

STARS AND STRIPES®

Tuesday, November 28, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Report contradicts deployment numbers

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Defense Department officials were pressed Monday to explain inconsistencies between their statements about troop counts in multiple war zones and statistics made publicly available on government-operated websites, discrepancies that raise questions about the deployment of U.S. forces worldwide.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has made assurances his agency would be more forthcoming about how many troops he has committed to operations in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, but so far those changes have not taken effect.

Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Rob Manning said Monday there were about 500 U.S. troops in Syria, a number far short of the 1,720 listed in the most recent quarterly report furnished by the Defense Department Manpower Data Center. In Iraq, the number is 8,892 troops — substantially higher

than the 5,000 Manning said are currently there.

The center's latest worldwide deployment data, accurate as of Sept. 30, was released on its website Nov. 17.

Speaking to the Pentagon press corps, Manning offered explanations why the numbers can be different.

They can fluctuate, he said, as troops rotate in and out of a region. Sometimes, he added, political sensitivities and agreements might limit the public disclosure of troop levels in certain countries. Security concerns also make it risky to tabulate precisely how many troops are stationed in any given place, he said.

The Defense Department data do not include such disclaimers.

The issue has taken on new significance since four American soldiers were killed Oct. 4 in Niger, which hosts a U.S. drone base and relies on U.S. Special Forces for training and guidance in its struggle with Islamic militants.

A year ago, the Defense Department's public data disclosed the presence of just seven troops in Niger, a number that remained largely unchanged until this month, when the latest data report jumped to 536. Earlier this year, in a disclosure to Congress, the White House indicated there were 645 American troops in the country. Immediately following the deadly ambush, military officials said there were 800 troops in Niger.

The Defense Department's publicly disclosed data, which track U.S. personnel levels in dozens of countries, are "not meant to represent an accurate accounting of troops deployed to any particular region," said Eric Pahon, a Pentagon spokesman. That may change soon, he said, as the Pentagon takes a "hard look" at the utility and value of the manpower data it provides in its quarterly reports.

The 500 figure officials cite as the U.S. troop presence in Syria is the "force management level," a cap set by President

Barack Obama's administration to limit the amount of U.S. personnel there and in Iraq, where operations against Islamic State have been conducted primarily by local forces supported by U.S. firepower and advice.

Obama was reluctant to deepen the U.S. commitment there, according to Todd Harrison, a defense analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank. The preference for a small U.S. military presence — limited early on to Special Operations troops, attack helicopters and artillery units — led to loose definitions and fuzzy accounting, he said.

"They didn't count all boots on the ground," he said, adding that officials in the Trump administration are still grappling with earlier practices that do not give a clear picture of where U.S. troops are deployed.

"It's given the public and Congress a false sense over how overstretched the military really is," he said.

Democrats shun Trump meeting following tweet

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Congress' top Democratic leaders abruptly pulled out of a planned meeting Tuesday with President Donald Trump after he attacked them on Twitter, casting doubt on the prospects for a quick agreement to avert a government shutdown at the end of next week.

Trump tweeted early Tuesday that "I don't see a deal!" with Senate Minority leader Charles Schumer and top House Democrat Nancy Pelosi, of California, and accused them of being soft on crime, taxes and illegal immigration.

Schumer and Pelosi shot back

by canceling the afternoon White House meeting and asking instead for immediate talks with top Republican leaders in Congress.

"Given that the president doesn't see a deal between Democrats and the White House, we believe the best path forward is to continue negotiating with our Republican counterparts in Congress instead," Schumer, D-N.Y., and Pelosi said in a statement. "Rather than going to the White House for a show meeting that won't result in an agreement, we've asked Leader McConnell and Speaker Ryan to meet this afternoon."

A spokeswoman for Speaker

Paul Ryan, R-Wis., said there were no changes in his schedule to announce.

Congress faces a Dec. 8 deadline to pass stopgap legislation to keep the government open and a slew of other unfinished legislation.

It was hoped the White House meeting might lay a foundation to keep the government running and set a path for a year-end spending package to give both the Pentagon and domestic agencies relief from a budget freeze.

Trump is still seeking his first big legislative win in Congress, and his attack on Democrats came as his marquee tax bill

faced turbulence as well. The White House and top GOP leaders have work to do to get their tax bill in shape before a hoped-for vote later this week.

