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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Air Force gives iconic warthog plane new life

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Warthog is sitting pretty.

Once on the brink of forced retirement, the A-10 attack plane with the ungainly shape and odd nickname has been given new life, spared by Air Force leaders who have reversed the Obama administration's view of the plane as an unaffordable extra in what had been a time of tight budgets.

In the 2018 Pentagon budget plan sent to Congress this week, the Air Force proposed to keep all 283 A-10s flying for the foreseeable future.

Three years ago, the Pentagon proposed scrapping the fleet for what it estimated would be \$3.5 billion in savings over five years. Congress said

no.

The following year, the military tried again but said the retirement would not be final until 2019. Congress again said no.

Last year, officials backed away a bit further, indicating retirement was still the best option but that it could be put off until 2022.

Now the retirement push is over, and the Warthog's future appears secure.

"The world has changed," said Maj. Gen. James F. Martin Jr., the Air Force budget deputy, in explaining decisions to keep aircraft once deemed expendable.

The Air Force has similarly dropped plans to retire the iconic U-2 spy plane amid prospects for bigger budgets under

President Donald Trump. It also reflects the relentless pace of operations for combat aircraft and surveillance and reconnaissance planes that feed intelligence data to war commanders.

The service had complained for years that its inventory of aircraft was getting dangerously small and old. Gen. Mark Welsh, who retired as the top Air Force officer last year, was fond of describing the service as having 12 fleets of aircraft that qualify for antique license plates in the state of Virginia.

The A-10 is a special case. Rep. Martha McSally, a Republican from Arizona who flew the A-10 in combat and commanded a squadron in Afghanistan, speaks of it with obvious affection.

"The A-10 is this badass airplane with a big gun on it," she said she told Trump in a recent conversation, explaining why the Warthog is unlike any other attack aircraft.

The "big gun" to which she refers is a seven-barrel Gatling gun that is nine feet long and fires 30mm armor-piercing shells at a rate of 3,900 rounds per minute. Also armed with Maverick missiles, the A-10 is effective not only in a conventional battle against tanks and other armored vehicles. It also provides close-air support for Iraqi and other U.S. partner forces taking on Islamic State fighters in the deserts of Iraq and Syria.

A number of A-10s fly missions in Syria from Incirlik air base in Turkey.

Marine officers drugged, robbed after pub crawl

Miami Herald

Three married U.S. Marine officers have found themselves under investigation for a night in February that went off the rails in Bogota, Colombia, involving allegations they went drinking with some local women, were slipped drugs, robbed of U.S. property and landed in a hospital emergency room.

The men may have fallen prey to what is known as "burundanga poisoning," according to a report on the investigation conducted by the Marine Corps Forces, South, a Southern Command subsidiary, and obtained by the Miami Herald.

The report recommended that Marine Col. Roger T. McDuffie, a Harrier pilot who serves as the chief of operations at MARFOR SOUTH; Maj. Andrew L. Mueller, described as a theater security cooperation planner; and Maj. Mauricio Saenz, an exercise planner, face "appropriate administrative or judicial proceedings."

That means they could be charged with "conduct unbecoming an officer" at the very least. Marine Col. Michael Farrell, the MARFOR SOUTH chief of staff, wrote the report for Marine Brig. Gen. Kevin Iiams,

who was the commander at the time of the episode but left the decision on what action to take to Marine Maj. Gen. David Bellon, who replaced Iiams on Tuesday.

The trio ventured into a working-class section of Bogota that is off limits to Pentagon personnel, violated a 1 a.m. curfew and brought four women back to their hotel rooms.

McDuffie was the senior officer on the trip for the Colombia Staff Planners Working Group starting Jan. 31 at the Jazz Blue Doors Hotel. They met Colombian counterparts to plan for a meeting to map out future U.S. Marine-Colombia operations.

The larger group of Marines started their night with drinks at the home of a Marine attache assigned to the U.S. Embassy. They moved on to the Ugly American Bar & Grill and then hit the Colombian Pub, according to the report. The other Marines headed back to their hotel. But the trio picked up four local women and moved on, ending up at a bar in a section of Bogota that is off limits to the Marines.

Somewhere along the way, according to the report, two of the men were slipped benzodi-

azepine before returning to their hotel with the women. Someone stole Mueller's work laptop and iPhone 6 as well as McDuffie's iPhone 6, all government-issued. Mueller's personal iPad and iPhone were also stolen, the report said, as were McDuffie's personal iPhone and iPod and cash.

"It is impossible to know at what point Col. McDuffie and Maj. Mueller were poisoned by their companions or when the drugs took effect," Farrell wrote in the report. "It is indisputable however that Col. McDuffie and Maj. Mueller placed themselves in a situation that directly resulted in being drugged, robbed, hospitalized and the loss of U.S. government property."

Saenz apparently never blacked out and wasn't drugged, according to the report. But he joined the other two as they "associated with women other than their spouses throughout the night, to include imbibing for a prolonged period of time, dancing with the women in public and being with them privately in their hotel rooms," the investigation found. "This conduct is prejudicial to good order and discipline and constitutes conduct unbecoming an officer."

Vets cringe at Trump sub disclosure

Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Some veterans of the Navy's "Silent Service" are cringing at news that President Donald Trump disclosed the whereabouts of two submarines that are part of an undersea force that prides itself on stealth.

While Trump did not give the subs' precise location, his telling the president of the Philippines of the submarines' presence startled many in a community that has abided by the adage "Loose lips sink ships."

