

STARS AND STRIPES®

Tuesday, March 13, 2018

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Probe: Navy intel chief took 'Fat Leonard' gifts

The Washington Post

After a four-year investigation, federal authorities concluded that the Navy's former intelligence chief accepted extravagant meals, cigars and other illicit gifts from a corrupt defense contractor known as "Fat Leonard," but they were unable to verify allegations that he also partied with prostitutes, new documents show.

The documents reveal that retired Vice Adm. Ted "Twig" Branch, a fighter pilot and aircraft carrier commander who became the steward of the Navy's secrets, enjoyed a decade-long friendship with Leonard Glenn Francis, a Singapore-based maritime tycoon who has pleaded guilty to bribing scores of military officers and defrauding the Navy of \$35 million.

The nature of their relationship had been a long-running mystery. In November 2013, the Navy announced on a Friday night that it had suspended Branch's access to classified material because he was under criminal investigation by the Justice Department for his ties to Francis. The contractor's firm held lucrative deals to provide supplies, fuel and port services to Navy vessels in Asia.

For years, Navy and Justice officials remained silent about the investigation, though in private Navy leaders expressed frustration that federal prosecutors were taking so long to review the case. In an unusual twist, the Navy allowed Branch to keep serving as its intelligence boss for more than 1,000 days even though he was barred from reading, seeing or hearing military secrets. Branch retired from the military in October 2016, but the investigation into his conduct continued.

Last September, on another

Friday night, the Navy announced in a brief statement that the Justice Department had referred the case to the Pentagon after finally deciding not to bring charges against the three-star admiral. Cryptically, Navy officials said they had taken "appropriate action" against Branch for unspecified wrongdoing but would not provide details and declared the case closed.

Navy files obtained by The Washington Post under the Freedom of Information Act shed some light on the matter for the first time. The Navy stripped Branch's name from the documents, but they contain other information that matches the admiral's military service record. Branch declined to comment but confirmed that the files pertained to his case.

The heavily redacted documents indicate that Branch first met Francis in 2000 when serving as an officer aboard the USS John C. Stennis, an aircraft carrier. During a port visit to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Branch attended a dinner paid for by Francis' firm, Glenn Defense Marine Asia, and improperly accepted a ceremonial dagger as a gift, according to the documents.

The Navy investigated allegations that Branch also attended a private party that evening hosted by Glenn Defense, and that the contractor gave him drinks, "the services of a prostitute" and a Malaysian pewter tea set. In the end, however, the Navy concluded that there was "insufficient evidence" to prove Branch was at the party with the prostitute or accepted the tea set.

Although the Navy cited Branch for four counts of misconduct, it does not appear that it imposed any penalties.

Tillerson is out at State; Trump picks Pompeo for post

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump unceremoniously dumped Secretary of State Rex Tillerson by tweet on Tuesday and picked CIA Director Mike Pompeo to take his place, abruptly ending Tillerson's turbulent tenure as America's top diplomat and escalating the administration's chaotic second-year shake-up.

Tillerson was ousted barely four hours after he returned from an Africa mission and with no face-to-face conversation with the president, the latest casualty of an unruly White House that has seen multiple top officials depart in recent weeks. Citing the Iran nuclear deal and other issues, Trump said he and Tillerson were "not really thinking the same."

"We disagreed on things," Trump told reporters at the White House — a diplomatic take on a fractious relationship that included reports that Tillerson had privately called the president a "moron."

Tillerson said Tuesday he'll delegate all responsibilities as secretary of state by the end of the day.

In an illustration of the gulf that has long separated Tillerson and Trump, the White House and the State Department vigorously disagreed about the circumstances of his firing.

Undersecretary of State Steve Goldstein and other State Department officials said Tuesday morning that Tillerson hadn't learned he was dismissed until

he saw Trump's early-morning tweet, and hadn't discussed it directly with Trump. Goldstein said the former Exxon Mobil CEO was "unaware of the reason" he was fired and "had had every intention of staying." Then Goldstein, hours after making those comments, was fired, too.

Multiple White House officials said that Tillerson had been informed of the decision Friday, while he was in Ethiopia. One official said chief of staff John Kelly had called Tillerson on Friday and again on Saturday to warn him that Trump was about to take imminent action if he did not resign and that a replacement had already been identified. Tillerson canceled his entire schedule that Saturday in Ethiopia, with the State Department telling reporters he was sick.

When Tillerson didn't step aside, Trump fired him, that official said.

All of the officials demanded anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak publicly.

"I think Rex will be much happier now," Trump said before flying to California.

Trump's change puts Pompeo, an ardent foe of the Iran nuclear deal, in charge of U.S. diplomacy. Trump faces another deadline in May to decide whether to remain in the Obama-era nuclear agreement that he campaigned aggressively against. Tillerson had been pursuing a delicate strategy to try to improve or augment it to Trump's liking.

Video shows Navy pilot's close encounter with 'UFO'

The Washington Post

For the third time in three months, a declassified Defense Department video shows U.S. F-18 Navy fighters seemingly encountering UFOs.

"Oh my gosh, dude," said one pilot in the video of their F/A-18 Super Hornet's 2015 encounter with the unusual object along the East Coast. The oval-shaped aircraft zipped with befuddling speed.

"Wow! What is that, man?" said another. "Look at that flying!"

