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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Special Forces unit's deployment scrutinized

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

A Green Beret who fired on a civilian truck in Afghanistan showed “horribly poor judgment” during a deployment in which officers let soldiers drink alcohol and have sex in violation of military rules, the team’s enlisted leader stated in an Army investigation report.

A video montage that showed an American soldier firing a shotgun into the driver’s window of an Afghan cargo truck was posted online late last year, stirring controversy and prompting military officials to promise a thorough investigation.

Though Army investigators found no wrongdoing, an investigative report obtained by Stars and Stripes reveals new details, including allegations of “toxic” team members and failures in discipline and professionalism that carried over into operations, leading to the shooting, which the team’s senior noncommissioned officer called “stupid.”

The incident came as some officials have questioned whether the military is relying too much on special operations units and raised concerns about the strain of frequent deployments on the elite forces.

Officials found no probable cause to believe there was a killing or violation of the

rules of engagement, the Army’s Criminal Investigation Command said in May.

A soldier had fired a nonlethal beanbag round into the truck after its driver ignored several warnings not to encroach on a U.S. convoy, officials said.

The investigation report includes sworn statements from most of the 12-member team, though the names of the members and two other Green Berets interviewed in late January at Joint Forces Training Base in Los Alamitos, Calif., were redacted.

Part of the California National Guard’s Company A, 5th Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne), the 12-man team deployed to Afghanistan in late 2016. The shooting occurred sometime in January or February 2017 near Bagram Air Field, officials said.

The shot through the window may have been the only way to get the driver’s attention, the team’s commander, a captain, told an investigator. The driver ignored small flares and other warnings, he said.

The captain assessed the driver as “fine” after the incident and said if the shooting had resulted in a death, locals would have complained on social media about coalition forces “conducting vile acts (with) no repercussions.”

A master sergeant who was the team’s operations sergeant and senior NCO on

the deployment, however, raised concerns about violations of standard operating procedures and questioned the shot placement, calling it “horribly poor judgment” to fire into the window.

“Even if the civilian vehicle was trying to disrupt or enter into part of our convoy, ignored pen flares as warnings, a shot to the metal door could achieve the same message without putting the civilian driver at risk of injury,” he said.

A 10-year veteran of Special Forces teams — known as Operational Detachment Alphas, or ODAs — and several deployments, the master sergeant described having his authority subverted by fellow NCOs because he had taken a stand against allowing soldiers to violate General Order No. 1, which prohibits alcohol use and sex, in Afghanistan.

The team’s commander and assistant commander permitted the violations, he alleged, and let at least two soldiers carry on extramarital affairs at Bagram.

Adultery is also a military law violation carrying a maximum punishment of one year of confinement, a dishonorable discharge and financial penalties.

“Throughout the deployment, I had to deal with toxic individuals who undermined my authority because they were being protected by the ODA officers,” he said.

Lawmakers prod DOD to base more troops in Europe

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon will have to consider increasing combat power in Europe and look at the feasibility of permanently stationing an Army brigade in Poland under a deal reached by House and Senate lawmakers.

A House and Senate panel agreed on Monday to a reconciled version of the National Defense Authorization Act, which could come up for a vote in the House as early as this week.

Overall, the bill calls for troop increases and acquisition of a wide range of new aircraft, ships, submarines and weapons. Lawmakers also want the Pentagon to review how it conducts advisory missions in places like Niger, where four U.S. soldiers were

killed in October in an ambush.

For Europe, the NDAA spells out steps to counter and “if necessary, defeat Russian aggression.”

The bill would mandate that President Donald Trump designate an official in the National Security Council to develop and oversee a strategy for fighting Russian “malign influence.”

Meanwhile, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis would be required to consider specific steps to “enhance U.S. forward presence, combat capability, and capacity in Europe.”

The bill would require Mattis to examine the merits of putting an Army brigade combat team and combat enablers in Poland on a permanent basis.

Within military circles, the idea of gar-

isoning U.S. troops in Poland is controversial. Warsaw is pushing hard for a larger and permanent U.S. presence and has offered up to \$2 billion to help offset the costs.

Already, the U.S. has rotational forces operating daily in Poland, including a battle group not far from the country’s border with the Russian military enclave of Kaliningrad. In addition, an armored brigade and an Air Force detachment are all on year-round rotations in the country.

Still, supporters of a permanent presence argue that basing troops in Poland would send a stronger deterrent signal to Russia. Opponents, however, worry that such a presence would cause divisions within NATO at a time when the alliance is already under political strain.

Academy charges midshipmen in drug case

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — The U.S. Naval Academy announced Tuesday it is bringing charges against a midshipman who allegedly distributed illegal drugs, including cocaine.

The charges include failure to obey a general regulation, making a false official statement and possession of illegal substances, said Cmdr. David McKinney, an academy spokesman. The charges also include possession of illegal substances with intent to distribute, use of

illegal substances and distribution of illegal substances.

An Article 32 hearing, which is similar to a civilian grand jury proceeding, was scheduled for Wednesday before a military court at the Washington Navy Yard to help determine whether the case should proceed to a court-martial, McKinney said.