T. Michael Bircumshaw, a retired Navy master chief and former commander of the United States Submarine Veterans Inc., said telling anyone anything about where U.S. submarines are is "pure, unadulterated, criminal stupidity."

Security experts say such disclosures are rare. One breach that's bitterly remembered in the submarine force came in 1943 when Kentucky Rep. Andrew J. May revealed submarines were escaping

Japanese attacks because the charges they were dropping were exploding at too shallow of a depth, Bircumshaw noted. Japanese forces adjusted, and U.S. submarines were hit.

During an April 29 call, Trump revealed the U.S. had two nuclear submarines near North Korea and did not want to use them, according to a leaked transcript of the conversation with Rodrigo Duterte.

"I didn't see any foul there, and those people making it a foul are a bit ridiculous," said retired Vice Adm. Al Konetzni. "We have submarines operating, thank goodness, we have them operating in all of the trouble spots of the world."

Thomas Fedyszyn, a professor of national security affairs at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, R.I., could not recall a U.S. president ever making such a disclosure.

The Navy generally does not describe where submarines are patrolling until after they've returned home or they're calling on a port. It announced a visit

by the USS Michigan to Busan, South Korea, days before Trump's call with Duterte.

Deen Brown, who conducted submarine war patrols for the Navy during World War II, said he was not concerned about the disclosure, and the subs may not even be where Trump said they were.

"But even if they are there, they're not going to be there very long," said Brown, 94, of Oakdale, Conn.

Bud Atkins, who served on 10 submarines and retired as a command master chief, was incredulous. He said Trump should "keep his mouth shut, to put it bluntly."

"I couldn't believe it. I could not believe it," said Atkins, also of Oakdale.

U.S. submarines carrying nuclear warheads patrol the oceans to deter a nuclear attack. Their locations are kept secret to ensure the U.S. can strike if attacked. Attack submarines also need to stay hidden for their missions, from destroying enemy ships to sending special

operations forces ashore and collecting intelligence.

While opinions varied about the significance of Trump's disclosure, the submariners all spoke of stealth as a principle advantage.

"We spend all those years training to keep quiet under the water. We build machines to do specifically that," said submarine veteran Ray Hamilton, of New London, Conn. "And we stay hidden, until the president says, 'Hey we're hiding them over there!'"

James H. Patton Jr., a retired Navy captain, said it should come as no surprise that there are submarines operating in that part of the world, and Trump didn't give a precise location or ship names. But he wondered whether it was an intentional statement vetted by his advisers, perhaps to reassure allies, or something spontaneous.

"If he was blurting out information he knew, that's worrisome," said Patton. "If it was a consciously thought-out statement, I have no issue."

Suddenly there's another LCS in Trump's budget plan

Bloomberg

The White House budget office and the Navy are rushing to find an extra \$600 million to buy a second littoral combat ship after including only one in the budget President Donald Trump proposed last week.

Allison Stiller, the Navy's acting weapons buyer, disclosed the unusual budget maneuver Wednesday at a House Armed Services seapower panel whose members are sympathetic to adding more of the vessels made in competing versions by Lockheed Martin and Austal. A second ship would guarantee that each company will get to build one, keeping both of their shipyards running.

Referring to the Office of Management and Budget, she told reporters that adding the ship is "OMB's prerogative."

The Littoral Combat Ship, designed for missions in shallow, coastal waters, has drawn criticism from Pentagon testing officials and some lawmakers over its reliability and its vulnerability in combat. But the Navy supports the ship, which would help Trump reach his pledge for a 350-ship

Navy, up from today's fleet of 275 vessels that can be deployed.

The budget office "will be publishing a budget errata that adds another LCS to the FY 2018 budget request," Lt. Col. Eric Badger, a Pentagon spokesman, said in a statement. "The total request is two LCS ships. The Navy will identify" where the funds will come from, he said.

"The printed budget request included one LCS because the facts and need for a second came to us so late in the process," OMB spokeswoman Meghan Burris said. "We understand that Congress is moving quickly to put together FY18 bills, and wanted to get the change in front of them as quickly as possible."

Burris said "we are still working through the funding, and the official communication to Congress will be delivered upon completion" of that process.

The Trump budget proposal sent to Congress on Tuesday requested \$636 million for one littoral combat ship. Instead of a second, the Pentagon and the Navy had agreed to go for two DDG-51 Flight III destroyers

rather than one.

Pentagon officials were surprised when OMB decided to add a second littoral combat ship, too.

Hours before Stiller's testimony, Acting Navy Secretary Sean Stackley told the Senate defense appropriations panel that the budget sought just one littoral ship because "in 2018, budget-wise, we don't have the capacity to grow in terms of procurement and modernization."

The Navy says it's important to maintain the workforces of both Lockheed in Wisconsin and Austal in Alabama until the Navy is ready to pick one of the contractors in mid-2020 to build a better-armed frigate as the successor to the planned fleet of as many as 30 littoral combat ships.

To OMB, the decision is about "not wanting either Wisconsin or Alabama — where the LCSs are built and both Trump-backing states — to suffer," Mark Cancian, a budget analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies who handled defense issues when he worked for the budget office, said in an email.

Illness led to recruit's death at Parris Island

The Washington Post

In a dark room of bunk beds at Marine Corps boot camp came a cry for help: "Recruit down! Recruit down!" Zachary Boland, 18, was convulsing uncontrollably in his bunk, and could not be resuscitated. He was declared dead about 45 minutes later at a nearby hospital.