On a separate track from taxes is a multi-layered negotiation over several issues. Hoped-for increases for the Pentagon and domestic agencies are at the center, but a host of other issues are in the mix as well.

A temporary spending bill expires Dec. 8 and another is needed to prevent a government shutdown. Hurricane aid weighs in the balance, and Democrats are pressing for legislative protections for immigrants known as "Dreamers."

Russian jet makes 'unsafe' intercept of US Navy plane

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A Russian fighter crossed within 50 feet of a U.S. surveillance aircraft flying over the Black Sea, blasting its afterburners in a dangerous maneuver in front of the American aircraft, military officials said Tuesday.

The encounter on Saturday between the Sukhoi Su-30 fighter and the P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol jet lasted about 25 minutes and culminated with the Russian plane cutting in front of the P-8A, U.S. European Command said.

"The commander of the aircraft determined it was unsafe," said Maj. Juan Martinez, a EUCOM spokesman.

The Su-30's afterburners created a stream of turbulence that

caused the U.S. plane to tilt into a 15-degree roll, Martinez said.

The P-8A, based on Boeing's 737-800 airliner, lacks the maneuverability of the much smaller Su-30 fighter jet.

Navy P-8s, which often fly out of the Navy's air station in Sigonella, Italy, are specialized in anti-submarine warfare and electronic support measures.

U.S. military officials have repeatedly expressed concern about Russian submarine activity in the Black Sea and Mediterranean.

Encounters between Russian and U.S. military aircraft are fairly routine around the Baltic states and the Black Sea. In most cases, intercepts happen without incident as aircraft follow a set of air safety protocols.

However, U.S. and NATO of-

ficials have complained that the Russians sometime engage in unpredictable, aggressive maneuvers that include flying without transponders turned on.

In June, a Russian fighter flew toward a U.S. Air Force surveillance plane over the Baltic Sea with a "high rate of closure speed and poor control of the aircraft," EUCOM said at the time. Last year, a Russian fighter barrel-rolled over the top of an Air Force RC-135 flying in international airspace in a maneuver that the military said put the U.S. crew at risk.

Saturday's encounter also occurred in international airspace, EUCOM said. The Navy P-8A was observing international flight rules and was flying with its transponder on, Martinez said.

McCain back on course to Japan

By TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The collision-damaged USS John S. McCain is finally on its way to Japan after repair and weather issues forced a diversion to the Philippines last month.

The guided-missile destroyer — which collided with a commercial oil tanker near Singapore over the summer, killing 10 sailors — was en route to Yokosuka aboard the heavy lift vessel MV Treasure on Oct. 22 when it changed course to Subic Bay, Philippines. The decision was based on new cracks discovered in the ship's hull and severe weather caused by Typhoon Lan, the Navy said.

In Subic Bay, technicians determined that the McCain needed additional blocks to support it aboard the Treasure, said a Navy statement issued Tuesday. Once the warship arrives in Yokosuka — its homeport — it will undergo a lengthy repair process to bring it back into service.

Ship Repair Facility-Japan Regional Maintenance Center "is making preparations to begin remediation and repair efforts immediately once the ship is dockside," Lt. Cmdr. Sandra Wyman, of SRF-JRMC, said in the statement. "The project will be one of the largest SRF has undertaken."

The McCain's sister ship, the USS Fitzgerald, is being sent to Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Miss., for repairs after seven sailors were killed in a June 17 collision with a merchant vessel off Japan.

The crippled USS Fitzgerald departed Yokosuka on Nov. 23 but was forced to return Monday after suffering a pair of punctures while being loaded onto a heavy lift vessel for its trip stateside.

Fighter jet squadrons move to Iwakuni

By TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Three USS Ronald Reagan fighter jet squadrons arrived at their new home Tuesday, the latest step in transferring the bulk of Naval Air Facility Atsugi's Carrier Air Wing 5 to Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni.

Strike Fighter Squadrons 115 and 195 and Electronic Attack Squadron 141 turned up at Iwakuni after participating in the carrier strike group's routine fall patrol, the Navy said in a statement Tuesday.

Capt. Michael Wosje, Carrier Air Wing 5's commander, said the arrival of the first F/A-18 squadrons is an important step forward for the phased relocation.