The charges are based on an investigation by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service that began in November. The results were sent to Vice Adm. Ted Carter, the academy's

superintendent, who decided to recommend the charges against the accused, who was not named in a news release from the academy.

As a result of the investigation, six midshipmen have been kicked out of the academy for using illegal substances, McKinney said. Another five midshipmen were administratively disciplined for drug-related violations. The illicit drugs involved were cocaine, ecstasy, ketamine and hallucinogenic mushrooms.

"The United States Navy and

the Naval Academy both have a zero tolerance policy when it comes to the use of illegal substances and take all allegations of misconduct seriously," McKinney said.

Some of the charges related to an arrest by the Dover Police Department for selling and possessing controlled substances, McKinney said.

When Carter updated the academy's Board of Visitors about the investigation in April, he said midshipmen brought the drug use to the attention of school officials.

Images show N. Korea dismantling key test site

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

North Korea has taken "an important first step" toward fulfilling a promise made during its summit with the United States by starting to dismantle a key missile testing site, a monitoring website said Monday.

The report came as President Donald Trump said he was "very happy" with progress in relations with the North. He pointed out the communist state hasn't conducted a missile test in months.

Commercial satellite images show key facilities, including the rocket engine test stand, being razed at the Sohae Satellite Launching Station, according to 38 North.

The complex north of the capital, Pyongyang, has been used to develop technologies for the North's intercontinental ballistic missile program and therefore the dismantling represents "a significant confidence building measure," according to the analysis by defense expert Joseph Bermudez Jr.

The report comes amid concern about the North's true intentions as the June 12 summit

in Singapore yielded no specific commitments or timelines.

According to 38 North, satellite images from Friday showed the roof and supporting structure partially removed from the rail-mounted processing structure for the launch pad and numerous vehicles were present, including a large crane.

Two days later, images showed one corner of the structure had been completely dismantled and parts were scattered on the ground, the website said.

It noted, however, that the main processing building and gantry tower remained intact.

The vertical engine test stand superstructure also has been completely dismantled, leaving on the base, "which is also in the process of being removed," 38 North said, citing images from Sunday.

The Trump administration has maintained optimism about the diplomatic process aimed at persuading the North to abandon its nuclear weapons program, insisting there's "no rush" to reach a final deal.

Analysts, however, have expressed skepticism that the North is willing to give up its hard-won nuclear weapons.

Okinawa builds shelters to protect children from falling aircraft parts

BY AYA ICHIHASHI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Okinawa government is building shelters to protect schoolchildren from falling aircraft parts near an American military base in Japan's southernmost prefecture.

"There will be four emergency shelters — two at playgrounds and two at other locations," Okinawa Defense Bureau spokesman Masashi Katsuren said Tuesday.

One of the shelters is now under construction at Futenma Daini Elementary School on the northern side of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma.

In December, a 3-foot-by-3-foot window fell from a Marine CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter onto the school's playground where dozens of students were taking a physical education class. A boy sustained a minor injury on the back of his hand from a small stone that was sent airborne, but no other injuries or damage were reported.

Earlier that month, a plastic part thought to belong to a U.S. military helicopter was found

on the roof of a nearby nursery school.

The elementary school closed its playground until February. Since then, Okinawa Defense Bureau staff have watched for aircraft and ushered children indoors when they spot them nearby. They've cleared the playground 25 times in July, the spokesman said.

The Okinawa Times newspaper reported 216 evacuations over 28 days in February and March.

At Futenma Daini Kindergarten, next to the elementary school, kids played outside on Tuesday while builders worked on the shelter.

"We are somewhat relieved that with two shelters in the playground, we can shorten the evacuation time and resume the physical education class quickly," the elementary school's vice principal, Kenji Arakawa, told Stars and Stripes.

Students still get worried when aircraft fly overhead, Arakawa said.

"Most of all they feel stress about all the evacuations and cuts to physical education and recess," he said.

'Baby Hornets' at end of line

BY MARCUS FICHTL
Stars and Stripes

HONOLULU — This month's Rim of the Pacific exercise in Hawaii will mark the end of the line for the Navy's "Baby Hornets."

Ten F/A-18C multirole supersonic combat jets on the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier will be traded for newer, larger F/A-18E Super Hornets in January, said Lt. Kevin Frattin, the "senior-junior" officer for Strike Fighter Squadron 34 out of Virginia Beach, Va.

"You're not going to see a Hornet on an aircraft carrier, at least with U.S. Navy painted on it, ever again," he said during a tour of the carrier Saturday.

Strike Fighter Squadron 34, known as the "Blue Blasters," traces its heritage back 75 years to an F6F Hellcat squadron aboard the USS Enterprise during World War II in the Pacific. It's the only operational Hornet squadron still flying, although another squadron that simulates enemy jets still flies the aircraft.

The jets are, perhaps, the most visible symbol of the American military might that the Navy has been showing off to visitors on the carrier.

The legacy Hornet, which some claim is nimbler and more agile than its replacement, will be missed by pilots, Frattin said.