The Nov. 4 death of the former high school football player and Eagle Scout shocked members of his platoon and prompted renewed scrutiny of Parris Island, S.C., the iconic training ground for enlisted Marines. The incident marked the second time in less than a year that a recruit at Parris Island died amid allegations that numerous drill instructors have hazed or abused those they are training.

But a Marine Corps investigation of the Boland case found an entirely different set of circumstances, according to documents obtained by The Washington Post through the Freedom of Information Act.

Boland, of Madison, Ala., died due to complications from pneumonia after concealing his illness from drill instructors, the investigation found.

Boland's parents have stayed quiet about their son's death for months in part due to leanness about all the attention the hazing allegations have received, they said in an interview.

But they do not blame the Marine Corps for the death of their son and now want to encourage other recruits to pay attention to their health when they go

through boot camp.

"You hear over and over that the fastest way off the island is graduation," said Boland's mother, Sam. "You know, basically just telling them to get through it: 'The fastest way off the island is graduation.' But that's really not the fastest way. They get off that island really fast if they're in ... a casket, and these kids need to understand that if they get dropped, it's OK. It's not a sign of weakness to tell someone you're sick. It's not a bad thing to ask for help."

Documents from the case and the Boland family describe a complicated set of circumstances that conspired against the recruit. The death ended the military career of a teen who had been preparing to be a Marine since age 11, and was interested in becoming a Marine Raider who carried out special operations, his parents said.

Boland was originally scheduled to report to boot camp in November, said his father, Bob.

He reported several weeks early when a slot opened up in another class, but he was then sidelined after reporting soreness and swelling in his left leg on Sept. 23 during his initial processing as a recruit, the documents said.

Doctors diagnosed him with the bacterial skin infection cellulitis, administered antibiotics and released him six days later after also testing him at nearby Naval Hospital Beaufort for potential blood clots. By then, the training platoon Boland would

have joined had moved on, and he had to start over.

Boland's training was further delayed by Hurricane Matthew, which postponed the date of his last checkup with doctors about his cellulitis because of a week-long evacuation of recruits beginning Oct. 5.

Boland was able to join a new platoon of recruits in late October, about a month after first arriving on base.

Boot camp is notoriously a breeding ground for germs. So when Boland began coughing regularly in the first week of training with his new platoon, it didn't raise any concerns.

But there were signs of illness. Several recruits told investigators after Boland's death that he had vomited on a lunch tray about a week before his death, and asked other recruits not to tell any drill instructors.

They assumed that Boland did not want to seek medical attention that would force him to start over in training again.

On Nov. 1 — three days before his death — Boland also failed a timed two-mile run, even though other recruits said they had considered him a fairly strong runner, according to military documents.

Drill instructors interviewed after Boland's death said he appeared to be an average recruit, and was "not one of the 'problem' recruits" in his platoon, the investigation found.

One drill instructor said he assumed Boland struggled because at 6-foot-2 and about 228 pounds,

he was one of the larger recruits and may not have stretched well or eaten enough.

Bob Boland, an Army veteran who went on to a career with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, said those descriptions "sound like Zach."

He repeatedly told his son before he shipped to boot camp that flying "under the radar" and giving his best effort was the best way to graduate from boot camp quickly.

"I know Zachary, and the last thing he was probably thinking was, 'Oh, I don't want to get held back again,'" he said. "He's thinking that 'I'm not that sick and I can probably get through.'"

A spokesman at Parris Island, Capt. Gregory Carroll, said the investigation found drill instructors did not deviate from rules they are meant to follow.

Recruits are encouraged to seek medical care any time, regardless of the training they are about to do or whether a recruit passes or fails an event.

After Boland's death, Marine officials invited the family to visit Parris Island. The Bolands did so late last year, meeting privately with Boland's fellow recruits.

The family gave Marines on the base special coins made in memory of their son, and the recruits showed them Boland's bunk, which they turned into a shrine in his honor.

The Bolands attended the graduation ceremony for their son's platoon a week later.

Mattis references UK attack at West Point

Associated Press

WEST POINT, N.Y. — The deaths of 22 people at a concert hall in Manchester, England, this week shows the need for institutions like the U.S. Military Academy to produce soldiers willing to battle those who would commit terrorism, U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Saturday.

"Manchester's tragic loss underscores the purpose of your years of study and training at this elite school," Mattis told the 950 graduating cadets at West Point. "We must never permit murderers to define our time or warp our sense of normal. This is

not normal."

Twenty-two people were killed in a bombing at a concert hall in Manchester on Monday. Authorities said the 22-year-old bomber who struck the Ariana Grande concert was known to security services because of his radical views and had strong links to Libya.

"You will drive home a salient point," Mattis told the cadets. "That free men and women will volunteer to fight, ethically and fiercely, to defend our experiment that you and I call, simply, 'America.'"

The retired four-star Marine general became defense secretary Jan. 20, hours after

President Donald Trump was sworn in.

He spoke on a sun-drenched day at the military academy's football stadium in New York's Hudson Valley, but spoke of "storm clouds gathering" around the world.

"Our enemies are watching," he said. "By your commitment, you will prove the enemy wrong. Dead wrong."

He drew loud cheers when he added: "We Americans are not made of cotton candy."

Three brothers are among the cadets. Noah, Sumner and Cole Ogrydziak of Nederland, Texas, entered the academy in 2013. The last time three siblings graduated together was 1985.