The 35-second video, released by the privately owned media and scientific research company To the Stars Academy of Arts and Science, is the latest to suggest the existence of hovering, egg-shaped vessels since the Pentagon in December publicly acknowledged a program dedicated to the study of unidentified flying objects. While the Advanced Aviation Threat Identification Program ran from 2007 to 2012, those familiar with it say efforts are still made to further learn about these objects.

News of the mystery program

and the first two declassified videos of the strange objects introduced the possibility of extraterrestrial aircraft for the first time since the Air Force's Project Blue Book — records cataloguing more than 12,000 UFO sightings between 1947 and 1969, when the program was shut down. The program was unable to find "any technological developments or principles beyond the range of present-day scientific knowledge" and "no evidence indicating that sightings categorized as 'unidentified' are extraterrestrial vehicles," according to the Air Force.

The release of the videos was quietly arranged by intelligence officer Luis Elizondo, who headed the Advanced Aviation Threat Identification Program and left the Defense Department late last year. He told *The Washington Post's* Joby Warrick in December that the raw footage from encounters between fighter jets and "anomalous aerial vehicles," which is what the military calls UFOs, could help educate pilots and advance aviation safety.

One of the videos released in December is of former Navy

pilot Cmdr. David Fravor's 2004 encounter with a flying object about the size of his plane moving at a rapid pace, unlike anything else he'd seen in the air. He told the *Post's* Eli Rosenberg that he has not forgotten the incident. As Rosenberg reported:

"An order came in for [Fravor] to suspend the exercise and do some 'real-world tasking' about 60 miles west of their location, Fravor said. He said he was told by the command that there were some unidentified flying objects descending from 80,000 feet to 20,000 feet and disappearing; he said officials told him they had been tracking a couple dozen of these objects for a few weeks.

"When they arrived closer to the point, they saw the object, flying around a patch of white water in the ocean below.

"A white Tic Tac, about the same size as a Hornet, 40 feet long with no wings," Fravor described. "Just hanging close to the water."

The object created no rotor wash — the visible air turbulence left by the blades of a helicopter — he said, and began to mirror the pilots as they pursued it, before it vanished.

Members of MEU train in Romania and Israel

BY SCOTT WYLAND
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — A Marine Corps unit has members training simultaneously in Israel and Romania, two strategically important nations experiencing tensions with their neighbors.

The 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit is participating in two exercises that began last week — Juniper Cobra in Israel and Spring Storm in Romania. Both exercises are intended to sharpen tactical skills by training with foreign allies.

Juniper Cobra, the larger of the two, is focused on boosting missile defenses through computer simulations and on military drills on land and sea. About 2,500 U.S. military personnel from all services are taking part.

Marines trained with the Israeli military and practiced ship-to-shore movements from their amphibious assault vessel, the USS Iwo Jima.

The 26th MEU, based in North Carolina, was deployed to the 6th Fleet theater in January after assisting with hurricane disaster relief in Key West, Fla., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

For Spring Storm, Marines went to the Black Sea region, which has been tense since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. Relations between the U.S. and Moscow have grown more strained since the Navy installed a missile-defense station in Romania and began building another in Poland.

Marines trained with the Romanian army, shooting on a live-fire range, maneuvering in urban terrain and conducting a simulated amphibious assault, said Capt. Nancy Poggemeyer, a 26th MEU spokeswoman.

They also trained with a Romanian women's unit, which included using live fire and non-lethal weapons, patrolling and handling detainees, she said.

Officer pleads guilty in Marine recruit hazing

The Island Packet (Hilton Head Island, S.C.)

QUANTICO, Va. — The highest-ranking Marine implicated in the recruit abuse and hazing scandal following the death of a Muslim recruit pleaded guilty Monday during a court-martial at Marine Corps Base Quantico in Virginia to charges of dereliction of duty, making a false statement and conduct unbecoming an officer.

As part of a pretrial agreement, Lt. Col. Joshua Kissoon opted to retire early from the Marine Corps in addition to pleading guilty to the criminal charges. His rank could be downgraded at the time of his retirement, though that decision will be determined at a later time.

In addition, U.S. Navy judge Capt. Charles Purnell sentenced Kissoon with a reprimand and forfeiture of \$1,000 a month for five months, the latter

of which will be implemented in six months' time.

Kissoon's was the last of a string of courts-martial and disciplinary actions handed down by the Corps in the wake of the death of Taylor, Mich., native Raheel Siddiqui, 20, and the hazing probe it spawned at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C.

Siddiqui died following a nearly 40-foot fall from the third floor of his Parris Island barracks March 18, 2016. Moments before the fall, Siddiqui's senior drill instructor, Gunnery Sgt. Joseph Felix, made the recruit — who was reportedly ill at the time — perform a series of punitive sprints, during which Siddiqui collapsed to the floor. Felix was witnessed slapping Siddiqui forcefully in the face just before the recruit jumped up, ran out the back door of the barracks and fell over the stairwell railing to the ground below.

Russia, Iran complicate ISIS fight in Syria

By CLAUDIA GRISALES

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — In the fight against Islamic State in Syria, U.S. forces are facing an increasingly risky and convoluted battlefield that pits them against pro-regime forces supported by Russia and Iran, a top military commander told lawmakers Tuesday.

Army Gen. Joseph Votel, commander of U.S. Central Command, told a panel of senators that Russia and Iran are destabilizing the fight against ISIS in Syria. Several members of the Senate Armed Services Committee expressed concern that the U.S. role in Syria has become mired in the civil war fight to topple the Bashar Assad regime, which is being propped

up by Russia and Iran.