"It's a lot of fun to fly," he said. "For some things we could do, we were the only ones who could do it."

'Showcasing America's might'

So far during RIMPAC, the Carl Vinson has hosted more than 200 distinguished visitors, Navy spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Tim Hawkins said aboard the carrier Saturday.

"We are showcasing America's might, but we're also showcasing America's commitment ... to sustaining strong partnerships that we've had in the Indo-Pacific for a very long time," he said.

During RIMPAC, "America's Favorite Carrier" has acted as a seaward hub for navy leaders and dignitaries.

Each day, its wardrooms or officer's galley have bristled with brass and the flags of foreign nations.

The carrier hosted more than 8,000 people for tours on RIMPAC's opening week at Pearl Harbor in late June.

"[The Carl Vinson] is a hub

not only for our leadership of the carrier strike group but it's also a platform for hosting dignitaries and foreign leaders, explaining to them the Navy's mission and role," Hawkins said.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Callie Riley, 24, who works at the ship's store and helped sell \$40,000 worth of merchandise — mostly Zippo lighters — during a recent port call in Vietnam, has seen more foreign sailors during RIMPAC than most crewmembers.

"They're usually in here looking for coins and other goodies," he said, pointing to racks of junk food and Navy ballcaps. "They're very interested in what we have to offer."

The Carl Vinson has been the go-to warship for the Navy in the Pacific with an extended deployment last year off the Korean Peninsula. In March, it became the first U.S. carrier to visit Vietnam since the war.

During RIMPAC, the ship hasn't been involved in much training and isn't hosting foreign sailors like the amphibious USS Bonhomme Richard, which has an Australian commodore, foreign marines and international staff on board.

Carrier Reagan returns to Yokosuka

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier and its strike group returned home to Yokosuka on Tuesday after a two-month patrol of the South, East and Philippine seas.

Rear Adm. Karl Thomas, who was sworn in as Task Force 70 commander last week, said though the deployment was not lengthy, all goals for the mission were accomplished.

"We like to operate when we need to and where we need to," he said.

"We don't talk about future deployments, but the amount of time we were out allowed us to prepare and to train and to conduct exercises."

The Ronald Reagan left its homeport on May 29 after a two-week delay to repair a "material issue" discovered during sea trials earlier that month. Thomas said the delay did not affect the overall mission.

"We were a little bit late getting underway, but we still were able to conduct all the exercises we wanted to do," he said.

Those drills included Malabar 2018 early last month with the Indian Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force. The countries exchanged expert and professional information and practiced surface and anti-submarine warfare, medical operations, damage control and helicopter operations over the nine-day exercise, according to the Navy.

"Our presence out there is the most important thing so that we can sustain the peace and security of the region," Thomas said.

The Ronald Reagan's commanding officer, Capt. Buzz Donnelly, said he was "proud of the crew," which is excited for a "short break this summer" in Yokosuka.

Senate confirms Wilkie as new VA chief

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Monday night confirmed Robert Wilkie to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs, marking the latest chapter for the federal government's second-largest agency, which is embroiled in controversy, volatility and lingering vacancies.

Wilkie, 55, has served as the Defense Department undersecretary of personnel and readiness and was considered a safe choice for the job after President Donald Trump dismissed previous VA secretary David Shulkin earlier this year and tried to replace him with Rear Adm. Ronny Jackson, a White House doctor who quickly be-

came caught up in controversy and flamed out as a candidate for the job.

As a result, the massive agency has been without a permanent secretary since March 28, when Trump fired Shulkin barely a year after a nearly unanimous Senate confirmed him for the job.

"We have the chance to fix the problems that we've had and make [the VA] better," Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., chairman the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, said ahead of Monday night's vote. "We owe it to our veterans no less than the best secretary ... Robert Wilkie."

The Senate confirmed Wilkie's nomination with an 86-to-9

vote, with only Democrats opposing him. Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., was the only senator to vote against Wilkie when he easily won nearly unanimous approval July 10 from the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. Since the VA became a Cabinet-level department in 1989, there have been nine secretaries. All of them were unanimously approved by the Senate.

During Wilkie's confirmation hearing, Sanders expressed concerns that Trump was attempting to slowly erode VA resources and send more money into the private sector. In response, Wilkie said he believed the VA should be central to veterans' health care.

Iran dismisses Trump threat

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's explosive Twitter threat to Iran's leader comes as his administration is ratcheting up a pressure campaign on the Islamic republic that many suspect is aimed at regime change.

No one is predicting imminent war. But Trump's bellicose, all-caps challenge addressed to President Hasan Rouhani followed a speech by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in which he accused Iran's leadership of massive corruption and widespread rights abuses and urged Iranians to rise up in protest.

Both the tweet and the speech landed less than two weeks before the administration will begin reimposing sanctions on Iran that had been lifted under the 2015 nuclear deal. In the meantime, the U.S. is stepping up Farsi language outreach that is intended to support Iranians demonstrating against the policies of their government.

Trump's tweet doesn't appear to have been prompted by any

notable shift in rhetoric from Iran.