"Today represents years of hard work and coordination between the U.S. and Japanese governments and we are looking forward to enjoying the hospitality and building new friendships with our Iwakuni hosts," he said in a statement.

In February, Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron 125, previously based at Norfolk, Va., arrived at Iwakuni to replace Atsugi-based Airborne Early Warning Squadron 115 — the first major step in relocating seven of Carrier Air Wing

5's nine squadrons from Atsugi to Iwakuni.

Two helicopter squadrons will remain at Atsugi. The Navy has yet to announce a timetable for the relocations of Strike Fighter Squadrons 27 and 102 and Fleet Logistics Support Squadron 30.

The relocation is part of the Navy's goal of sending all of Atsugi's fixed-wing aircraft to Iwakuni. The move, directed in May 2006 as part of the U.S.-Japan Roadmap for Realignment, was to be completed by 2014.

"The arrival of these initial Japan-based elements moves us ever closer to the culmination of years of planning and preparation here under the Defense Policy Review Initiative," Iwakuni's commander, Marine Col. Rick Fuerst, said in the statement. "This transformation was designed to both fulfill the United States' strategic vision for its rebalance in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, and to further strengthen the responsiveness and potency of our role in the U.S.-Japan security alliance."

Iwakuni will undergo a physical transformation because of the relocation. The base is slated to get new schools, a commissary, a Marine Corps Exchange, family and unaccompanied housing, hangars, a gym, a childcare center, a theater, administrative buildings, a gas station and runway modifications.

Report: N. Korea launches ballistic missile

Stars and Stripes

North Korea fired a ballistic missile early Wednesday in its first launch since it fired a missile over Japan in mid-September, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported.

The agency quoted the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff as saying the missile was fired from South Pyongan province in an eastward direction.

No further details were released.

U.S. and Japanese officials had been expecting another test since signals monitoring indicated the North Koreans were preparing for one.

North Korea had accelerated its missile-testing program this year but suspended those tests after a missile flew over Japan's Hokkaido Island on Sept. 15.

Until the September pause the North Koreans had launched 22 missiles during 15 tests since February. They included an intercontinental ballistic missile, launched on July 4, which North Korea claimed could strike a target in the U.S.

On Sept. 3 North Korea detonated what was widely believed to be a hydrogen bomb and threatened another test over the Pacific. Last week, North Korea denounced President Donald Trump's decision to put Pyongyang back on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, which paves the way for additional sanctions against the communist state.

Hawaii brings back nuke attack sirens

The Washington Post

As nuclear tensions between North Korea and the United States grow, officials in Hawaii are walking a delicate line — quietly planning for a catastrophe while assuring residents and tourists alike that they can keep sipping beverages from coconuts without alarm.

The “without alarm” part gets harder this week.

That is when the government is set to bring back a statewide nuclear attack siren, a relic of the Cold War that will notify islanders that a missile is headed toward them. Officials will test the system for the first time on Friday just before lunchtime, according to the Honolulu Star-Advertiser.

If the alarm goes off at any other time, by the way, it means that residents have 15 minutes before a nuclear bomb destroys Hawaii as we know it. The tests will be conducted on the first business day of every month for the foreseeable future.

The siren tests are an audible example of the growing strife with North Korea, which has spooked other communities in the still-hypothetical line of fire. Guam distributed a pamphlet on nuclear attack preparedness that encouraged people to avoid using conditioner, “as it will bind the toxins to your hair.” A 16-page bulletin released by emergency management authorities in California warned people to beware of radioactive pets.

Hawaii's warnings about a possible nuclear attack have been understandably grim.

“There will be no time to call our loved ones, pick up our kids and find a designated shelter,”

Vern Miyagi, administrator of the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency, said in an interview with the Star-Advertiser.

Miyagi is a mainstay in many emergency management videos, including the latest one about the nuclear siren. He wears an Aloha shirt, speaks in a soft, even tone and is accompanied by the gentle strumming of a ukulele as he essentially describes the last sound Hawaiians will hear as a ballistic missile streaks toward the 50th state.

The video wasn't the only one that tried to balance a message of calm with a message about a worst-case scenario.

In October, the University of Hawaii sent an email to 50,000 students and 10,000 employees that spoke about growing tensions between the United States and North Korea and the rogue nation's nuclear ambitions, according to The Washington Post's Nick Anderson.

