreign terrorist training camp.

Evacuations ordered as winds fuel Northern Calif. fires

Associated Press

GUINDA, Calif. — Evacuations were ordered as dry, hot winds fueled a wildfire burning out of control Sunday in rural Northern California, sending a stream of smoke some 75 miles south into the San Francisco Bay Area.

The fast-moving blaze that broke out Saturday in western Yolo County charred at least 50 square miles of dry brush and threatened more than 100 structures in ranchland northwest of Sacramento.

No injuries were reported, and the exact number of people

evacuated was unclear.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said Sunday night that there was 2 percent containment.

Autumn Edens marveled as a huge plume blocked the sun while she drove to her job as manager of the Corner Store in Guinda, a town of about 250 people just north of the fire.

"You can see the smoke and you can see an orange-red glow from the flames. It looks like a movie," she said. "I've never seen a fire like that up close, and it's an intense feeling."

It was one of two major wildfires in the northern part of the

state, where temperatures were soaring, humidity was dropping and winds were steady.

A blaze burning for several days to the west in Lake County jumped containment lines Saturday, prompting additional evacuation orders. That fire was more than 70 percent contained after charring about 22 square miles of brush and destroying at least 20 structures.

Smoke from the Yolo County fire was contributing to poor air quality in Napa, Sonoma, San Mateo and San Francisco counties, according to the National Weather Service.

The haze settled on areas to

the south and west and rattled nerves near wine country communities that were devastated by deadly wildfires late last year.

"A lot of friends and family were texting today and saying they were having some PTSD," said Savannah Kirtlink, who evacuated her Napa home during the blazes in December. She told KGO-TV she empathized with her neighbors to the north who were forced to flee their homes.

"I'm imagining what they're going through," she said.

Border Patrol arrests drop sharply in June

Associated Press

MCALLEN, Texas — U.S. Border Patrol arrests fell sharply in June to the lowest level since February, according to a U.S. official, ending a streak of four straight monthly increases.

The drop may reflect seasonal trends or it could signal that President Donald Trump's "zero tolerance" policy to criminally prosecute every adult who enters the country illegally is having a deterrent effect.

The agency made 34,057 arrests on the border with Mexico during June, down 16 percent from 40,344 in May, according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the numbers are not yet intended

for public release. The June tally is preliminary and subject to change.

Arrests were still more than double the number of 16,077 in June 2017, but the sharp decline from spring could undercut the Trump administration's narrative of a border in crisis.

Customs and Border Protection, which includes the Border Patrol, declined to comment on the numbers, saying it doesn't discuss them as a matter of policy until public release "to ensure consistency and accuracy."

The administration announced in early May that it was prosecuting every illegal entry, including adults who came with their children. The separation of more than 2,000

children from their parents sparked an international outcry, and Trump reversed course on June 20, ordering that families should stay together.

Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Kevin McAleenan told agents to temporarily stop referring illegal entry arrests to the Justice Department for prosecution if they involve parents — unless they had a criminal history or the child's welfare was in question. His edict came "within hours" of Trump's directive to avoid splitting families.

Rising temperatures could also be a major influence, discouraging people from walking in the scorching and potentially lethal heat in much of California, Arizona, New Mexico and

Texas. Arrests fell from May to June in four of the previous five years, last year being the exception.

Still, the month-to-month percentage decline is notable. It fell in the low single digits in 2014 amid a major surge in illegal crossings and in 2015. Declines approached 20 percent in 2016 and 2013.

Border arrests — an imperfect gauge of illegal crossings — surged during much of last year after falling dramatically in the early months of the Trump administration.

The numbers do not reflect activity at official crossings. The Border Patrol polices between ports of entry, not at them.

Secret Service to talk to prankster who called Trump

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A comedian who says he spoke with President Donald Trump by phone aboard Air Force One while posing as a senator tweeted Sunday that he had been contacted by the Secret Service for a Monday interview.

Comedian John Melendez, known as "Stuttering John" from his years on "The Howard Stern Show," released audio of his prank call with Trump on his podcast last Thursday.

Melendez claimed to be Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez, of New Jersey, during the call, and said he was connected to Trump while the president was traveling after a Wednesday night rally in North Dakota.