It could have been an impulsive reaction to reports from Tehran quoting Rouhani as giving the U.S. an oft-repeated reminder that conflict with Iran would be "the mother of all wars." Yet animosity directed at the Iranian leadership is an established part of the administration's broader foreign policy.

Iran publicly shrugged off Trump's late Sunday message — "NEVER EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE."

Tweeted Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Monday: "COLOR US UNIMPRESSED: The world heard even harsher bluster a few months ago. And Iranians have heard them — albeit more civilized ones — for 40 yrs. We've been around for millennia & seen fall of empires, incl our own, which lasted more than

the life of some countries. BE CAUTIOUS!"

Asked at the White House if he had concerns about provoking Iran, Trump said simply, "None at all."

Tehran is already aware of what is coming from the administration as consequences of Trump's May withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear accord take shape.

As Pompeo noted in his speech to Iranian-Americans and others in California on Sunday, the centerpiece will be the reimposition of U.S. economic sanctions. The first batch will go back into force Aug. 4, targeting the Iranian automotive sector and trade in gold and other metals. A more significant set of sanctions that will hit Iran's oil industry and central bank by punishing countries and companies that do business with them will resume Nov. 4. "Right now, the United States is undertaking a diplomatic and financial pressure campaign to cut off the funds that the regime uses to enrich itself and support death and destruction," Pompeo said.

Trump foes facing loss of security clearances

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is considering revoking the security clearances of six former top national security officials who have been critical of his administration, a move that opponents and experts say would be an unprecedented politicization of the clearance process.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Monday the president is "exploring the mechanisms" to strip clearance from former CIA Director John Brennan as well as five other former officials: former FBI Director Jim Comey; James Clapper, the former director of national intelligence; former CIA Director Michael Hayden; former national security adviser Susan Rice; and Andrew McCabe, who served as Trump's deputy FBI director until he was fired in March.

At least two of the former officials, McCabe and Comey, do not currently have security clearances.

The leaders have served in both Democratic and Republican administrations, including Trump's.

Sanders accused the officials of having "politicized and in some cases monetized their public service and security clearances" by making "baseless accusations" that the Trump administration had improper contact with Russia or was influenced by Russia. "The fact that people with security clearances are making these baseless charges provides inappropriate legitimacy to accusations with zero evidence," she said.

Sanders did not cite specific comments made by any of the officials. But the president has been seething over the backlash to his meeting last week with Russia's Vladimir Putin and the ongoing investigations into Russia's meddling in the 2016 election, whether his campaign aides were involved in the effort and whether he obstructed justice.

Israel says Syrian jet breached airspace

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Israel shot down a Syrian fighter jet it said had breached its airspace on Tuesday while advancing Syrian government forces retaking territory from rebels reached the Golan Heights frontier for the first time in seven years.

The Israeli military said it monitored the advance of the Syrian Sukhoi fighter jet and shot it down with a pair of Patriot missiles after it penetrated Israeli airspace by about 1.2 miles.

Syria's military, however, said one of its jets was targeted by Israel over Syrian territory as it flew sorties against Islamic State militants.

Syrian forces have been battling rebels and ISIS militants at the frontier with Israel for weeks in a campaign to restore President Bashar Assad's rule over southwestern Syria.

On Tuesday, government forces reached the border fence where a U.N. peacekeeping force is deployed at the edge of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. It was the first time the Syrian government had managed to retake the area since 2011, when an uprising swept through Syria against Assad.

Israel captured Golan Heights from Syria in 1967. The U.N. deployed peacekeepers between the two sides in 1974.

Israel's military has been on "elevated alert" along the frontier because of activity on the Syrian side of the fence, said military spokesman Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus. Israel has warned Syria through various channels not to violate the 1974 agreement that established the demilitarized zone, he added.

Minutes before the reported downing of the jet, Syria's state-run Al-Ikhbariya TV was broad-

casting footage from the fence demarcating the U.N. buffer zone between Syrian and Israeli forces in the Golan Heights. A U.N. observer post could be seen just on the other side of the fence.

The camera showed an Israeli post 400 meters away.

Israel's military said the Syrian jet took off from the T4 air base, which Israel is believed to have attacked earlier this year. The plane flew toward Israel at "relatively high speed" before breaching the country's airspace, said Conricus. He said it was unknown if the plane deliberately crossed into Israel.

The plane crashed in the southern part of the Syrian Golan Heights, he said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said one pilot was killed and that the condition of the other was unknown.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Teen helps save friend who suffered seizure

NH PELHAM — A 14-year-old boy helped save his friend who suffered a seizure while swimming in New Hampshire.

WMUR-TV reported Ethan Gerry and Matthew Brooks were swimming in a pond in Pelham on Saturday when Ethan noticed Matthew's eyes rolling back.

Ethan said he dove under and held his friend above the water for as long as he could until an older boy helped lift Matthew onto a raft. Matthew was taken to a local hospital for treatment.

It is unclear what led to Matthew's seizure.

Inert grenade found as basement cleaned

MI HIGHLAND TOWNSHIP — Authorities said a woman cleaning a basement in suburban Detroit found what turned out to be an inert grenade.