Trump to decide on Paris climate deal next week

Associated Press

TAORMINA, Sicily — President Donald Trump says he'll make a final decision next week on whether the U.S. will stay in the Paris climate agreement.

Trump's surprise announcement, in the form of a tweet on the final day of his lengthy international trip, comes after Trump declined to commit to staying in a sweeping climate deal, refusing to give into intense international pressure.

Earlier Saturday, the other six members of the G-7, a group of some of the world's wealthiest nations, voted to abide by the Paris climate agreement, according to a person familiar with the talks. The person spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the matter before the formal announcement.

Trump was cajoled for three days — first in Brussels at meetings of NATO and the European Union, then in Sicily for G-7 — but will leave Italy without making clear where he stands. Under the G-7 agreement, the Trump administration will be given more time to consider whether it will remain committed to the 2015 Paris deal to rein in greenhouse gas emissions.

Backing out of the climate accord had been a central plank of Trump's campaign and aides have been exploring whether they can adjust the framework of the deal even if they don't opt out entirely. Other G-7 nations leaned heavily on Trump to stay

in the climate deal, with German Chancellor Angela Merkel saying "we put forward very many arguments."

Trump, who will return to the White House under a cloud of scandal, started Saturday at the second day of the G-7 summit in Sicily, bringing to an end a nine-day trip that started in Saudi Arabia and Israel before moving on to three European stops.

The trip largely has gone off without a major misstep, with the administration touting the president's efforts to birth a new coalition to fight terrorism, while admonishing partners in an old alliance to pay their fair share.

Trump also touted a renewed commitment by NATO's members to spend more on defense.

Before returning to Washington, Trump finished the day in Sicily, including a meeting with small African nations and a G-7 leader lunch and a speech to U.S. servicemembers at Naval Air Station Sigonella.

At Sigonella, Trump recapped his first foreign trip and saluted military personnel. Trump said that "you are protecting us and we will always remember that."

As their commander in chief, he noted his desire to boost military spending and promised them "my complete and unshakeable support."

Trump also previewed remarks he's scheduled to deliver at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va., on Memorial Day.

Russia diplomat: Kushner sought secret channel

The Washington Post

Jared Kushner and Russia's ambassador to Washington discussed the possibility of setting up a secret and secure communications channel between Donald Trump's transition team and the Kremlin, using Russian diplomatic facilities in an apparent move to shield their pre-inauguration discussions from monitoring, according to U.S. officials briefed on intelligence reports.

Ambassador Sergey Kislyak reported to his superiors in Moscow that Kushner, son-in-law of and confidant to then-President-elect Trump, made the proposal during a meeting on Dec. 1 or 2 at Trump Tower, according to intercepted Russian communications that were reviewed by U.S. officials. Kislyak said Kushner suggested using Russian diplomatic facilities in the U.S. for the communications.

The meeting also was attended by Michael Flynn, Trump's first national security adviser.

The White House disclosed the meeting only in March, playing down its significance. But people familiar with the matter say the FBI now considers the encounter, as well as another meeting Kushner had with a Russian banker, to be of investigative interest.

Kislyak reportedly was taken aback by the suggestion of allowing an American to use Russian communications gear at its embassy or consulate — a proposal that would have car-

ried security risks for Moscow as well as the Trump team.

The White House declined to comment. Robert Kelner, a lawyer for Flynn, declined to comment. The Russian Embassy did not respond to requests for comment.

Russia at times feeds false information into communication streams it suspects are monitored as a way of sowing misinformation and confusion among U.S. analysts. But officials said that it's unclear what Kislyak would have had to gain by falsely characterizing his contacts with Kushner to Moscow.

Kushner's apparent interest in establishing a secret channel with Moscow, rather than relying on U.S. government systems, has added to the intrigue surrounding the Trump administration's relationship with Russia.

To some officials, it also reflects a staggering naivete.

Current and former U.S. intelligence officials said that although Russian diplomats have secure means of communicating with Moscow, Kushner's apparent request for access to such channels was extraordinary.

The discussion of a secret channel adds to a broader pattern of efforts by Trump's closest advisers to obscure their contacts with Russian counterparts. Trump's first national security adviser, Flynn, was forced to resign after a series of false statements about his conversations with Kislyak.

No link found between cancer, conditions at Guantanamo

Associated Press

MIAMI — U.S. military health experts found no link between several cases of cancer and environmental conditions in an area used for legal proceedings at the Guantanamo Bay detention center, according to a report released Thursday by the Navy.

The report found no evidence that people working in Camp Justice were exposed to carcinogens above standards set by the

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It said there were five cases of cancer among 700 people who worked at the legal compound between 2004 and 2016, but could not trace them to conditions at the Navy base in southeastern Cuba. The report was prepared by the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center.

Four attorneys who have worked at Camp Justice filed suit in April against the Department of Defense, challenging an earlier finding that the area is safe. Their

lawyer, Daniel Small, said he was reviewing the new report and could not comment further. The Defense Department has asked a judge to dismiss the suit.

Camp Justice is a compound of temporary and permanent structures at a former airfield on the base that includes two courtrooms for use in legal proceedings against prisoners facing trial by military commission, including five men charged with planning and assisting the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Part of highway closed after naked man struck

AZ PHOENIX — Part of southbound Interstate in north Phoenix was closed for nearly two hours after a naked man was hit by a car.