Melendez said he was being represented by attorney Michael Avenatti, who skyrocketed to fame earlier this year for his representation of Stormy Daniels, a porn actress who alleges an affair with Trump.

Avenatti confirmed late Sunday that Melendez was his client, adding that he had been in touch with the Secret Service but no interview was planned

for Monday.

Asked why he took the case, Avenatti said: "I think it demonstrates the complete incompetence of the president and many of those around him. And I am concerned that he will attempt to make an example out of Mr. Melendez in an effort to repair his damaged ego."

The White House has declined to discuss the incident.

As played on Melendez's "Stuttering John Podcast," the conversation with Trump was relatively benign, with the president greeting the senator as "Bob" and offering "congratulations on everything." He added: "Congratulations, great job. You went through a tough, tough situation and I don't think a very fair situation, but congratulations."

What Trump was referring to wasn't clear. Menendez's trial on corruption charges ended in a hung jury and a mistrial last year, and the Justice Department early this year decided to drop all charges against him.

Melendez closed by saying, "All right, Baba Booy to you" — a reference to the Stern show.

12 boys, coach found alive in Thailand cave

Associated Press

MAE SAI, Thailand — Rescuers located 12 boys and their soccer coach alive deep inside a partially flooded cave in northern Thailand late Monday, more than a week after they went missing, bringing hope in a desperate search that has attracted international help and captivated the nation.

Chiang Rai provincial Gov. Narongsak Osatanakorn said the 13 were in the process of being rescued, but he cautioned that they were not out of peril yet.

"We found them safe. But the operation isn't over," he said.

Rescue divers had spent much of Monday making preparations for a final push to locate the lost soccer players, aged 11 to 16, and their coach, 25. They disappeared when flooding trapped them after entering the Tham Luang Nang Non cave June 23.

Thai navy divers and rescue workers from other countries made initial progress through the narrow passageway early Monday after passing through a key chamber on Sunday whose high, murky waters had previously blocked their progress.

Narongsak earlier said the passageway the divers made their way through goes upward in some places and downward in others and is extremely narrow, making it difficult for divers with all their gear to fit through.

The Thailand navy divers' Facebook page said that since Sunday night, the divers had reached a bend where the half-mile-long passage splits in two directions. The divers were aiming for a sandy chamber on higher ground in the cave.

Experts in cave rescues from around the world converged at the site. Other support included a U.S. military team, an official Australian group and Chinese lifesaving responders.

"These are challenging conditions, and there's a lot of consideration for safety as well. The environment outside is contributing to the environment inside," said U.S. Air Force Capt. Jessica Tait, part of a 30-strong U.S. military team assisting in the operation, referring to the rain that has been flooding the cave. "So I'd say, yeah, it's an accurate statement that it's challenging."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Father killed mom as child slept

FL PLANTATION — Authorities have charged a Florida man with murder, saying he hit his wife with a hammer while their 7-year-old son slept nearby.

Plantation police said Marc Berkowitz, 42, told them Thursday's killing came because he was mad that Anastisiya Savitskaya was planning to divorce him. Investigators said Berkowitz told his son to look away so he wouldn't see his mother's body.

Police said he told them his wife was still making noises so he dragged her out of the bedroom and strangled her with a cord.

Man accepts plea deal for spitting on mayor

LA COVINGTON — A man who faced public intimidation charges for allegedly spitting in the face of a Louisiana mayor has agreed to a deal that bars him from Town Hall except for public meetings.

Abita Springs Mayor Greg Lemons said negotiations have been ongoing between Raymond Pasqua's attorney and the state Attorney General's Office to resolve the case.

The Advocate reported that Pasqua was charged last year with a felony count of public intimidation after allegedly spitting in Lemons' face twice after being asked to leave Town Hall. That charge was reduced to misdemeanor simple battery in March.

Police investigating vandalism at churches

UT COTTONWOOD HEIGHTS — Four churches in a suburb of Salt

Lake City were vandalized on four consecutive nights, and police are looking for the person or people responsible for the damage.