The Oakland County sheriff's office said in a statement the discovery was made Saturday in Highland Township.

A deputy responded to the Highland Township Substation after another person reported his friend found the military-style grenade with a safety pin in place. He told the deputy that his friend's deceased ex-husband had served in the U.S. Army during World War II.

The Michigan State Police bomb disposal unit checked out the grenade and determined it was inert.

Attorney general: Pot gifting remains illegal

VT MONTPELIER — Vermont Attorney General T.J. Donovan has clarified that the sale of marijuana,

even when it is given as a "gift with purchase," is still illegal, despite the legalization of marijuana possession.

Donovan unveiled the guidance Monday. He clarified that any purchase, even the purchase of another item "with a purported gift of marijuana," continues to remain illegal. Vermont legalized the possession of one ounce of marijuana July 1 but did not legalize its sale or distribution.

Businesses in the Burlington area had begun "gifting" marijuana with the purchase of a courier service, arguing there was a loophole in the law and that nobody was purchasing marijuana.

Police responding to call find an alligator

NY BATAVIA — Police responding to a 911 hang-up call from an abandoned building in western New York found something they weren't expecting — a 4-foot-long alligator.

WKBW-TV in Buffalo reported officers in the city of Batavia were checking out the inside of the building Monday for anyone in distress when they found the alligator in a makeshift aquarium.

Officers notified the state Department of Environmental Conservation, which sent an environmental conservation officer to the scene. The reptile was handed over to the DEC officer.

Swastika burned into memorial park grass

NE OMAHA — Omaha police are trying to find whoever burned a Nazi symbol into the grass at an Omaha park memorializing U.S. military members who died in World War II.

Someone used a chemical or other means Saturday to turn

green grass into a brown swastika several feet across at Memorial Park in east-central Omaha. The parks department has tilled over the swastika, and the city intends to reseed the area.

Breastfeeding at pool prompts police call

MN MORA — Dozens of mothers and their children gathered during the weekend for what they called a "nurse-in" to support two women who were chastised for breastfeeding at a public swimming pool in eastern Minnesota.

The women gathered Saturday near the Mora Aquatic Center in Mora to defend Stephanie Buchanan and Mary Davis, two sisters-in-law whose breastfeeding of their infants last week prompted a call to police.

Buchanan said a pool patron approached them and asked them to cover up while they nursed because her boys were swimming nearby. Then a staff member made the same request and suggested they move to the locker room. Buchanan cited Minnesota state law, which protects breastfeeding in public.

The women eventually left the pool when police were called.

Band: Police lip-sync of song is 'amazing'

OH MIDDLETOWN — An Ohio police department's entry in a lip-sync challenge sweeping the nation has gotten rave reviews — including from the country music group whose song is featured.

Middletown police Chief Rodney Muterspaw said he's "overwhelmed" by the response to a video his department created as part of a national lip-sync challenge among police departments. The Hamilton-Middletown Journal-News reported that among fans of the video

is the band Lady Antebellum, which tweeted that the police department's cover of its song "Need You Now" is "amazing."

The video has been viewed more than 2 million times.

Woman charged after flag is stolen, burned

DE LEWES — A Delaware woman was charged with theft and criminal mischief for taking a police flag from a highway median and burning it.

Catherine Iocco, 21, of Wilmington was arrested after the incident earlier this month near Lewes.

Delaware State Police said witnesses saw a woman get out of her car on Coastal Highway near the Nassau Bridge and remove a mounted "thin blue line" flag. The flag uses the U.S. flag design in different colors and is meant to honor police.

Police said witnesses obtained a description and license plate number of Iocco's car. Troopers said Iocco could not return the flag because she burned it.

License suspensions over fines to end

ME AUGUSTA — Maine will no longer suspend driver's licenses over unpaid fines once a new law goes into effect.

The law says that until October 2021, Maine will no longer automatically suspend driver's licenses for failure to pay fines unrelated to driving.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Maine said suspending driver's licenses make it harder to pay a fine. The advocacy group said courts can instead garnish wages or order community service.

Lawmakers overrode GOP Gov. Paul LePage's veto.

From wire reports

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Cousins gets fresh start with Warriors

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — DeMarcus Cousins spent his first eight seasons in the NBA chasing two things — peace and the playoffs.

After signing with Golden State as a free agent, the four-time All-Star center has no doubts he'll finally find both, and that those will help dispel the notion that he's a bad teammate.

"Just a chance to play for a winning culture," Cousins said Thursday. "I also have a chance to play with some of the most talented players of this era. Those two things alone, that pretty much sums it up."

Looking relaxed while sitting on a stage next to Warriors general manager Bob Myers, Cousins was at ease during a news conference at the team's practice facility.

Golden State's fiery big man seems content in his new surroundings and wants the hardware to show for it.

"Every guy said let's go get

another championship," Cousins said. "They are a well-established team and they could have easily been like, 'No, we don't need him.' But they were excited like a team that's never accomplished anything."

While his signing in Golden State drew mostly groans from around the NBA, Cousins didn't need much persuading to join the two-time defending champions. He has never played in the postseason, is coming off Achilles surgery in January and didn't attract much attention in free agency until signing a \$5.3 million, one-year contract with Golden State.