Department of Public Safety spokesman Raul Garcia said the man reportedly was involved in an altercation at a nearby hotel before he went onto the freeway, laid down on traffic lanes and then was hit by a car after he stood up.

Garcia said the man's injuries are serious.

State to let whale rot on beach

WA TACOMA — Washington State Parks rangers plan to leave a dead gray whale to decay on the beach near Twin Harbors State Park after it washed ashore Tuesday.

The Olympian reported that in a statement, state parks officials said, "Visitors can expect strong, unpleasant smells as the carcass rots over the summer months."

Parks officials said the 30-foot-long juvenile female, believed to be 1 to 2 years old, was healthy before dying of a traumatic injury.

The whale's carcass, south of Westport in Grays Harbor County, is in the Washington state Seashore Conservation Area, which covers much of the state's western coastline.

Experts advised State Parks officials to leave the body to decompose naturally so it could serve as a food source for other wildlife.

State Parks officials advise people not to take parts of the rotting whale because it's a federal offense.

DUI charges after crash into fire station

ME ARUNDEL — Authorities said a driver was charged after a crash into part of a Maine fire station where firefighters and medical technicians sleep.

Police accused Kastara Ylonen, 25, of Biddeford, of operating under the influence of intoxicants in the crash, which happened at about 10:30 p.m. Thursday at the Arundel Fire Station.

York County Sheriff William King Jr. said it's not known if any first responders were in the area of the building when the crash happened, but no injuries were reported.

Damage to the building is estimated at \$50,000.

New restaurant deluged by \$300,000 water bill

NC CHARLOTTE — Two brothers launching a new restaurant in North Carolina found themselves deluged by a \$308,000 water bill. But now their water worries are over.

The Charlotte Observer reported that Faraz and Faisal Syed received the enormous bill in March, about two months before the Lazeez Mediterranean Grill had opened in that city. They say it covered just 13 days of service.

The brothers had the restaurant checked by a plumber and there were no leaks.

They also say water was cut off three times before service was restored Wednesday, two weeks after the restaurant had opened.

Charlotte Water spokesman Cam Coley wouldn't discuss specifics of what had happened, but said the issue had been resolved.

Bear with head stuck in jug for weeks rescued

NY KIRKWOOD — A black bear spotted for weeks in rural New York state with his head trapped in a plastic food jug has been rescued from his plight.

State wildlife officers near Binghamton received a call April 24 from a woman who said a black bear with a bucket stuck on its head was in her yard.

Other residents reported seeing the same bear.

State wildlife biologists captured three bears in traps over the next weeks but none was what had been dubbed the "bucket head" bear.

A homeowner called the Department of Environmental Conservation's Kirkwood office after spotting the bear, and wildlife biologists tracked it to a nearby property May 19.

They tranquilized the animal, removed the container from its head, and later released it into woods.

Cops put crack cocaine in 'lost and found'

PA WILKES-BARRE — Police in northeastern Pennsylvania said they've put about \$1,600 worth of crack cocaine in their "lost and found box" in hopes of reuniting the drug with its rightful owner.

The (Wilkes-Barre) Citizens' Voice reported the drug was found in the parking lot of a shopping center outside Wilkes-Barre.

Wilkes-Barre Township police posted about the find on the department's Facebook page. In a post headlined "FOUND ITEM," police quipped the drug had been placed in the department's "lost and found box" and invited the owner to

come retrieve it.

The post requested a picture of the crack's owner holding the drug, along with ID and a "written statement containing your claim to the crack."

Woman finds python while doing laundry

FL COCOA — Another day, another python in Florida.

This time a woman found a python wrapped around her pet rat's blanket while she was doing laundry.

Juanita Tedesco called police after spotting the snake as she rinsed blankets Wednesday.

She says she believes it was trying to get to her pet rat Princess.

Cocoa police Lt. Mike Delatorre told WESH the snake is likely a pet that slithered away from its home.

It was the third python sighting in Florida in a week.

Church renovation finds new visitors — bees

NM ALBUQUERQUE — Two pastors renovating and working to reopen a historic New Mexico church found out they already had visitors — bees.

KOB-TV in Albuquerque, N.M., reported that Dee Brown and his wife, Bernadine, discovered the bees while working to remodel Emerge Church ABQ.

Both are pastors of the church targeting Albuquerque's South Valley's African American community.

The bees had swarmed one side of the church and threatened renovations.

A local bee rescuer offered to remove the honey makers for free.

From wire reports

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All eyes on Spain's Alonso for Indy 500

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — One of IndyCar's all-time greats will lead the field to green at the Indianapolis 500.

All eyes, though, will be one row behind Scott Dixon as Fernando Alonso makes his debut in "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing." Alonso has never raced on an oval before, never raced an Indy car and hasn't done a rolling start in 20 years — and that was in a go-kart.

So, yeah, Alonso lingered long after all the other competitors in the final driver meeting before Sunday's race. The two-time Formula One champion peppered race director Brian Barnhart with questions for a solid 15 minutes before riding off through Gasoline Alley on his skateboard.

He's as ready as he can possibly be, and ranked fifth — the fastest rookie — on the speed chart during the final day of practice. Alonso has enjoyed every minute at Indy, but he's not letting the hype around his quest to win racing's version of the Triple Crown — he's already won at Monaco in F1 and

would like to someday run Le Mans — distract him from his mission.

"There is still no emotion. Until Monday, there are no emotions allowed to enter your mind," Alonso said. "The mind is so focused on the race. There is no space for the emotions right now."