“In light of concerns about North Korea missile tests, state and federal agencies are providing information about nuclear threats and what to do in the unlikely event of a nuclear attack and radiation emergency,” the email said.

After hitting “send” on the apocalyptic-sounding message, the communications official responsible for it was immediately wishing for a do-over, saying, “It was a mistake on my part.”

Hawaii has previously been depicted as a target by North Korea. Oahu is home to the Navy's U.S. Pacific Command. Hawaii is about 4,600 miles from North Korea. The U.S. mainland is 6,680 miles from North Korea.

Exchanges race to have decoders ready for HD AFN

By JENNIFER H. SVAN

Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — New decoder boxes needed by many subscribers to continue watching the American Forces Network as it transitions to high-definition TV hadn't reached shelves at some overseas bases Tuesday, but officials said most viewers should have time to make the switch without interruption.

About 20,000 of the 70,000 decoder boxes in use cannot

receive the new digital signal, which was slated to begin broadcasting in the Pacific region Tuesday.

The Atlantic and Indian Ocean regions are to follow on Dec. 5, with Europe, the Americas, Southwest Asia and Africa to transition on Dec. 12.

“In most cases, decoders will be available for customers several days in advance” of the switch to high definition, said Jason Moore, chief of telecommunications outside the continental U.S. for the Army and

Air Force Exchange Service.

“Consistent with those dates, decoder availability from the Exchange will be staggered, with the decoders available first in (the Pacific) and then Europe,” Moore said in an email to Stars and Stripes.

But employees at two overseas Exchange stores said the new decoders were not on store shelves yet.

At the Exchange at Yokota Air Base in Japan on Monday, a customer service representative said the store hadn't

received the new decoders, suggesting customers could purchase a new decoder online and wait about a month to receive them.

At the Ramstein Air Base Exchange store in Germany, customers are being told they can preregister for a new decoder online at shopmyexchange.com. Power Zone employees said Tuesday that the devices should arrive by mid-December but did not have an exact date.

Conyers again accused of sex harassment

The Washington Post

A former deputy chief of staff for Rep. John Conyers Jr., of Michigan, has accused the Detroit Democrat of unwanted sexual advances.

Deanna Maher said the congressman harassed and touched her on three occasions while she ran the congressman's Michigan office between 1997 and 2005, the Detroit News reported.

"I didn't report the harassment because it was clear nobody wanted to take it seriously," Maher told the paper.

Maher is the second former staffer to level sexual misconduct claims against Conyers, the longest-serving member of Congress. Last week, BuzzFeed reported on a 2015 settlement for \$27,000 between Conyers and a former staffer over harassment claims. The Washington Post followed up with a complaint of harassment and verbal abuse by Conyers toward a Washington lawyer who worked for the congressman in the 1990s.

The allegations have sparked a House ethics investigation, and Conyers has given up his spot as the ranking member on the House Judiciary Committee.

Arnold Reed, disputed the allegations from Maher.

"At the end of the day, he's confident that he will be exonerated because he maintains that he has not done anything wrong," Reed told the Detroit News.

In 1997, Maher told the newspaper, she was in Washington for a Congressional Black Caucus event. "I didn't have a room, and he had me put in his hotel suite," Maher told the Detroit News, adding that she rejected Conyers' offer of sex.

A second instance of an alleged unwanted advance came in 1998, she said. Maher was a passenger in a car the congressman was driving.

"He was trying to feel me up with his right hand," she told the paper. "I kept pushing his hand away. Then he put his hand on my neck and started trying to tickle me. ... I was saved ... because we got pulled over."

In 1999, Conyers allegedly put his hand up Maher's dress.

Navajo Code Talkers' families decry Trump's 'Pocahontas' jab

Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — Families of Navajo war veterans who were honored Monday at the White House say they were dumbfounded that President Donald Trump used the event to take a political jab at a Massachusetts senator, demeaning their work with an unbreakable code that helped the U.S. win World War II.

Trump turned to a nickname he often deployed for Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren during the 2016 presidential campaign: Pocahontas. He then told the three Navajo Code Talkers on stage that he had affection for them that he doesn't have for Warren.

"It was uncalled for," said Marty Thompson, whose great uncle was a Navajo Code Talker. "He can say what he wants when he's out doing his presidential business among his people, but when it comes to honoring veterans or any kind of people, he needs to grow up and quit saying things like that."