Cottonwood Heights police Lt. Dan Bartlett said that since June 25, four churches have had rocks propelled through their front glass doors, possibly with the use of a wrist rocket.

He told the Deseret News there's no evidence that the perpetrator has tried to enter any of the churches or steal any property.

Worker is fired for mean message on cup

OH CINCINNATI — An employee at a downtown Cincinnati Dunkin' Donuts who wrote a disparaging message on a homeless woman's cup was fired.

The Cincinnati Enquirer reported that the message first posted on Instagram by a customer and then shared on Facebook by others said: "Stop hangin out in-front of the store. If you have a Full Time job! — management."

The store's owner said the employee wasn't a manager and no longer works there.

Prosecutor: Man shot lewd video from shoe

MO ST. CHARLES — A suburban St. Louis man is accused of using a cellphone attached to his shoe to shoot video under the skirts of women at stores in a mall.

KTVI-TV reported that Charles Shoults II, 33, of St. Peters, is charged with five felony counts of invasion of privacy. St. Charles County prosecutor Tim Lohmar said there are six known victims, but authorities believe there are others.

An investigation began after two women trying on clothes

at Mid Rivers Mall reported seeing a shoe with a cellphone camera pointed up at them.

The women yelled and the man ran away.

Apparent human skull is found in trash

AZ TUCSON — Police in Tucson said what appears to be a human skull was found in a trash container on the city's south side.

They said a man was digging through trash Saturday when he discovered the object and called 911. Officers assessed the skull and notified the Pima County Office of Medical Examiner, whose staff will clean and test it. That process could take weeks.

Police said the examination should determine if it's a human skull and the gender of the person, along with a possible cause of death.

2 will participate in British Mongol Rally

ME YORK — A pair of guys from Maine and New Hampshire are preparing to ride across Europe, Russia and Mongolia in a three-wheeled car.

John Parrinello, 25, of Portsmouth, N.H., admitted it's a "little insane."

Parrinello and Tanner Pidgeon, 25, of York, told the Portsmouth Herald they learned of the 10,000-mile Mongol Rally from the British organization The Adventurists.

They plan to race in a 1987 Reliant Rialto Saloon three-wheel car they bought on Facebook.

Man carjacked while going to another's aid

RI PROVIDENCE — Police in Rhode Island said a man who was attempt-

ing to help a man lying in the middle of the road ended up the victim of a carjacking.

The good Samaritan-turned-victim said he was driving June 25 when he turned on a road and noticed a man asking for help. WPRI-TV reported he got out of his vehicle and was accosted by another man, who put a gun to the back of his head.

The victim said the two suspects then jumped into a Ford Expedition while another man made off with the victim's car.

City manager could lose job over coupon

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — A city manager could lose his job after allegedly throwing a tantrum over a coupon for a bundt cake.

Dannie Augustin told city commissioners last week that Sunrise City Manager Richard Salamon became enraged when the bakery refused to honor his coupon for a free cake because the coupon had expired. Augustin said the city manager told the employee to break the rules and just give him the \$3.99 deal.

One of the commissioners is calling for Salamon's resignation.

Man is charged with having pipe bombs

DE BEAR — Authorities said a Delaware man was charged with possessing multiple pipe bombs.

The News Journal of Wilmington reported Ryan T. Boyd, 24, was arrested Thursday.

Court records say police were told in May that Boyd told someone he had bombs and was going to "make the school year go out with a bang."

Police searched Boyd's Bear-area home and found three pipe bombs in a Coors Light cooler bag.

From wire reports

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and Military News

4-time NBA MVP LeBron joining Lakers

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — LeBron James is leaving home for Hollywood and an iconic team.

The Los Angeles Lakers have a new superstar — L.A.-Bron.

The four-time NBA MVP announced Sunday night that he has agreed to a four-year, \$154 million contract with the Lakers, joining one of the league's most storied franchises and switching conferences to try and dethrone the Golden State Warriors and grow his own legacy.

For the second time in his career, James is saying goodbye to the Cleveland Cavaliers, who drafted the teenage sensation from Akron in 2003 and have to be satisfied with winning just one title in the 11 years they had him.

Unlike his two previous forays in free agency, James did not drag out his decision and made the announcement less than 24 hours after NBA free agency opened.