“Our mission in Syria is strictly focused on defeating ISIS,” Votel said during a hearing to examine CENTCOM’s budget request for the 2019 fiscal year. “The biggest threat in Syria right now is all the other instability that is taking place that is preventing the country from moving forward. ... Certainly Iran is an aspect of this but so is Russia.”

Votel also repeated a warning that he issued to a House panel last month that Russia is trying to play “both arsonist and firefighter,” fueling tensions among forces in Syria and then attempting to arbitrate disputes. Tensions with Russia continue to escalate in the region as media reports revealed Russian mercenaries attacked U.S. spe-

cial operation forces in eastern Syria in February.

Even as the U.N. issued a new cease-fire resolution in Syria last month, it appears to have had little effect, Votel has said.

Concerns in the region are further fueled by President Donald Trump’s threats to pull the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement, which was designed to temper Iran’s nuclear program.

Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., the ranking Democrat on the armed services committee, raised concern Tuesday about the potential withdrawal and the failing diplomacy in the region and elsewhere. Earlier in the day, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was dismissed from his post.

Tillerson had vowed sup-

port for the JCPOA agreement, which didn’t address all of Iran’s “bad behavior,” but at minimum addressed the nuclear weapons concerns, Reed said. This is critical for the United States in light of other nuclear threats that it faces from North Korea, he said.

“The president risks creating a foreign policy crisis by threatening to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action,” Reed said. “Let there be no doubt, Iran continues to be a state sponsor of terror and an abuser of human rights. Iran continues to destabilize the region through its development of ballistic missiles and support for proxies in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and elsewhere. The JCPOA was not intended to address all of Iran’s bad behavior, just the nuclear aspect.”

US using ISIS strategy to limit Taliban funding

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military is ratcheting up its attack on Taliban funding streams in Afghanistan, where troops are using a strategy that paid dividends in the battle against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the general in charge of U.S. Central Command said Tuesday.

“This is a lesson learned from Iraq and Syria, where we got serious about going after the funding streams that supported ISIS,” Army Gen. Joseph Votel said during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing. “We started to see an immediate impact, so that is exactly the intention here.”

As the war in Afghanistan enters its 17th year, the U.S. military is again building up in the country. With ISIS largely defeated in Iraq and Syria, the United States is shifting more assets from the region to the war effort in Afghanistan, Votel said. Part of the rejiggered U.S. strategy is to once again go after

a multibillion-dollar drug trade in Afghanistan that the Taliban has relied on for years to fund its operations. But the trade has proven resilient despite international efforts to neutralize it.

In 2017, opium production increased 87 percent from the previous year, according to U.N. data.

NATO has long been vexed by Afghanistan’s drug economy. While the trade benefits the Taliban, eliminating it also hurts impoverished poppy producers who have few viable sources of income. Some critics argue a heavy bombing campaign could increase popular support for the Taliban.

Votel said there are signs the strategy is “proving effective.”

“Here we are 17 years later. It remains to be seen,” said Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii.

The U.S.-led effort in Afghanistan has gone after the drug trade before, from targeting labs to funding efforts aimed at enticing farmers to grow alternative crops such as pomegranates.

Military looking at helmet cam rules after Niger attack

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. military leaders are considering new guidelines for the use of helmet cameras on the battlefield after Islamic State-linked fighters in Niger exploited footage taken by a fallen American soldier to make a propaganda video that highlighted the killing of four U.S. forces.

Weeks after the deadly October ambush, people linked to the militants shopped around the grisly footage to news organizations. When few expressed interest, the insurgents added music and propaganda, made a short movie and posted it online. Then it was written about in a number of news stories around the world.

ISIS’ capitalization on its fortunate find after the northern Niger battle highlighted the risk for the U.S. military of its men and women using the popular mini-cameras on missions. Experts say military officials are likely to respond with tighter controls.

“The need for clear guidance on the use of cameras in operations was amplified by the ambush in Niger,” said Navy Capt. Jason Salata, spokesman for Special Operations Command, based in Florida.

And U.S. Africa Command, which doesn’t have its own policy on the issue, is also doing a review to determine whether new guidelines are required, said Army Col. Mark Cheadle, spokesman for the command.

The goal is to ensure commanders understand the risks when they authorize helmet cameras or other video to be recorded. One idea centers on security measures that would make it harder for enemies who get their hands on such footage to use it.

“I think they’re doing the right thing by saying, ‘Well, we can’t limit its usage, we’ve got to limit its vulnerabilities, things like encrypting them,’” said Spencer Meredith, associate professor of national security at the National Defense University.

9 midshipmen face discipline over drugs

BY SARAH LARIMER
The Washington Post

Nine midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy are facing disciplinary action amid an investigation into alleged drug use, a spokesman said in a statement Monday.

The Naval Academy has started the administrative disciplinary process against five midshipmen for “illicit drug use,” Cmdr. David McKinney, Naval Academy public affairs officer, said in a statement. That

process has also begun for four midshipmen accused of failing to report drug use.

McKinney’s statement said the drugs allegedly used included cocaine, ketamine, ecstasy and mushrooms.

The investigation is ongoing, the statement said. It began after two midshipmen made a report to Naval Academy officials in November, according to the statement. The Naval Academy and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service have been involved in the probe.