That's the intensity it will take to win the 101st running of the Indy 500. Still, it is Dixon who should be the favorite to win.

The New Zealander had the fastest qualifying effort in 21 years to win the pole, and he'd like to drink the victor's milk for the second time. Dixon won this race in 2008, he's a four-time series champion and ranks fourth on the career win list behind only A.J. Foyt, Mario and Michael Andretti.

"In my generation, he's the best," said Tony Kanaan, the 2013 winner of the Indy 500 and Dixon's teammate.

It doesn't hurt that Dixon this year is in a Honda, which has dominated the buildup to Sunday over rival Chevrolet. The Chevy camp — particularly Team Penske — has been

dramatically overshadowed so far but finally showed better speed Friday. Three-time Indy 500 winner Helio Castroneves, veteran of the Penske camp, was fastest on Carb Day.

"We keep working, digging, obviously finding a way," Castroneves said. "We're going to fight extremely hard out there and showing a little bit of speed certainly. We're going for the big one on Sunday."

Team Penske has four of the top five drivers in the IndyCar standings, has won the last three races of the season and added two-time 500 winner Juan Pablo Montoya to its lineup.

Still, a win by a Chevy driver might be considered an upset based on how strong Honda has been. Although reliability on the Honda engines has been spotty — James Hinchcliffe had a failure during Friday's practice — the speed is there and Honda won last year with Alexander Rossi, a rookie who coasted across the finish line on fumes.

Rossi is part of the massive effort from Andretti Autosport, which expanded to six

cars when it took on Alonso last month. Most teams might have flinched at taking on such a heavy workload for the biggest race of the year, but the Andretti camp did not back down.

"It has to make sense from a business standpoint," said Marco Andretti, son of the team owner and a driver eager to win his first Indy 500. "At first I was like, 'Man, six cars?' Then I found out who it was, and I was like, 'Well, we have to do that.' It's a lot for the team. But it's all good things, man. It's good for the sport."

There has certainly been a buzz around the Brickyard for Alonso, and worldwide television ratings should get a significant boost. IndyCar drivers are smart enough to understand that Alonso is good for all of them now.

With no clear favorite, questions about Honda's reliability, Penske's power and Alonso's lack of experience in this race, there could be a surprise winner in a race Roger Penske believes could be even more exciting than last year's historic 100th running.

30 is the new 25 for tennis heading into French Open

Associated Press

The very top of men's tennis has never been this old.

For the first time in the history of the ATP computer rankings, which date to the early 1970s, the men sitting at Nos. 1-5 are all 30 or older, the latest sign that the current crop of stars has enviable staying power.

It's also the latest reason to wonder when a new face will emerge among the elite, because there eventually will come a point — yes, there really will — when the group that was once known as the Big 3, then came to be called the Big 4, and now is considered by some to be a Big 5, is no longer running the sport.

With the French Open start-

ing Sunday, No. 1 Andy Murray, No. 2 Novak Djokovic, No. 3 Stan Wawrinka and No. 4 Rafael Nadal (No. 5 Roger Federer is skipping Paris) all have designs on another major trophy. But could someone such as Alexander Zverev, who just turned 20 last month, or the supremely talented — and supremely enigmatic — Nick Kyrgios, 22, or Dominic Thiem, 23, make a breakthrough for the up-and-coming kids?

Federer is 35, Wawrinka is 32, Nadal turns 31 on June 3, and Djokovic and Murray turned 30 this month. That quintet has won 46 of the last 48 Grand Slam titles, a dozen-year stretch of dominance.

Zverev's victory over Djokovic in the Italian Open final last weekend might have symbol-

ized coming change. Zverev was the first man born in the 1990s to win a Masters 1000 title, the youngest champ since Djokovic about a decade ago.

"It's nice ... for the tour, as well, to have a few younger guys, few younger girls, as well, to be able to play at the top," said Zverev, who is German. "As I said many times, unfortunately for tennis and unfortunately for the spectators, the top four cannot play forever. So it's good that younger players are starting to get through."

There is a similar situation in women's tennis, where Serena Williams has kept winning Grand Slam titles into her 30s and is the oldest No. 1 in WTA history. Current No. 1 Angelique Kerber was the oldest woman to make her debut at

that spot.

"Tennis has changed in the last 15 years ... since they slowed down surfaces and there is not much difference in speeds of the surfaces," said Patrick Mouratoglou, Williams' coach. "You rarely have many easy shots now. You have to work the points much more, and one of the consequences is you need to be physically much better and able to play long rallies." He points out that when Wimbledon's grass courts, for example, used to play much faster than they do now, a player could succeed there hitting aces by the dozen and going for one winner after another, because "you don't need the same maturity and understanding of tactics" that are required today.

Unbeaten Wood helps Dodgers blank Cubs

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Alex Wood has turned a substitute stint into a full-time gig in the rotation, and isn't showing any sign of letting go.

He allowed two hits over five scoreless innings, Chase Utley and Adrian Gonzalez homered, and the Los Angeles Dodgers defeated the Chicago Cubs 4-0 on Friday night in the series opener.

"It was a pretty beautiful game, for sure," Wood said.

He extended his career-high scoreless innings streak to 25¹/₃, longest in the majors this season. The left-hander began the season in the bullpen and has capitalized after getting a chance to fill in for some of the Dodgers' injured starters.

"I definitely feel confident now," Wood said. "The consistency of my stuff has been there and that's where my confidence is coming from."