This Summer of LeBron was barely a fling. His management agency, Klutch Sports Group, announced his agreement with the Lakers with a simple, short release. It was a stark contrast from eight years ago, when a poorly conceived TV special to announce his departure from Cleveland backfired and damaged James' image.

James isn't planning any more comments and there won't be a welcoming press conference or celebration in Los Angeles, a person familiar with his plans said Sunday night on the condition of anonymity. James will make his next public comments on July 30 in Akron when he opens a public school started by his family foundation.

It was all different this time.

The game's biggest star will now lead a young Lakers team — run by Lakers Hall of Famer Magic Johnson — that has been overmatched in recent years while rebuilding. But the Lakers will instantly rise with James, a three-time champion who after being swept by the Warriors in this year's NBA Finals said he is still driven and very much in "championship mode."

James wasn't planning to have any face-to-face meetings, but Saturday night he met with Johnson, who sold him on his vision for the Lakers, the person told AP. Earlier in the week, Johnson seemed resigned to the possibility he might not get James or Paul George, who ended up resigning with the Oklahoma City Thunder.

But Johnson was confident he could pull something off.

"I'm Magic Johnson," he said.

LA adds help for LeBron

JaVale McGee, a two-time NBA champion with the Golden State Warriors, is going to be part of the revamping by the Los Angeles Lakers, agreeing to a one-year deal worth just under \$2.4 million, according to a person familiar with the negotiations.

Lance Stephenson also is joining LeBron James in Los Angeles.

The two have traded testy moments in the playoffs when Stephenson's Indiana teams faced James' squads in both Miami and Cleveland.

Stephenson averaged 9.2 points last season.

— Associated Press

The Lakers' rich legacy is something that has always appealed to James and it wasn't long after his announcement that he heard from Kobe Bryant, who won five titles during 20 seasons with Los Angeles.

"Welcome to the family @KingJames," Bryant said on Twitter. "#lakers4life #striveforgreatness."

James and Bryant were Olympic teammates and there has been a perceived rivalry between the pair of alpha males. They're now linked like never before and if James wants to prepare for his eventual life after basketball, who better to learn from than Johnson, who has made a fortune as a business entrepreneur, or Bryant, an Academy Award winner.

The massive Los Angeles market will also provide James with a grander platform for his philanthropy and social activism. He already owns two homes in Southern California and has a film production company.

This is the third time in eight years James has changed teams. After bolting from Cleveland in 2010, he returned in an emotional homecoming four years later, determined to make the Cavs champions. The 33-year-old had previously said he wanted to finish his career in Ohio, and although he's leaving again, Cavs fans are more forgiving after he ended the city's 52-year sport title drought in 2016.

Shortly after the announcement, which came in a surprising manner, James posted a three-photo tribute to Cleveland fans on his Instagram account.

"Thank you Northeast Ohio for an incredible four seasons," James wrote. "This will always be home."

But there will always be a portion of Cleveland fans disappointed that James left again and that he wouldn't give the Cavs a longer commitment. His deal with

the Lakers is his longest since he signed for six years with Miami in 2010.

And unlike eight years ago when he ripped James for leaving, Cavs owner Dan Gilbert thanked him. Gilbert opened his comments by referring to Cleveland's 2016 title as "a championship that united generations of Clevelanders, both living and passed."

"LeBron, you came home and delivered the ultimate goal," Gilbert said in a statement. "Nothing but appreciation and gratitude for everything you put into every moment you spent in a Cavaliers uniform. We look forward to the retirement of the famous #23 Cavs jersey one day down the line..."

On Friday, James informed the Cavs that he was not exercising his \$35.6 million option and becoming a free agent. While in Los Angeles following a family vacation, he spoke to Cavs general manager Koby Altman moments after free agency opened on Sunday, and it appears that was more a courtesy than a chance for Cleveland to make one last pitch.

Cleveland's roster was exposed during this year's finals, and James may not have seen a way for it to improve enough to win a fourth title.

James gave Cleveland something to remember in his final season. He played in all 82 regular-season games and then somehow carried a team that underwent several transformations to a fourth straight conference title and matchup against the Warriors.