From the Warriors' side, it's a case of the rich getting richer. They've won the championship three of the past four seasons with an attack heavy on perimeter shooting and defense. In the 6-foot-11, 270-pound Cousins, they now have a dominant presence on the low block as well.

"It's a different dimension," Myers said. "It's not something that we've ever had as far as a

low-post threat since I've been here. I'm excited. I hope he's excited."

Cousins averaged 25.2 points and career highs in rebounds (12.9), assists (5.4) and minutes (36.2) with New Orleans before getting hurt. He has been frustrated by the tediousness of rehab but is being cautious in his approach.

"I'm progressing weekly, which is a positive," Cousins said. "As far as a timetable ... to be determined. I have to be smart about it. I'm in a unique situation, as well, where I'm not needed right away. Time is kind of on my side so I have a chance to get to 100 percent."

"Making it to the playoffs won't be an issue for this team, obviously. Once the basketball part comes, everything else will take care of itself."

A throng of media attended the news conference, flanked by 150 young fans who were taking part in a basketball camp held by the Warriors. Cousins answered questions from two of the youngsters who were

eager to know who his favorite players were growing up.

The 27-year-old with a quick temper and a history of piling up technical fouls at a rapid rate showed a playful side when he joked about the possibility of fighting with new teammates Kevin Durant and Draymond Green, two players with whom he's had on-court issues in the past.

"Might as well," Cousins said as the crowd laughed.

Cousins turned serious at one point when asked about reports that he had been offered a new contract by New Orleans before signing with Golden State.

"Only me and (Pelicans general manager) Dale Demps know what was said on the phone that night," Cousins said. "We both know the truth and I'll leave it at that."

As for his new team, Cousins has assimilated quickly. He played with several members of the Warriors while winning a gold medal as part of Team USA during the 2016 Summer Olympics.

NBA briefs

Cavaliers sign Love to 4-year, \$120 million extension

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — All-Star forward Kevin Love signed a new four-year, \$120 million contract Tuesday with the Cleveland Cavaliers, who are beginning anew following LeBron James' departure.

The 29-year-old just completed his fourth season with Cleveland, which was swept by Golden State in the NBA Finals. That loss was followed by James leaving in free agency to sign with the Los Angeles Lakers.

Love, who has been mentioned in trade speculation since arriving in Cleveland, now becomes the centerpiece of the franchise. He averaged 17.6 points and 9.3 rebounds last season when he made his fifth All-Star team.

Love said he is "super excited and I couldn't be happier. It's a big commitment for me and it's a big commitment from the Cavaliers."

Last season, Love revealed he has battled anxiety throughout his life.

Mavericks officially sign Nowitzki

DALLAS — Dirk Nowitzki is officially signed for a record 21st season with the Dallas Mavericks.

The Mavericks announced Monday that they had re-signed the 13-time All-Star. That was their plan when they declined a team option on Nowitzki's contract at the start of free agency to create more room under the salary cap before signing De-

Andre Jordan.

Nowitzki, a former NBA MVP who turned 40 last month, is set to become the first player in NBA history to play 21 consecutive seasons for the same franchise. The 7-foot German is one of six players overall, and the only international player, with more than 30,000 career points.

His \$5 million contract is the same amount he would have been guaranteed for 2018-19 for the second season of a two-year deal signed last summer.

Also:

■ The Mavericks acquired the rights to forward Maarty Leunen and cash from the Los Angeles Clippers for two-way forward Johnathan Motley and the rights to guard Renaldas Seibutis.

Dallas also signed guard-forward Ding Yanyuhang, who has played professionally in China for seven years. Ding was with the Mavericks during the summer league last year.

Free agent Ferrell joins Sacramento

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Free agent guard Yogi Ferrell signed Monday with the Sacramento Kings.

The third-year guard spent last season with the Mavericks after splitting the previous year between the Nets and Dallas.

He has averaged 10.2 points per game for his career with 2.9 assists and 2.8 rebounds after going undrafted out of Indiana and also spending time on G-League assignments.

Tour de France riders hit with tear gas

Associated Press

BAGNERES-DE-LUCHON, France — Julian Alaphilippe took advantage of his downhill skills to win the wild 16th stage of the Tour de France on Tuesday, which was briefly interrupted when police used tear gas to disperse a farmers' protest that had blocked the road with bales of hay.

The overall standings were unchanged with Geraint Thomas in the yellow jersey, Chris Froome in second and Tom Dumoulin third, each crossing at 8 minutes, 52 seconds behind.

Thomas remained 1 minute, 39 seconds ahead of four-time champion Froome, with Dumoulin 1:50 back.

Alaphilippe took the lead when Adam Yates crashed on a technical descent in the finale.

"I knew the finale was tricky," Alaphilippe said. "I was sad for [Yates] but it could have happened to me, too, because I took a lot of risks. ... I went all out for 220

kilometers today. I'm exhausted."