Wood (6-0) struck out eight and walked two.

"I thought it was somewhat of a victory getting Wood out after

five," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "He started out hot. His numbers were high, but then all of a sudden his velocity came back down. But their bullpen was that good."

After Wood departed, Pedro Baez and Chris Hatcher combined to toss four hitless innings.

The Dodgers have won nine of their last 11 at home, and their 19-8 home record is second-best in the majors.

Jake Arrieta (5-4) continued to struggle for the World Series champions, whose three-game winning streak ended. The right-hander gave up four runs and five hits in six innings, struck out nine and walked one.

"For the most part, it was really good, it really was," he said. "Just a couple of mistakes came back to get me."

Arrieta had blanked the Dodgers in 16 consecutive innings and won his last six regular-season starts in California, but they jumped all over his fastball.

Utley homered for the sec-

ond straight game leading off the third for a 1-0 lead.

"The one that Utley hit out was on the corner," Arrieta said. "That's a good piece of hitting."

The Dodgers made it 2-0 in the fourth. Corey Seager drew a leadoff walk and came home on Yasmani Grandal's double to deep left center. Seager's helmet went flying off as he rounded third and narrowly beat the tag at the plate with a head-first slide.

Gonzalez extended the lead to 4-0 on his two-run shot that scored Seager with two outs in the sixth.

Chicago got its only two hits back-to-back in the second on singles by Jason Heyward and Javier Baez. The Cubs had hit 26 home runs in their previous 14 games.

Gonzo's drought ends: Gonzalez's homer was his first of the season in the team's 49th game, a rare drought for the slugger. His last homer came in Game 2 of the National League Championship Series last October against the Cubs, who

eliminated the Dodgers in six games. "I knew I'd hit a homer before the season ended," he said. "My body feels good, so my swing can do things. It's still a work in progress, but obviously it's trending in the right direction. If I'm healthy, I feel like I can do things. If not, I'm fighting myself." Earlier in the month, Gonzalez was on the disabled list for the first time in his long career.

Trainer's room

Dodgers: OF Andrew Toles (right knee surgery) and LHP Scott Kazmir (left hip strain) were transferred to the 60-day disabled list. Toles had ACL surgery this week, while Kazmir hasn't pitched this season. Manager Dave Roberts said Kazmir is rehabbing in Arizona, where his velocity has reached 90-92 mph off the mound. ... INF Rob Segedin, on the DL since April 19 because of a right big toe strain, will have right wrist surgery Wednesday.

Scherzer pitches into 9th, Nationals defeat Padres

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Max Scherzer struck out 13 and gave up three hits over 8²/₃ innings, leading the Washington Nationals over the San Diego Padres 5-1 on Friday.

Bryce Harper, Trea Turner and Michael A. Taylor homered for the Nationals.

Scherzer (5-3) got pulled by acting manager Chris Speier in the ninth, and Koda Glover got his fourth save. Speier is filling in while manager Dusty Baker is away.

Rockies 10, Cardinals 0: Rookie Antonio Senzatela threw eight sharp innings to grab a share of the major league lead in wins and Charlie Blackmon had a homer and RBI single as part of an eight-run eighth for host Colorado.

Fresh off a 7-3 road swing, the Rockies kept right on rolling behind Senzatela, who joins Clayton Kershaw, Dallas Keuchel and Ervin Santana with seven victories.

Senzatela (7-1) scattered five hits and showed plenty of poise as the 22-year-old escaped trouble courtesy of four double plays.

Astros 2, Orioles 0: Jake Marisnick and Carlos Beltran each homered for host Houston, backing a solid start by Joe Musgrove.

Blue Jays 7, Rangers 6: Devon Travis hit his second career grand slam and host Toronto posted its fourth straight win.

Mets 8, Pirates 1: At Pittsburgh, Neil Walker homered twice in his return to his hometown and Jacob deGrom gave New York's bullpen a needed rest.

Rays 5, Twins 2: Chris Archer struck out 11 while pitching into the eighth inning and visiting Tampa Bay hit three home runs.

Marlins 8, Angels 5: Giancarlo Stanton homered off the retaining wall behind the center-field fence, a shot estimated at 460 feet, to lead host Miami.

Athletics 4, Yankees 1: Masahiro Tanaka struck out a career-high 13 to rebound from the worst stretch of his major league career but wound up a hard-luck loser when reliever Tyler Clippard's wild pickoff throw sparked a go-ahead, two-run eighth inning for visiting Oakland.

White Sox 8, Tigers 2: Melky Cabrera homered and had four RBIs, Matt David-

son went deep and Avisail Garcia drove in three runs to lead Chicago over visiting Detroit after the first game of their double-header was postponed because of rain.

Red Sox 3, Mariners 0: Eduardo Rodriguez pitched six scoreless innings and host Boston won its season-high fifth in a row.

Royals 6, Indians 4: Jorge Bonifacio's two-run double off Andrew Miller broke an eighth-inning tie and lifted visiting Kansas City.

Reds 5, Phillies 2: At Philadelphia, Tim Adleman tossed eight innings of one-hit ball and Adam Duvall and Scott Schebler homered for Cincinnati.

Diamondbacks 4, Brewers 2 (10): Jake Lamb homered in the fourth inning and hit an RBI double in his team's two-run 10th, and Arizona extended its winning streak to five games with a victory over host Milwaukee.

Braves 2, Giants 0: Jaime Garcia pitched 6²/₃ innings and drove in the first run of the game with an RBI single in the seventh inning to lead Atlanta over host San Francisco.