As has been the case in the past, James didn't have enough help as the Cavs were swept, dropping him to 3-6 in the NBA Finals — a record sometimes used to compare him to Michael Jordan.

His stay with the Cavaliers will best be remembered for 2016, when he rallied the Cavs from a 3-1 deficit in the finals to stun the Warriors. James helped seal a Game 7 win with a chase-down block of Andre Iguodala, the signature moment of a career that has shown no signs of decay.

With the Lakers, James will be playing in the Western Conference for the first time and just down the Pacific Coast Highway from the Warriors, the team that has stymied him three times in the past four finals.

The chance to play for one of America's most storied franchises is a new challenge for James, who prides himself on knowing the game's history. In Los Angeles, championships are the standard and he'll feel new pressure in upholding the legacies of Johnson, Bryant, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Jerry West and other Lakers greats.

It's now his turn.

Neymar leads Brazil into quarterfinals

Associated Press

SAMARA, Russia — Neymar flaunted his flair and his theatrics with a goal and an assist Monday at the World Cup.

The world's most expensive player led Brazil over Mexico 2-0 Monday and into the quarterfinals of the tournament for the seventh straight time.

Neymar broke through Mexico's stern resistance by setting up the opener when his back-heel released Willian. Neymar then ran into the penalty area and slid to tap Willian's cross into the net.

While his scoring is so often the focus, Neymar also creates goals for his teammates. A toe-poked attempt to beat Mexico goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa in the 88th minute was diverted into the path of Robert Firmino, who scored the second. Neymar has 11 goals and nine assists in his last 19 games for Brazil.

But before setting up the second goal it looked like Neymar's game — or even his

World Cup — could be over with 20 minutes to go. It turned out to be pure histrionics. Writhing in agony after his right ankle was stepped on by Miguel Layun, Neymar managed to get back on his feet. But not before trying to step on Layun. Both escaped punishment.

The five-time World Cup champions will next face either Japan or Belgium in the quarterfinals, the stage they have reached at every World Cup since 1994.

Mexico has now lost at this stage at every tournament over the same period of time, extending its wait for the "quinto partido" — or fifth game — for at least another four years. The last time Mexico reached the quarterfinals was when the country hosted the tournament in 1986.

This year's World Cup had started so promisingly for Mexico. The team opened with a win over Germany, setting the defending champions on the path to an early exit. They caused problems for Brazil, too, initially.

But they couldn't find a way to stop Neymar, who has scored two goals in four matches in Russia.

"The key was to play together without the ball because with the ball we know the quality of the team," Willian said. "We know we have players that can decide the game."

Neymar's dispute with Layun unfolded as the Mexico sub tried to recover the ball. In a delayed reaction, Neymar made the most of Layun stepping on his ankle, rolling around with his hand covering his eyes.

The rapid recovery seemed miraculous for a player who missed the last three months of the season with a broken right foot.

"We wasted a lot of time because of one single player," Mexico coach Juan Carlos Osorio said, without naming Neymar. "I think this is a real shame for football, especially for kids who are watching because this this has to be a sport of virility, of determination, a man's sport, like other games, and not a charade."

Busch outduels Larson

Associated Press

JOLIET, Ill. — Kyle Busch and Kyle Larson raced all over the track during an electric final lap. As Busch began to celebrate his dramatic victory, Larson gave him a thumb's up.

It was quite a finish, and they knew it.

Busch outdueled Larson down the stretch Sunday in the NASCAR Cup Series race at Chicagoland Speedway, earning his fifth victory of the season.

"It was a good day, a great finish, an exciting one for that, especially at a mile and a half," Busch said. "People don't necessarily see those very much anymore. Man, you just got to be pumped for that. It's cool."

Busch moved into the lead on a restart with 58 laps to go, replacing Kevin Harvick at the front of the field. Busch, Harvick and Martin Truex Jr. — NASCAR's top three teams so far this season — were up front with about 40 laps left before a hard-charging Larson crashed the party.

He powered by Harvick to get into second. He appeared to

be in trouble after brushing the wall with seven laps left, but he kept going and Busch was slowed by a couple lapped cars at the back of the field.