Belgian rider Philippe Gilbert crashed earlier while in the lead when descending from the Col de Portet-d'Aspet, hitting a wall and flipping off his bike but avoiding major injury. It was the same descent where Italian rider Fabio Casartelli died in the 1995 Tour.

Gilbert, the 2012 world champion and a Quick-Step teammate of Alaphilippe, appeared to avoid major injuries and was treated for some scrapes on his left arm after getting back on his bike.

The farmers' protest occurred 18.6 miles into the 135.5-mile leg from Carcassonne to Bagneres-de-Luchon.

Thomas, Froome, world champion Peter Sagan and other riders were treated with eye drops due to the tear gas amid a 15-minute delay.

"I was lucky that it did not affect me too much, I had a bit of tingling in the back of the throat but I used some water to wash it out," Thomas said.

The small group of farmers from the Ariège department were protesting the reduction of European Union funding, French media reported.

"We are not going to lock the riders in a stadium or a tennis court," Tour director Christian Prudhomme said. "People should not block the road, no matter what causes they are fighting for."

It was the first of three mountainous stages in the Pyrenees before Sunday's conclusion in Paris.

Passing briefly through Spain, the route featured three climbs in the finale — the Col de Portet-d'Aspet, the Col de Mente and the Col du Portillon — followed by a downhill finish.

The race remains in the Pyrenees on Wednesday for what could be the most challenging stage, a 40.39-mile leg from Bagneres-de Luchon to Saint-Lary-Soulan Col du Portet with three grueling climbs, including an uphill finish.

Sports briefs

OSU fires coach after domestic dispute

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Ohio State has fired receivers coach Zach Smith, who was charged last week with misdemeanor criminal trespass after a dispute with his ex-wife.

Coach Urban Meyer announced Smith's dismissal in a two-sentence statement on Monday.

The move came after multiple media outlets reported that Smith's ex-wife has filed for a protective order against him. The Columbus Dispatch reported that Courtney Smith wrote in a sworn document that her ex-husband has stalked and intimidated her.

At the time of the trespass charge, Zach Smith's attorney said Smith's ex-wife accused him of driving to her apartment after she told him they would meet elsewhere so he could drop off their son.

Meyer was scheduled to speak to reporters at Big Ten Media Days on Tuesday. According to his statement, "coaching staff

adjustments will be announced at a later date."

Smith is the grandson of former Ohio State coach Earle Bruce. He had been on the Buckeyes' staff since Meyer arrived in 2012, and he previously worked as a graduate assistant under Meyer.

Mbappe, Modric vie for FIFA's top award

GENEVA — World Cup stars Kylian Mbappe and Luka Modric will lead the challenge against a decade-long dominance of FIFA's best player award by Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi.

Mbappe, the teenage star of France's World Cup-winning team, and Modric, the Croatia captain who was named the tournament's best player, joined five-time winners Ronaldo and Messi among 10 candidates announced by FIFA on Tuesday.

France also has Antoine Griezmann and Raphael Varane, who won a third

straight Champions League title alongside Modric and Ronaldo with Real Madrid, on the FIFA list.

Belgium, which lost to France in the semifinals, has Kevin De Bruyne and Eden Hazard on the shortlist.

It is completed by World Cup golden boot winner Harry Kane of England and Mohamed Salah, the Egypt forward who was inspirational in Liverpool's run to the Champions League final.

The winners will be announced in London on Sept. 24.

In the women's player award, French and European champion Lyon provided six of the 10 candidates. The group includes captain Wendie Renard of France, plus Dzsennifer Marozsan and Saki Kumagai, the captains of Germany and Japan.

Three candidates who play in the National Women's Soccer League are United States international Megan Rapinoe, five-time FIFA winner Marta of Brazil, and Australia forward Sam Kerr.

Espinoza still in hospital after fracture

DEL MAR, Calif. — Hall of Fame jockey Victor Espinoza will miss the rest of Del Mar's summer meet after he fractured a vertebra in his neck during a training accident.

Agent Brian Beach tweeted Monday that Espinoza's condition had improved to stable and he was up and walking in the hospital. Beach says the 46-year-old rider was expected to be moved from the intensive care unit, but will be held a few more days for observation.

Espinoza was hurt Sunday while exercising Bobby Abu Dhabi during morning workouts at the track. Track officials said the horse had an apparent heart attack and Espinoza was thrown off. The 4-year-old horse died.

Espinoza rode American Pharoah to a sweep of the Triple Crown in 2015.

The Del Mar meet opened July 18 and closes Sept. 3.

Cards' Ponedeleon impressive in debut

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Daniel Ponedeleon wasn't going to let a sore neck ruin his major league debut, not after all he's come through in the last year. The Cardinals' determined rookie shook it off and made St. Louis history.

Ponedeleon was sensational 14 months after suffering a severe head injury, throwing no-hit ball for seven innings Monday night before Eugenio Suarez led the Cincinnati Reds' rally in the ninth for a 2-1 victory.

The 26-year-old right-hander was hit on the right temple by a line drive while pitching for Triple-A Memphis on May 9 last year, fracturing his skull and causing bleeding in the brain. He had emergency surgery followed by months of slow recovery.