Pocahontas is a well-known historical figure who bridged her own Pamunkey Tribe in present-day Virginia with the British in the 1600s. But the National Congress of American Indians says Trump wrongly has flipped the name into a derogatory term, and the comment drew swift criticism from American Indians and politicians.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders, asked about criticism of Trump's remarks, said a racial slur "was certainly not the president's intent."

Trump made the comment as he stood near a portrait of President Andrew Jackson, which he hung in the Oval Office in January. Trump admires Jackson's populism. But Jackson is an unpopular figure in Indian Country because his policies led to the forced removal of American Indians from their southern homelands.

The Navajo Nation suggested Trump's remark Monday was an example of "cultural insensitivity" and resolved to

stay out of the "ongoing feud between the senator and President Trump."

"All tribal nations still battle insensitive references to our people. The prejudice that Native American people face is an unfortunate historical legacy," Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye said in a statement.

Still, Begaye and relatives of Navajo Code Talkers said they're honored the story of the men recruited from the vast Southwest reservation to become Marines could be told on a national stage. Peter MacDonald, a former Navajo chairman and trained Code Talker who stood beside Trump, also took the opportunity to ask for support for a Navajo Code Talker museum. Trump obliged.

MacDonald didn't immediately return messages left Monday by The Associated Press. He didn't visibly react to Trump's "Pocahontas" comment and later told the president he was certain he would succeed, crediting military generals.

False accuser is linked to gotcha group

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A conservative group known for undercover investigations has been linked to a woman who falsely told The Washington Post that Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore impregnated her as a teenager, the newspaper reported.

Moore has been accused of multiple instances of sexual misconduct. But The Post determined that one accuser who approached the newspaper earlier in the month, identified as Jaime Phillips, made up a fake story likely designed to embarrass the newspaper.

The Post published a story Monday about its dealings with Phillips. Earlier in the day, reporters from the newspaper

saw Phillips walking into the New York offices of Project Veritas, a conservative group with a long track record of targeting Democratic groups and major media outlets, often by hiding their identities and using hidden cameras.

"We don't comment on investigations real or imagined, or imagined stings," conservative activist and Project Veritas leader James O'Keefe told The Associated Press on Monday evening.

O'Keefe released an unrelated video that he said exposed liberal bias at the newspaper hours after the Post story was initially published.

The video featured a series of secretly recorded conversations with Post employees.

The Post reported Monday afternoon that Phillips approached one of its reporters earlier in the month as Moore faced several accusations of sexual misconduct. In a series of interviews over two weeks, Phillips told the Post about an alleged sexual relationship with Moore in 1992 that led to an abortion when she was 15.

She repeatedly pressed Post reporters to give their opinions on the effects that her claims could have on Moore's candidacy if she went public, the newspaper reported. The Post did not publish Phillips' claims and confronted her with inconsistencies in her story. She told the Post she was not working with any organization that targets journalists.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Family carjacked in driveway after holiday

NJ MILLBURN — Police in New Jersey said a family returning home from a Thanksgiving weekend vacation was carjacked in their own driveway as they unpacked luggage.

Police in Millburn said the family was unloading their two Range Rovers just before 2 a.m. Monday when they were approached by two armed men.

Police told NJ.com one man held a 13-year-old child at gunpoint and the other pointed a gun at the other family members, demanding keys to the cars and cash.

One man drove off in one of the family's vehicles; the other man couldn't get the SUV to start so he fled in a waiting car. Police later found the stolen Range Rover in Newark.

Man stuck under shower is rescued

AK FAIRBANKS — A Fairbanks man was stuck beneath his shower for three days before he was rescued, Alaska State Troopers said Sunday.

Authorities went to a residence for a welfare check and heard a man yelling for help, according to the police dispatch log. They forced entry and found a 67-year-old man stuck beneath the platform on which his shower was built.

The man fell headfirst into "a small void-space behind the shower," said University Fire Department Battalion Chief Forrest Kuiper. He wiggled farther into the space in an attempt to turn around, but couldn't get out.

Kuiper said the man was in good shape and refused medical attention.

Man sleeping in bin gets stuck in truck

PA PHILADELPHIA — Officials said it took firefighters more than two hours to free a man who wound up stuck in a trash truck's compactor section.