Busch and Larson then were neck-and-neck on the final lap. Larson bumped into the back of Busch's car and moved into the lead. Busch then raced into the back of Larson's car and sped ahead for the victory.

"When I was going down the backstretch, I was like, 'Hell, no, you're not taking this one away right now,'" Busch said. "This was kind of where I was at. I was just going to do anything that it took for us to be able to get back to the start/finish line first."

Busch was booed by the crowd when he got out of his No. 18 Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota. He playfully rubbed his left eye in a crying motion and waved off the jeering fans.

Larson, who was trying for a weekend sweep after winning the Xfinity Series race Saturday, had no complaints.

"I roughed him up. He roughed me up. That's racing," he said.

Serena gets victory in Wimbledon return

Associated Press

LONDON — Serena Williams needed six match points to finish off a 7-5, 6-3 win over Arantxa Rus of the Netherlands and reach the second round of Wimbledon.

Williams broke for a 5-3 lead in the second set and led 40-15 when serving for the match, but Rus saved the first two match points and then another three after reaching deuce. However, Rus finally sent a shot into the net to give Williams a winning return to the All England Club.

The seven-time champion missed last year's tournament while pregnant.

Her sister, five-time champion Venus Williams, also advanced to the second round, with a 6-7 (3), 6-2, 6-1 victory over Johanna Larsson.

Having struggled to establish a rhythm against her Swedish opponent during the opening set, ninth-seeded Venus won 10 games in a row from 1-2 in the second to take control.

The 38-year-old American,

the oldest woman in the draw, reached the 2017 final where she was beaten by Garbine Muguruza.

Katie Swan became the first British player to progress to the second round with a 6-2, 6-2 victory over Irina-Camelia Begu.

The 19-year-old Swan defeated her 36th-ranked opponent in just 52 minutes to earn the first Grand Slam victory of her career.

The 204th-ranked Swan is one of five British women aged from 19 to 23 to have been given a wild card to Wimbledon.

U.S. Open champion Sloane Stephens is out after a 6-1 6-3 defeat to Donna Vekic.

The 4th-seeded Stephens produced an error-strewn display on No. 1 Court as she exited in the opening round for a second consecutive year.

Having backed up her 2017 US Open triumph by reaching the French Open final last month, Stephens was considered a Wimbledon contender.

Yankees rout rival Red Sox to win series

Associated Press

NEW YORK — First, it was third-string catcher Kyle Higashioka getting the silent treatment in the dugout after a home run. Then, the same for Aaron Hicks when he hit homer No. 3.

On a 91-degree night with the pennant race heating up, the New York Yankees enjoyed some more yucks against their biggest rival.

Hicks launched three home runs and the Yankees pummeled David Price again, connecting five times in the first four innings Sunday on the way to an 11-1 rout of the Boston Red Sox.

“It feels awesome,” Hicks said. “I blacked out after the third one. Kind of didn’t know what to do. But I mean, it’s exciting.”

Luis Severino became the first 13-game winner in the majors, cruising through 6²/₃ shutout innings of two-hit ball after the Bronx Bombers quickly built him a big cushion. With the teams trading blowouts

all weekend, the Yankees (54-27) took two of three from Boston to regain baseball’s best record and first place in the AL East.

“It’s going to be a dogfight. We have a good team, they have a good team,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “A weird series, honestly. It was very weird. Weird games.”

Aaron Judge and Gleyber Torres also homered for New York, which leads the 19-game season series 5-4. The next time the teams meet is early August at Fenway Park.

“I’m sure it’s going to be a fun few months,” Yankees manager Aaron Boone said.

The first Yankees leadoff batter to hit three home runs in a game, Hicks connected twice from the right side of the plate and once from the left. He smacked a two-run shot to right field in the second inning and a solo drive to center in the fourth that chased Price (9-6) and made it 8-0.

Hicks pulled his 14th of the season into

the right-field stands in the eighth off Hector Velazquez. It was the first three-homer game by a Yankees player since Alex Rodriguez, part of the ESPN broadcast crew Sunday, accomplished the feat at Minnesota in July 2015.