Administrative discipline measures can include restrictions and the loss of privileges, as well as demerits and removal from the Naval Academy, according to McKinney’s statement.

The statement noted that military justice proceedings were still an option for officials, who were expected to make a decision on that after the NCIS review had wrapped up.

Those options could include court-martial.

“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,” the statement said.

The Naval Academy is in Annapolis, Md., and is home to about 4,400 students.

In 2011, several midshipmen were removed from campus for possessing or using a synthetic form of marijuana, which an investigation found had been widely used at the Naval Academy.

Russia demands samples of nerve agent from Britain

Associated Press

LONDON — Russia will only cooperate with Britain on the investigation into last week’s poisoning of an ex-Russian spy and his daughter if it receives samples of the nerve agent that is believed to have been used, Russia’s foreign minister said Tuesday.

Sergey Lavrov spoke in response to the British government’s demand for an explanation of the use of a military-grade nerve agent produced in Russia in the attack in the English city of Salisbury, which left Sergei Skripal, 66, and his daughter Yulia, 33, in critical condition.

Lavrov told reporters on Tuesday Moscow’s requests to see samples of the nerve agent have been turned down, which he called a violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which outlaws the production of chemical weapons. He insisted that Russia is “not to blame” for the poisoning.

He said Moscow is willing to cooperate with the probe but suggested that London would be “better off” complying with its international obligations “before putting forward ultimatums.”

It was not immediately clear if Lavrov’s comments constituted Russia’s official response to Britain’s demand for an explanation of the poisoning by the midnight Tuesday deadline.

Russian news agencies reported that the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday summoned the British ambassador in Moscow over the poisoning.

Republicans on House panel find no collusion in Russia probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans on the House Intelligence Committee have completed a draft report concluding there was no collusion or coordination between Donald Trump’s presidential campaign and Russia, a finding that pleased the White House but enraged Democrats who had not yet seen the document.

After a yearlong investigation, Texas Rep. Mike Conaway announced Monday that the committee has finished interviewing witnesses and would share the report with Democrats for the first time Tuesday. Conaway is the Republican leading the House probe, one of several investigations on Russian meddling in the 2016 elections.

“We found no evidence of collusion,” Conaway told reporters, suggesting that those who believe there was collusion are reading too many spy novels. “We found perhaps some bad judgment, inappropriate meetings, inappropriate judgment in taking meetings.”

Hours later, Trump tweeted his own headline of the report in excited capital letters: “THE HOUSE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE HAS, AFTER A 14 MONTH LONG IN-DEPTH INVESTIGATION, FOUND NO EVIDENCE OF COLLUSION OR COORDINATION BETWEEN THE TRUMP CAMPAIGN AND RUSSIA TO INFLUENCE THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.”

Conaway previewed some of the conclusions, but said the public will not see the report until Democrats have reviewed it and the intelligence community has decided what information can become public, a process that could take weeks. Democrats are expected to issue a separate report with far different conclusions.

In addition to the statement on coordination

with Russians, the draft challenges an assessment made after the 2016 election that Russian meddling was an effort to help Trump. The January 2017 assessment revealed that the FBI, CIA and NSA had concluded that the Russian government, at the direction of President Vladimir Putin, waged a covert influence campaign to interfere in the election with the goal of hurting Democrat Hillary Clinton’s candidacy and helping Trump’s campaign.

House Intelligence Committee officials said they spent hundreds of hours reviewing raw source material used by the intelligence services in the assessment and that it did not meet the appropriate standards to make the claim about helping Trump. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the intelligence material.

Conaway said there will be a second report just dealing with the intelligence assessment and its credibility.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence issued a statement soon after the GOP announcement, saying it stood by the intelligence community’s findings. DNI spokesman Brian Hale said the office will review the findings of the committee’s report.

According to Conaway, the report will agree with the intelligence assessment on most other details, including that Russians did meddle in the election. It will detail Russian cyberattacks on U.S. institutions during the election and the use of social media to sow discord. It will also show a pattern of Russian attacks on European allies — information that could be redacted in the final report. And it will blame officials in President Barack Obama’s administration for a “lackluster” response and look at leaks from the intelligence community to the media.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Girl Scouts targeted during cookie season

WA SEATTLE — Several Washington Girl Scouts troops have been targets of crime during this cookie sale season including an attempted armed robbery.

Tacoma police spokeswoman Loretta Cool said two men with a gun tried to rob Girl Scouts selling cookies in front of a Tacoma store Saturday evening.

She said the men fled the scene without stealing any cookies or cash.

Girl Scout officials said no one was physically harmed.

Troop leader Dina Dahl said her group lost \$60 after they were given three counterfeit bills. An Edmonds troop also lost \$100 to a counterfeit bill.

Group wedding set for Daytona Bike Week

FL DAYTONA BEACH — Looking to get hitched during Daytona Bike Week? There's a group wedding event for that.

The Daytona Beach News-Journal reported Volusia County Clerk of the Circuit Courts Laura Roth will don a leather jacket on Friday and marry all the biker couples who show up.

Officials remind couples that Florida residents must apply for a marriage license at least three days in advance. But if you're from out of state, no worries. You and your spouse-to-be can get your marriage license on the same day as the wedding.

Man rescued from mud after trench collapses

PA NORTH FRANKLIN — Authorities rescued a man who was trapped in chest-high mud for several

hours after a trench he was digging at a Pennsylvania home collapsed.