Subban has found his way in Nashville

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — It has been an extraordinary 11 months for P.K. Subban.

The defenseman moved from the Eastern Conference to the Western Conference. Left his native Canada to live in the American South. Blended in with new teammates, created a new home and learned a new system of money, too.

Oh, and along the way the former star for the Montreal Canadiens played a key role in Nashville's stirring run to the Stanley Cup Final.

The best way to sum up Subban's approach? C'est la vie.

"I just tried to have the right attitude when change comes my way," Subban said. "I think when you have an open mind, an open mind is like a gold mine. You just have an open mind, you can only go up from there regardless of what comes your way and just always try to approach things in a positive way."

The Canadiens and Predators shocked the NHL last June 29 when Nashville swapped captain Shea Weber for Subban

in a rare one-for-one trade of All-Star defensemen. Adding Subban's offensive skills immediately made the Predators a popular pick to be right where they are now as the Western Conference champions.

The stylish Subban has as much flair on the ice with his goal celebrations as off with his hats and stylish suits. The Predators and their fans have embraced all of it.

"When it happened, I came in here with the right attitude and just wanted to be a part of this team and do whatever I can do to help a team win," Subban said.

The 28-year-old Subban has done that and more. The former Norris Trophy winner was voted the All-Star captain for the Central Division, and he scored 40 points in 66 games during the regular season.

Paired with Mattias Ekholm this postseason, Subban has helped suffocate some of the NHL's most potent scorers. Chicago captain Jonathan Toews scored only one goal against Nashville in a first-round sweep that caught the league's attention that Nashville was for

real. Vladimir Tarasenko had three points for St. Louis in the second round, but his two goals came in Game 2 of a six-game loss to the Predators.

In the conference finals, Anaheim captain Ryan Getzlaf came in with eight goals and 15 points. He never scored a goal against Nashville and managed only four assists.

Next up for Subban? Defending the likes of Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and the rest of the Penguins. Game 1 is Monday night in Pittsburgh.

"He and Mattias Ekholm have really formed a chemistry together, and that takes time," Nashville coach Peter Laviolette said. "But they've formed a chemistry together that makes them just a real difficult pair to play against."

General manager David Poile praised Subban with being very coachable and fitting in, which some critics said could never happen. Poile said Subban probably has given up a little bit of his offensive tendencies to play the role Nashville needs him to right now.

"Everybody wants to see what they think they want to

see, rushing the puck up the ice or getting a big goal, which he's certainly got some big goals," Poile said. "But nobody wants to talk about his defense. It's probably not as exciting, probably not as sexy. ... He is tremendous from a defensive standpoint."

Only Ottawa's Erik Karlsson (16) and teammate Ryan Ellis (11) have more points this postseason among defensemen than Subban, who is tied with another teammate Roman Josi with 10. Subban is averaging 25 minutes, 52 seconds of ice time and trails team-leader Josi by only four seconds.

Nashville goaltender Pekka Rinne said Subban is an easy defenseman to work with, always wanting the puck. He also thinks Subban has adjusted well with the Predators after taking some time to mesh at the beginning of the season.

Canadian media and his fans from Montreal have made trips to Nashville to talk with and see the charming defenseman this season. Subban said his parents have seen Predators' flags hanging in his hometown of Toronto.

Warriors' Green isn't bored playing Cavs for third time

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Draymond Green just doesn't see the logic: How could three straight NBA Finals between Golden State and Cleveland possibly be boring?

Even if the NBA's top two teams have steamrolled their way right to the place everybody figured they'd be when the season started all those months ago.

Green said people should appreciate the talent and the level of these teams, before it's no longer.

"I think it's a great thing for the league, contrary to popular belief where everyone says it's boring," Green said Friday. "I think maybe people just fail to realize that you just have two

great teams and don't appreciate that. Everyone wants to say, 'Ah, man, this is boring' and this, that and the other, but you usually don't appreciate something until you don't have it anymore. And so, I think maybe there's just a lack of appreciation for greatness. But then when you look at a situation, most people have never reached greatness. So maybe there's just not an understanding of what you're watching. I think you've found two great teams. We've played that way, and maybe people don't appreciate it because of a blowout or because of a sweep.

"But people may want to be careful, because I think right now you're witnessing greatness."

LeBron James called the

Warriors a "juggernaut," and Green said "there's always a mutual respect."

It was Green who was suspended for Game 5 of last year's Finals for a swipe at James' groin — and Golden State wound up squandering a 3-1 series lead and chance at a repeat title.

Warriors owner Joe Lacob said publicly he wanted another chance at the Cavs because of unfinished business from 2016.

"It was taken, they took it," Green said. "We want to go take back a championship, that's just the nature of a competitor and I think that's the mindset of everyone in this organization to go take back what they took from us."

Now, the Warriors are 12-0 this postseason, well-rested

and riding the momentum of three straight sweeps against Portland, Utah and San Antonio. The story lines are plenty, including a few fresh ones, such as acting Golden State coach Mike Brown going against the team he coached not once but twice.

"It's one of those things I have no control over, it is what it is," said Brown, filling in for the ailing Steve Kerr. "Just kind of take it in stride."

Golden State already is the first team to begin a postseason 12-0, and the Warriors would love to go unbeaten the entire way — as daunting a challenge as it would be to do so against King James and Co.

"I hope it's four. We'd love it if we could win in four games, that would be great."