Police said it appears the man had been sleeping in a trash bin when he was tossed into the truck. He was buried under bagged and loose trash when firefighters tried to reach him Monday morning.

The ordeal happened outside The Kintock Group home, which serves as an interim stop before state and federal prisoners are released.

Authorities initially said the man escaped from the home, but a prisons department spokeswoman said no one was missing.

The man was taken to a hospital with leg, hip and abdominal injuries. Fire officials said residents who heard the man screaming called 911.

Woman becomes US citizen after 60 years

MI BERRIEN SPRINGS — An 87-year-old southwestern Michigan woman became a U.S. citizen — six decades after arriving and surviving perilous, puzzling times in Nazi Germany.

The South Bend Tribune reported Selma Satonica, of Berrien Springs, was sworn in last week. Satonica said she was a lawful permanent resident, but the citizenship process was confusing.

The German immigrant lived in a town formerly in Poland, now Ukraine. As the German front collapsed, soldiers helped her family and others escape hours before Russians invaded.

Man: Great white took '2 or 3 bites' of son

CA PEBBLE BEACH — A California spear fisherman said a great white shark took "two or three bites" of his son before they were able to get him out of the water and to safety.

Armen Azatian told KSBW-8 TV that the moment was a shock for him and a "horrific scene" but he moved quickly to help stop the bleeding.

Azatian said his son, Grigor, 25, stayed calm although the amount of damage and blood was overwhelming. His son described the shark as about 15 feet long.

Passengers rattled as landing jet blows tires

NJ NEWARK — Passengers had a rough landing when their flight from Germany arrived in New Jersey and the plane's tires blew out.

A spokesman for United Airlines said the Boeing 777-222 from Frankfurt was landing around 1:30 p.m. Sunday at Newark Liberty airport when it "experienced tire issues."

Passengers say some of the plane's tires blew out on landing.

No one was reported injured.

Charity nears 10,000 soldier care packages

WI HARTFORD — A Wisconsin woman's charity organization is close to sending its 10,000th care package to U.S. military personnel serving overseas.

The Daily News reported that LeAnn Boudwine started Support The Troops 11 years ago. Boudwine had been sending care packages to her sons and learned that some of their

fellow soldiers weren't receiving any gifts.

Boudwine hopes to send the charity's 10,000th care package by the end of the year.

Pregnant woman fatally stabs pit bull

FL SAFETY HARBOR — A pregnant Florida woman fatally stabbed her pit bull when it attacked two other dogs and then turned on her mother and sister.

Pinellas County sheriff's officials said in a news release the attack happened Friday at the family's home in Safety Harbor, near St. Petersburg on Florida's Gulf Coast.

Sheriff's spokesman Spencer Gross said Buster, the pit bull, started attacking two other pit bulls at the home. When Heidi Cooper, 45, tried to intervene, Buster attacked her and also turned on Cooper's daughters, Meghan Tokay and Sierra Willson. Willson then stabbed the dog.

Police say driver hit business and a house

NY BALDWIN — Police said a reckless driver crashed into a business and a house on Long Island.

Nassau County police said officers tried to stop Rodney Boone, 53, for failing to use his turn signal at 4 a.m. Saturday in Baldwin. They said Boone kept driving and crashed into a tire and wheel store in Hempstead, causing substantial damage, then hit a nearby house, causing a gas leak.

Boone was charged with reckless driving and fleeing a police officer. Authorities said he also had an outstanding warrant for violating a family court order in Albany County.

From wire reports

Your objective source for military news
updated 24/7 from bases
around the world.
Now online at www.stripes.com.

STARS AND STRIPES®

Browns buzzing over Gordon's return

Associated Press

BEREA, Ohio — Josh Gordon's imminent return has the Browns buzzing.

Suddenly, there's a ray of hope in this dreary, dismal season.

With Gordon eligible to play on Sunday in Los Angeles for the first time in the regular season since 2014, coach Hue Jackson can barely contain his excitement in having the wide receiver back.

"My plans for him?" Jackson said Monday. "Oh boy, let me tell you, I have big plans for him."

Gordon's return has brought some badly needed optimism to the Browns (0-11), who are run-

ning out of time and games to avoid joining the 2008 Detroit Lions as the only 0-16 teams in NFL history.