The man was digging a French drain at a North Franklin home Sunday and was facing an exterior wall of the home when the trench collapsed.

Emergency crews soon responded and eventually were able to free the man, who was conscious and could talk.

Collector donates blimp memorabilia to college

OH AKRON — An airship aficionado's memorabilia collection documenting the history of lighter-than-air flight is headed to the hometown of Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. and birthplace of its iconic blimps.

The University of Akron is accepting 100 boxes of rare toys, books, photos and videos from New York City resident Alan Gross, who bills himself as "Airship Al."

The collection includes relics from the height of the airship age and miniature versions of Goodyear blimps.

The university maintains historical archives of local industries to include lighter-than-air flight.

State roadway named for fallen Navy SEAL

IL CHILLICOTHE — A roadway in the central Illinois city of Chillicothe has been named in honor of a Navy SEAL killed in action last year.

The (Peoria) Journal Star reported that state lawmakers last week officially designated Illinois Route 29 as the Senior Chief Petty Officer William "Ryan" Owens Memorial Highway. Owens died last January while on a mission at an al-Qaida compound in Yemen. He was the first known U.S. com-

bat casualty of Donald Trump's presidency.

Signs are to be posted later this year to mark the honorary roadway.

Museum renovates World War II fire truck

LA NEW ORLEANS — The National World War II Museum is taking apart a fire engine made for the military home front in 1943, and expects to have it rolling and ready for display in two or three years.

The Ford-American LaFrance fire truck was donated in 2009 by an Alabama man who'd been told to either get it fixed and running or get it out of his yard.

It's currently a weathered red, but restoration manager Tom Czekanski said it will be repainted olive drab. He said that's the color all U.S. military fire trucks were painted after the attack on Pearl Harbor, because the red fire trucks were bombed first.

Casino wants to break record for vow renewals

NY NIAGARA FALLS — Niagara Falls is inviting married couples to re-tie the knot in a place already known as a honeymoon hotspot.

City promoters are putting together a Guinness World Records attempt at the largest marriage vow renewal ceremony. Couples are asked to register online for the June 23 event.

The current record stands at 1,201 couples set by Western Michigan University in 2016.

The Seneca Niagara Resort & Casino is organizing the event with help from the region's tourism agencies and will host a reception.

Niagara Falls is known to many as the "honeymoon capital of the world."

Woman slips out of handcuffs, bites deputy

FL TAMPA — Authorities say a Florida woman slipped out of her handcuffs and bit a deputy on the leg.

Hillsborough County Sheriff's deputies were arresting Alexander Roque, 19, for grand theft inside a food store this week. As they tried to handcuff him, authorities say Ellen Pride tried to reach her hand in his pocket. It's unclear what their relationship is or what she was looking for.

The Tampa Bay Times reported Pride became combative, wriggled out of her handcuffs and bit the deputy through his uniform pants, breaking the skin.

Deputies say Roque was placed in leg shackles and kicked the door of the patrol car so hard that it bowed away from the frame. He also allegedly threatened to fight and kill the officers.

Missing skier makes his own way home

VT BOLTON — A skier who went missing over the weekend in Vermont walked out of the woods to safety.

Vermont Search and Rescue officials said David Siegel, 28, went backcountry skiing Friday at Bolton Valley in Richmond, and was reported missing Saturday. WCAX-TV reported after two hours of searching, authorities received an unexpected call — informing them that Siegel was able to find his way out of the woods and into nearby Bolton.

Siegel told police he spent an uncomfortable night on Ricker Mountain after building a fire. Siegel says he was able to find a local hunter and call 911.

From wire reports

On a mission to provide objective reporting
to America's military, wherever they serve.
Read us online at www.stripes.com.

STARS AND STRIPES®

Perfect UConn gets top women's seed

Associated Press

NEW YORK — UConn is back in a familiar place — the No. 1 overall seed in the women's basketball NCAA Tournament.

Joining the Huskies as top seeds are Notre Dame, Louisville and Mississippi State.

The Huskies enter as the lone unbeaten team and will be vying for their 12th national championship. It's the ninth time that UConn has entered the NAAs undefeated, including last year when the Huskies went in as the overwhelming favorite before their 111-game winning streak ended with a loss to Mississippi State in the Final Four.

This year's Final Four is in Columbus, Ohio, and will take place on March 30. The national championship game is on Sunday, April 1.

Defending national champion South Carolina and A'ja Wilson await as a possible Elite Eight matchup for UConn in the Albany Regional. The Gamecocks are the No. 2 seed.

"What can you do? You have to beat some pretty good teams. Is it an impossible feat? Obviously not," South Carolina coach Dawn Staley said. "We saw that last year. If we're in the position where we have to play them, we're going to play them. We're going to give it our best shot and let the chips fall where they may."

The Gamecocks lost by 25 at home against UConn on Feb. 1. Florida State and Georgia

are the other top seeds in the Huskies' part of the bracket.

"Brackets are brackets. There are good teams in every bracket," UConn coach Geno Auriemma said. "There are great matchups in every bracket and it doesn't really matter at this stage where you're placed, what region, you're going to have to beat some really good teams. The schedule we play, I knew we'd get somebody two or three that we already played. We know that."

UConn, which has been a No. 1 seed every year since 2007, opens up against 16-seed Saint Francis (Pa.) on Saturday morning. All of the top four teams in each region host the opening two rounds at home.