The only other Yankees hitter to go deep three times at the current Yankee Stadium was Curtis Granderson in April 2012 against the Twins.

The Yankees finished with a season-high six homers to boost their major league-leading total to 137, setting a franchise record for before the All-Star break.

Exactly halfway through its season, New York is on pace to surpass the 1997 Seattle Mariners’ mark of 264 homers.

Price was rocked for eight earned runs — matching a career high — and nine hits in 3¹/₃ innings, his latest flop against the Yankees. He had never given up more than three homers in a game.

MLB roundup

Snell helps Rays cap impressive homestand

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Blake Snell struck out 10, reliever Diego Castillo fanned Jose Altuve in a key spot and Tampa Bay beat Houston 3-2 to end a homestand.

The Rays went 8-1 at Tropicana Field, taking three of four from the World Series champion Astros, sweeping three from the New York Yankees and winning both games against Washington. Tampa Bay set a team record by allowing no more than two runs in its sixth straight game.

Matt Duffy hit a two-out, two-run single in the seventh inning that put the Rays ahead 2-1 and Mallex Smith homered in the eighth. Evan Gattis homered twice for Houston.

Snell (11-4) allowed one run and four hits in 7¹/₃ innings.

Charlie Morton (10-2) struck out 11 in 6²/₃ innings.

Cubs 11, Twins 10: At Chicago, Jon Lester hit a three-run homer in an eight-run second inning and wound up with his NL-leading 11th victory.

Ian Happ also homered for the Cubs. They have scored at least 10 runs in four straight games for the first time since 1930.

Dodgers 6, Rockies 4: Matt Kemp had three hits and drove in four runs, including a go-ahead homer leading off the eighth inning that rallied Los Angeles past visiting Colorado to prevent a sweep.

Kemp sent his 14th homer of the season over the center-field wall off Adam Ottavino (4-2) to put Los Angeles ahead 5-4. It was the Dodgers’ first homer of July after they hit a major league-leading and franchise-record 55 in June.

Giants 9, Diamondbacks 6: Brandon Belt and Joe Panik drove in two runs each and Hunter Pence had a pinch-hit, two-run double, leading San Francisco to a series sweep against host Arizona.

Orioles 8, Angels 2: Manny Machado and Mark Trumbo hit consecutive homers after the Angels lost a popup in the sun, and Baltimore beat visiting Los Angeles to end a seven-

game losing streak.

The Orioles improved to 1-15 against the AL West and won at home for only the second time in 19 games since May 13.

Indians 15, Athletics 3: Francisco Lindor homered and hit two of visiting Cleveland’s 11 doubles and the Indians ended Oakland’s six-game winning streak.

White Sox 10, Rangers 5: Matt Davidson hit a two-run double in his second straight three-hit game to lead Chicago past host Texas.

Avisail Garcia had four hits, and Davidson and Jose Abreu drove in three runs apiece to help the White Sox avoid a sweep to start a 10-game road trip, their longest of the season.

Phillies 4, Nationals 3 (13): Pinch-hitter Andrew Knapp homered just inside the right-field foul pole in the 13th inning to lift Philadelphia past visiting Washington.

Reds 8, Brewers 2: Jose Peraza kept up Cincinnati’s parade of grand slams, sending Matt Harvey and the host

Reds over NL Central-leading Milwaukee.

Mets 5, Marlins 2: Steven Matz and three relievers combined on a four-hitter and visiting New York beat Miami to escape the NL East cellar after a one-day stay.

Braves 6, Cardinals 5: Mike Foltynewicz threw five shutout innings and Freddie Freeman homered in Atlanta’s victory over host St. Louis.

Tigers 9, Blue Jays 1: Nick Castellanos hit his fourth career grand slam, Jordan Zimmermann pitched seven strong innings and visiting Detroit beat Toronto to snap a snapping an 11-game losing streak.

Pirates 7, Padres 5: Colin Moran hit his second grand slam of the season and Corey Dickerson and Elias Diaz also homered in Pittsburgh’s victory over host San Diego.

Mariners 1, Royals 0: James Paxton limited Kansas City to two hits and struck out 11 in eight innings and host Seattle beat the Royals for its season-best seventh consecutive victory.