A former All-Pro, Gordon, who led the league in yards receiving in 2013, is expected to be activated later this week and make his long-awaited return against the Chargers on Sunday.

Gordon returned to practice last week after being suspended for two seasons and dazzled his teammates, who can't wait to see if he can be the same electrifying player.

"I plan for him to play and play as much as he can handle," Jackson said. "He's a very talented player. He needs to get out there and play, but we have

to see where he is and make sure how much can he handle, how much can he do."

Gordon was eligible to come off the Commissioner's exempt list on Monday, but the Browns intend to wait until later in the week to activate him. The 26-year-old last played a regular-season game on Dec. 21, 2014.

Cleveland's roster has changed dramatically since then, but guard Joel Bitonio remembers when Gordon last returned from a suspension. On Nov. 23, 2014, Gordon caught eight passes for 120 yards as the Browns beat the Atlanta Falcons 26-24.

"Anytime you bring a player back of Josh's talent, it's going to bring a spark to the offense,"

Bitonio said.

"He's also been out of football for a while. So no matter how good a shape he's in, expectations have to be tempered a little bit, but I think there's going to be a jolt in practice, exciting.

"I don't know what the game plan is for him yet or anything like that yet, but he was an All-Pro. He was one of the best receivers in the game the last time he played and we're looking forward to bringing that spark. I think that helps protections, it helps the run game, that helps the quarterback and maybe the offense being lifted up will help the defense, too.

"It could be a big week for him."

Suggs, Ravens defense puts clamps on Texans

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Take the ball away from the other guys, hold onto it yourself and make sure nothing happens to Justin Tucker.

That, apparently, is the formula the Baltimore Ravens intend to use to reach the playoffs.

Terrell Suggs led an aggressive defense that kept Houston out of the end zone for the final 51 minutes, and the Ravens forced two turnovers in the final 5 minutes to secure a 23-16 victory on Monday night.

"If the game's on the line, you've got to be comfortable when your defense is out there," Suggs said. "It feels good."

After Suggs stripped the ball from quarterback Tom Savage and Baltimore recovered, Tucker kicked his third field goal with 2:53 remaining for a seven-point cushion.

Anthony Levine then intercepted a Savage pass to clinch it.

The Ravens picked off two passes to increase their NFL-leading total to 18, and their three takeaways upped their league-best total to 26.

Asked to assess Savage's performance, Houston coach Bill O'Brien said: "Can't turn it over. I thought he did some good things, but he turned it over too many times."

Baltimore, in turn, did not commit a turnover.

Suggs had two sacks, Alex Collins ran for 60 yards and a touchdown, and punter Sam Koch threw perhaps Baltimore's most significant pass of the game.

Baltimore coach John Harbaugh called for a fake punt, converted a fourth down with a rarely used pitchout and had quarterback Joe Flacco line up at wide receiver on a play in which Collins took a direct snap.

"You always have them in the game plan," Flacco said. "It's just the flow of the game."

All of this added spice to a stagnant offense that protected the ball and did just enough to win.

Flacco went 20-for-32 for 141 yards.

The Ravens (6-5) have won consecutive games for the first time since they opened the season 2-0. They are now above .500 for the first time since Oct.

8 and tied with Buffalo for the final AFC wild-card spot.

Houston (4-7) has lost four of five.

Savage, who has started the past four games in place of injured DeShaun Watson, completed 22 of 37 passes for 252 yards. But he gave the ball away three times, and that was the difference.

"You're not going to win any games when you turn it over and you don't get any turnovers," O'Brien said.

Aided by three penalties against Baltimore, the Texans traveled the length of the field and went up 7-0 on a 4-yard touchdown run by Lamar Miller.

Early in the second quarter, after a third-down incomple- tion, the Ravens appeared poised to punt for the fourth time in four series. But Koch lofted a pass to Chris Moore, a play that went for 22 yards to the Houston 19. That set up a 10-yard touchdown run by Javorius Allen, who reached the end zone with a healthy push from several of his teammates.

An interception by Tony Jefferson was followed by a fourth-and-1 gamble in which

Collins took a quick pitch and ran for 29 yards to the Houston 8. Collins covered the final 8 yards on the following play for a 14-7 lead.

The teams traded field goals in the final two minutes before halftime.