Like the Huskies, the Irish are a No. 1 seed again. Notre Dame has been a top seed the last seven years. This might be one of coach Muffet McGraw's finest accomplishments as Notre Dame lost four pivotal players to injury, but only three games on the season. Two of those losses came to Louisville.

"A great reward for this team for what they've been through ... playing the toughest schedule and getting a No. 1 seed," McGraw said. "I'm so proud of this group and what they have accomplished. [Being a No. 1] is quite an accomplishment for what we've been through all year long."

The Irish are in the Spokane Regional and open up against Cal State Northridge on Friday.

If Notre Dame advances, the Irish would head out west to potentially face No. 2 Oregon.

"We've never been in the West bracket. I love playing Friday at 5. That's awesome," McGraw said.

The Ducks could stay out west and play in Spokane, where coach Kelly Graves spent many years as Gonzaga's coach. Ohio State and Texas A&M are the three and four seeds in that region.

Louisville won the Atlantic Coast Conference for the first time this season. The Cardinals open up against Boise State and are one of eight ACC teams in the field. The Southeastern Conference has seven teams in the tournament, while the Pac-12 and the Big Ten have six.

"We're really excited about the opportunity," Louisville coach Jeff Walz said. "We're excited to host the first two at home against two very good basketball teams. If we're fortunate enough to advance, we get the opportunity to play in Lexington, which would be great for our fans."

The Lexington Regional is stacked with former NCAA Tournament winners with Baylor the two-seed, Tennessee the three and Stanford the four. While the Lady Vols have been in the NCAA Tournament every year since it began in 1982, Nicholls State, Northern Colorado, Mercer and Seattle will be making their first appearances. Stanford potentially is head-

ed to Lexington for the third straight year if it can advance.

Mississippi State is a No. 1 seed for the first time in school history. The Bulldogs won their first 32 games this season before losing to South Carolina in the SEC title game. With most of their players back from last season's runner-up finish — including Morgan William, who hit the game-winner in overtime to knock off UConn — the Bulldogs hope to make another deep NCAA run.

The NCAA revealed Sunday night the final eight teams under consideration for the last four spots in the tournament. Buffalo, Creighton, Minnesota and Oklahoma got in. Purdue, Rutgers, Southern Cal and West Virginia were the first four teams out.

Oklahoma got in with a 16-14 record — the fewest wins for an at-large team since 2005 — a day after the Oklahoma men got an at-large berth with an 18-13 record and losses in 11 of their final 15 games.

"We spent almost seven hours on that decision of who those last four teams in and first four out were," NCAA women's basketball committee chair Rhonda Bennett said. "We went through those resumes and their body of work. We took as long as it took to get those teams into the bracket."

Bennett said Oklahoma's strength of schedule, which was second best in the country, was a key to its selection.

Despite one loss, Baylor falls short of No. 1

Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. — There were five teams vying for the four No. 1 seeds in the NCAA Tournament on Monday, and when the music stopped, Baylor was left without a chair.

The Lady Bears, who lost just one game all season (31-1), instead get a No. 2 seed in Lexington, a region that includes top-seeded Louisville, Tennessee and Stanford.

"We felt there was a razor-thin margin between Baylor and Notre Dame," said NCAA women's basketball committee chair Rhonda Bennett. "Notre Dame did

have the top strength of schedule in the country and they did have the best strength of schedule in the country and they had nine more top-50 wins than Baylor and those were the reason that the committee put Notre Dame on that one line and Baylor on that two line."

Baylor coach Kim Mulkey said she doesn't see it as that big a deal.

"We've won a national championship as a two seed, we've won it as a one seed," she said. "And really what does it matter? Because the one has to play the two. Mississippi State was a two last year and they played for the national championship. We

were a two seed in 2005 and we played and won the national championship."

Some other things to watch for in the women's tournament:

Mid majors: Dayton and Buffalo both made the tournament as at-large teams from mid-major conferences.

The Flyers (23-6) get in as a No. 9 seed, despite losing to George Washington in the Atlantic 10 semifinals and will play Marquette in the first round.

Buffalo (27-5) is an 11-seed after losing to Central Michigan in the MAC championship. The Bulls face South Florida in the first round in Tallahassee.

Which teams could wreck men's bracket?

Associated Press

Underdogs are a big part of NCAA Tournament lore and almost every year a few double-digit seeds make a surprising run deep into the bracket. Here are a few of the candidates — from No. 10 all the way to No. 16 — that could wreck some brackets over the next couple weeks:

No. 10 Providence

Providence is a program with a rich NCAA Tournament history, making Final Four appearances in 1973 and 1987. It also made a run to the Elite Eight in 1997 as a No. 10 seed. The Friars are playing some of their best basketball of the season, getting wins over Creighton and Xavier in the Big East Tournament. They've beaten some really good teams this year, including Xavier (twice) and Villanova.

Don't forget: Butler. The Bulldogs are no stranger to deep runs in the tournament, though the No. 10 seed is a little low compared with recent history.

No. 11 San Diego St.

The Aztecs are quite comfortable in the NCAA Tournament, winning games in the Big Dance in 2011, 2013, 2014 and 2015. They're also getting hot at the right time with nine straight wins, including an impressive run through the Mountain West Tournament. In nonconference play, a win over Gonzaga is the highlight.