Ponedeleon was one of the top pitchers in the Pacific Coast League when St. Louis called him up Monday to help their in-

jury-depleted rotation. With 10 family members cheering from the stands, he walked three and struck out three, threw 116 pitches and gave way to a pinch-hitter in the eighth with St. Louis up 1-0.

"I don't know if words can describe that," interim manager Mike Shildt said. "It's what's magical about this game and what we love about this game — stories like that."

Ponedeleon prayed for calmness before his debut, went to the bullpen to warm up and hurt his neck on one pitch.

"I tweaked my neck in the bullpen and had a hard time looking toward home plate," he said. "I was a little nervous then."

The neck was fine once the game began. Ponedeleon joined the Dodgers' Ross Stripling as the only major leaguers to throw at least seven no-hit innings in their debuts since 1908.

Given his high pitch count, Shildt had no thought about

leaving him in.

"We weren't in a situation where he would have been able to finish that game with a no-hitter," Shildt said. "It was his time."

Jordan Hicks gave up a one-out single up the middle by pinch-hitter Phillip Ervin in the eighth for Cincinnati's first hit.

Suarez's two-out, solo homer off Bud Norris (3-3) tied it 1-1. The closer then loaded the bases on a pair of singles and a walk, and pinch-hitter Dilon Herrera singled to end the Reds' losing streak at four games. Jared Hughes (3-3) pitched the ninth.

"We don't mind waiting until there two outs in the ninth to score some runs," said Tucker Barnhart, who singled to help load the bases. "It makes it a little nerve-wracking on the bench."

Matt Carpenter had a pair of hits that extended his streak, including a double in the fifth inning off Luis Castillo. Yadier

Molina followed with a single for his 17th RBI against the Reds this season, the most by any major league player against Cincinnati.

Carpenter homered in six straight games last week, a streak that ended on Sunday. He's 14-for-28 in the last eight games.

In the interim: The Cardinals are 3-4 under Shildt. The Reds are 41-41 under interim manager Jim Riggleman.

Rookie show: The Cardinals plan to start three rookies in the series, the first time they've had three rookies start in a row since September 1997 when Mike Busby, Matt Morris and Manny Aybar pitched against the Cubs. The last time they had three straight rookie starters before September was in August 1959, when Bob Gibson, Ernie Broglio and Marshall Bridges faced the Phillies, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

MLB roundup

Pirates tee off on Indians' Kluber, win 10th straight

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Corey Kluber struggled in his return while the Pittsburgh Pirates' hot streak showed no signs of letting up.

Josh Harrison hit a three-run homer and Gregory Polanco had a two-run triple off Kluber, and the Pirates beat the Cleveland Indians 7-0 in a six-inning, rain-shortened game Monday night for their 10th straight win.

The game was called following three rain delays that totaled 2 hours, 3 minutes. The first pitch was delayed 55 minutes, and a delay of 27 minutes followed in the third inning. The final delay was 41 minutes.

The Pirates have won 10 in a row for the first time since June 26-July 5, 2004.

Rays 7, Yankees 6: Gary Sanchez failed to hustle on a pair of key plays, Jake Bauers hit a three-run homer and scored with some nifty baserunning, and host Tampa Bay beat Luis Severino and New York.

Dodgers 7, Phillies 6: Max Muncy, Yasmani Grandal, Chris Taylor and Joc Pederson hit solo homers and Alex Verdugo scored the tiebreaking run on a wild pitch in the top of the ninth inning, lifting Los Angeles over host Philadelphia in a matchup of division leaders.

Red Sox 5, Orioles 3: Rick Porcello scattered six hits over six scoreless innings, Mitch Moreland homered and Boston beat host Baltimore in a rain-delayed matchup between the best and worst teams in the major leagues.

Diamondbacks 7, Cubs 1: Paul Goldschmidt homered and Patrick Corbin pitched seven strong innings to pick up his first win in seven weeks, leading Arizona over host Chicago.

Padres 3, Mets 2: Jacob deGrom's winless streak reached five games as the major league ERA leader was hurt by a pair of errors behind him, and San Diego beat host New York in a matchup of teams with the worst records in the National League.

Braves 12, Marlins 1: Freddie Freeman hit his 17th homer and also doubled for Atlanta, which totaled 16 hits to beat host Miami.

Brewers 6, Nationals 1: Christian Yelich had a bases-loaded triple and Jhoulys Chacin had another strong start to help host Milwaukee beat

Washington.

Athletics 15, Rangers 3: Jonathan Lucroy hit a grand slam off his former battery mate and surging Oakland beat host Texas for its 24th win in 31 games.

Twins 8, Blue Jays 3: Logan Morrison homered and had three RBIs, Max Kepler added a two-run blast and Minnesota beat host Toronto, snapping a three-game losing streak.

Tigers 5, Royals 4: Jim Ad-duci delivered a two-run double in the ninth and scored the go-ahead run on James McCann's double as Detroit beat host Kansas City.

White Sox 5, Angels 3: Jose Abreu homered and drove in two runs, leading Lucas Giolito and Chicago past host Los Angeles.