Don't forget: There are a lot of candidates at this spot. UCLA and Syracuse have ample NCAA history. St. Bonaventure and Loyola of Chicago come from tough basketball conferences. Loyola beat Florida earlier this season.

No. 12 New Mexico St.

New Mexico State has won 28 games this season, including an eye-opening victory over sixth-ranked Miami during nonconference play. The last time the Aggies were a No. 12 seed was in 2010, when they narrowly lost to Michigan State 70-67.

Don't forget: Davidson. The Wildcats certainly have plenty of momentum. They earned a bid thanks to an Atlantic 10 Tournament champion-

ship and have won eight of their past nine games. The only loss was in triple overtime to St. Bonaventure.

No. 13 Buffalo

The Bulls rolled through the Mid-American Conference this year and had close losses against several NCAA Tournament teams, including Cincinnati, South Dakota State, St. Bonaventure and Syracuse. Buffalo made the Big Dance in 2015 and 2016, playing West Virginia and Miami tough before falling in both games. This could be the year the Bulls finally break through, though first-round opponent Arizona is a difficult one.

Don't forget: Marshall. The Thundering Herd are in the NCAAs for the first time since 1987 and have some momentum after winning the Conference USA Tournament.

No. 14 Bucknell

Bucknell, which won the Patriot League, had one of the biggest upsets in NCAA Tournament history when it knocked off Kansas as a No. 14 seed in 2005. The Bison also beat Arkansas in the 2006 tourna-

ment and last year as a No. 13 seed played West Virginia tough.

Don't forget: Stephen F. Austin. The Lumberjacks knocked off West Virginia in 2016 as a No. 14 seed.

No. 15 Georgia St.

Georgia State isn't a regular in the tournament, but the Panthers have made the most of their opportunities in the past. They beat Wisconsin in 2001 as a No. 11 seed and shocked Baylor 57-56 in 2015 as a No. 14 seed. The Panthers won the Sun Belt Tournament.

No. 16 Penn

Is this the year a No. 16 seed finally beats a No. 1? Probably not, but the Ivy League champion Quakers might have a fighting chance. They haven't won a game in the NCAA Tournament since beating Nebraska in 1994, but they have a history of competitive losses in the Big Dance and even made a Final Four back in 1979. The Ivy League is also responsible for one of the biggest 16-1 scares of all-time, when Georgetown narrowly beat Princeton 50-49 in 1989.

Venus beats sister Serena for the 1st time since 2014

Associated Press

INDIAN WELLS, Calif. — One sister is rusty, just beginning a comeback after having a baby. The other is rejuvenated at 37, back in the world's top 10.

An unwanted rivalry with roots going back 20 years had its latest chapter Monday night at the BNP Paribas Open, with Venus Williams beating sister Serena 6-3, 6-4 in the third round for her first win over her younger sibling since 2014.

It was their earliest meeting since a 17-year-old Venus beat 16-year-old Serena in the second round of the 1998 Australian Open. They played Monday night for the first time since last year's Australian Open final, when a pregnant Serena won her 23rd Grand Slam title.

"That's going to be a huge story, maybe the story of the year," men's No. 1 Roger Federer said of Serena's comeback.

"Hopefully, she decides to play a lot and enjoy herself in the process and get back to who knows how high? It almost doesn't matter, but it would just be amazing to see her do it now."

But this night belonged to Aunt Venus.

She closed out the 1½-hour match on her second match point when Serena's forehand service return sailed long. It was one of Serena's 41 unforced errors, including 17 on the forehand side.

"I'm just lucky that I've played more matches than her right now," Venus said on court afterward. "She just came roaring back. I had chances for the match to be over, but it wasn't."

Venus broke Serena at love in the sixth game for a 4-2 lead in the first set. She emphatically closed out the 36-minute set with back-to-back aces that clocked 108 mph and 120 mph.

"I definitely know her well, but she definitely played a little bit better than she normally does," Serena said. "She served very consistently. She just did everything great."

Venus raced out to leads of 3-0 and 5-2 in the second set. Serena's shot went wide to set up her sister's first match point. But Serena cracked a backhand winner down the line for deuce. Venus' forehand was long and she double-faulted away the game to make it 5-3.

Serena held to trail 5-4 with an ace and a clean winner.

Venus faced two break points in the next game, but got bailed out on Serena's consecutive forehand errors to get to deuce. Venus hung on from there to end their 29th meeting.

"Missing shots that I never miss, and so close," Serena said. "At least they're in the margin. I'm getting there. It's

not exactly where I want to be, but I'll get there eventually."

Serena still owns a 17-12 advantage overall, although Venus evened their WTA Tour head-to-head meetings at 7-7.

"I really abhor every time we play, but I do enjoy the battle when I'm out there," Serena said last weekend. "It's just afterwards I don't like it as much."

It was obvious at the net when they greeted each other with a one-arm hug and neither smiled. Venus did her usual victory pirouette, but still didn't smile.

A stone-faced Serena exited the court to cheers, pointing her right index finger in the air.

Serena was back on the WTA Tour for the first time since ending a 14-month absence during which she gave birth to daughter Alexis Jr. and married Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian, who sat courtside.

NBA roundup

Lillard helps Blazers win 10th straight

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — As the Portland Trail Blazers keep winning, Damian Lillard should keep climbing in the MVP conversation, according to Miami coach Erik Spoelstra.

Lillard had 32 points and 10 assists, and the Trail Blazers beat the Heat 115-99 on Monday night for their 10th straight victory.

Jusuf Nurkic added 27 points and 16 rebounds for the Blazers, who have the longest current winning streak in the NBA and a two-game lead over Oklahoma City for the No. 3 seed in

the Western Conference.

After Lillard put the finishing touches on the win, Spoelstra said Portland's All-Star deserves a little more recognition league-wide.

"I don't know if there is any other player in this league right now that is playing at a higher level than Lillard," Spoelstra said. "You know the names in the MVP conversation. The way he's playing right now and winning, he deserves to be in that conversation as well."

The Heat used an 18-2 run to start the fourth quarter to trim a 19-point deficit to three, but

Lillard took charge for the Blazers. The All-Star guard broke Portland's drought of over five minutes with a three-pointer midway through the period to put Portland back in front by six, and the Blazers stayed safely ahead from there.

Rockets 109, Spurs 93: James Harden scored 16 of his 28 points in the third quarter to allow host Houston to build a huge lead and sail to an easy victory.

The NBA's leading scorer took a little while to get going a night after sitting out against Dallas with a sore left knee and had just 12 points at halftime.

Bucks 121, Grizzlies 103:

Khris Middleton scored 24 points, Giannis Antetokounmpo added 20 and Milwaukee sent host Memphis to its 18th consecutive loss.

Brandon Jennings, signed to a 10-day contract by Milwaukee on Sunday, finished two rebounds short of a triple-double with 16 points and 12 assists.

Thunder 106, Kings 101: Russell Westbrook scored 17 points and notched his 20th triple-double of the season to help host Oklahoma City.

Westbrook had 10 rebounds and 11 assists in the 99th triple-double of his career.

NHL roundup

Ovechkin scores 600th career goal in Capitals' victory

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Make it 600 goals and counting for Alex Ovechkin, and give the Washington Capitals two more points for the tough playoff race in the Eastern Conference.

Ovechkin scored twice in another historic performance and Evgeny Kuznetsov had the overtime winner as the Capitals returned to first place by beating the Winnipeg Jets 3-2 on Monday night.

The 32-year-old Ovechkin scored during a 5-on-3 power play in the first period and then put back a rebound past Connor Hellebuyck for No. 600 in the second. The Russian winger became the 20th player and fourth-fastest in NHL history to the milestone and is on pace to lead the league in goals for the seventh time with 42 on the season.

"Of course it's special," he said. "You can see when I score the goal, everybody tried to find me, everybody tried to look at me. I knew if I'm gonna have another one, I'm gonna score."

Ovechkin continued a season-long trend of scoring a high

volume of goals for the Capitals, who lost significant talent from back-to-back Presidents' Trophy-winning teams. He has roughly a fifth of Washington's goals this season and needed to be on his game against Patrik Laine and Winnipeg.

Laine entered with an 11-game point streak and scored his 41st goal of the season to make it 16 in his past 12. Nikolaj Ehlers also scored a 4-on-4 goal for Winnipeg, which got 40 saves from Connor Hellebuyck.

Golden Knights 3, Flyers 2: Marc-Andre Fleury made 38 saves to become the 13th goalie in NHL history with 400 career victories, and Ryan Carpenter scored the winning goal for visiting Vegas with 2:40 left.

Erik Haula and William Karlsson also scored for the Pacific Division leaders, who completed a 4-1 road trip.

Blue Jackets 5, Canadiens 2: Seth Jones was the driving force behind two power-play goals in the first period, helping host Columbus to its fifth consecutive victory.

Alexander Wennberg had a

goal and three assists for the Blue Jackets, and Nick Foligno, Boone Jenner and Ian Cole also scored.

Rangers 6, Hurricanes 3: Jimmy Vesey scored three times, Mats Zuccarello had two goals and host New York stopped a three-game slide.

Vladislav Namestnikov also scored for the Rangers, who earned their first home win since Feb. 9. Pavel Buchnevich and Mika Zibanejad each had three assists.

Senators 5, Panthers 3: Matt Duchene scored twice, including the go-ahead goal with three minutes left, and Ottawa got the road win.

Magnus Paajarvi also had two goals for Ottawa, and Jean-Gabriel Pageau added one late. Craig Anderson made 35 saves, and Erik Karlsson and Mike Hoffman each added two assists.

Sharks 5, Red Wings 3: Eric Fehr scored his first goal with his new team and San Jose closed a six-game homestand by handing Detroit its seventh straight loss.

Joonas Donskoi, Kevin La-

banc and Timo Meier also scored to help the Sharks win for the fourth time on the homestand and remain in second place in the Pacific Division. Chris Tierney added an empty-net goal to seal it.

Kings 3, Canucks 0: Jonathan Quick made 35 saves for his fourth shutout of the season and host Los Angeles moved back into playoff position with a win over Vancouver.

Tyler Toffoli, Anze Kopitar and Tanner Pearson scored for the Kings, who jumped into third place in the Pacific Division with their fifth victory in seven games. Los Angeles is one point ahead of Anaheim in the division standings.

Blues 4, Ducks 2: Ivan Barbashev had a goal and an assist to help visiting St. Louis beat Anaheim.

Robert Bortuzzo, Vladimir Sobotka and Patrik Berglund also scored for the Blues, who have won consecutive games after losing nine of 10. They are one point behind Anaheim and Colorado for the final playoff spot in a crowded Western Conference race.