Something we learned about the Ravens and Texans:

A second chance. O'Brien has been preaching pocket presence to quarterback Tom Savage, but the coach wouldn't fault the quarterback for the strip-sack and fumble that turned the ball over to the Ravens at a critical fourth-quarter juncture.

Baltimore cashed in with a field goal for a seven-point lead with 2:53 left.

O'Brien admitted that Savage needs to perform better, but said the Ravens' relentless defense didn't exactly give him room to work.

"If you put a clock on that, he might have had one second to get the ball off, so you could have the greatest pocket awareness in the world and you have no chance there," O'Brien said. "I wouldn't put that one on him."

Virginia's defense stymies Wisconsin

Associated Press

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — Always a perfectionist, especially when it comes to how No. 18 Virginia plays defense, even Tony Bennett found no room to complain.

"Collectively, we did as well as we could have defensively," Bennett said Monday night after Virginia beat Wisconsin 49-37 in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge.

The Badgers' point total represented less than half of their 75-point average, and they shot just 31 percent (15-for-48).

Kyle Guy scored 17 points, and the Cavaliers held Wisconsin scoreless for more than 7 minutes in the second half, turning a 30-26 lead into a 42-26 margin that was never

threatened. Devon Hall scored 16 for the Cavaliers (7-0), who had a 12-0 run during the Badgers' drought.

On the defensive end, Virginia looked to be in midseason form, but Hall said the team is still finding its way.

"I think we're still in the midst of trying to forge our identity as a team," he said.

That identity seemed pretty clear to Wisconsin coach Greg Gard.

"I can't fault the effort and the energy that we played with," he said. "But you've got to make shots against Virginia."

Ethan Happ led Wisconsin (3-4) with 14 points and D'Mitrik Trice had 10, but the Badgers shot poorly all night.

Virginia didn't shoot much better, hitting 23 of 60 shots

(38.7 percent), but the Cavaliers outrebounded the Badgers 39-30 and outscored them 34-18 in the paint. In a physical game, the Cavaliers still managed to play the entire game without attempting a free throw.

"You could tell it was going to be the type of game where you just have to grind it out," Hall said.

The Cavaliers were playing their third game in five days.

"Both teams were tired," Bennett said. "It was a very physical game, a lot of screens set."

Guy was just 1-for-6 from beyond the arc after coming into the game shooting 48.3 percent on three-pointers. He did most of his damage driving to the basket and was 7-for-9 in-

side the arc. Largely a one-dimensional outside shooter as a freshman, Guy has worked on getting to the rim more.

No. 11 Cincinnati 83, Alabama State 51: Gary Clark had 14 points and seven rebounds, and the host Bearcats (7-0) stayed unbeaten heading into their game against cross-town rival No. 21 Xavier on Saturday.

After playing at Xavier, Cincinnati plays at No. 6 Florida, hosts Mississippi State, and plays at UCLA.

Niagara 77, Army 71: At Lewiston, N.Y., Matt Scott scored 25 points and grabbed 10 rebounds, Marvin Prochet scored 12 and had a career-high 15 rebounds and the Purple Eagles rallied past the Black Knights.

Grizzlies fire Fizdale one day after he benched Gasol

Associated Press

The Memphis Grizzlies fired coach David Fizdale on Monday, with the team at 7-12 and a day after he benched center Marc Gasol for the fourth quarter of an eighth straight loss.

General manager Chris Wallace announced the move. Associate head coach J.B. Bickerstaff has been named interim coach.

"After a thorough evaluation, I decided a change in course was necessary to move forward and provide the team and organization its best chance at success this season and beyond," Wallace said in a statement.

Gasol, given a maximum deal by the Grizzlies in July 2015, sat throughout the fourth quarter of a 98-88 loss to the Brooklyn Nets on Sunday. Gasol leads the Grizzlies in points, rebounds and assists, and he was an All-Star in Fizdale's inaugural season. But the center spent plenty of time after the game making it clear to reporters how upset he was at sitting out a full quarter.

"It's a first for me, trust me, and I don't like it one bit," Gasol

said. "I'm more (ticked) than I can show and frustrated."

Fizdale explained his decision before Gasol spoke in the locker room and said he simply was trying to win a game while sticking with his reserves. Fizdale said taking a risk as head coach means sometimes upsetting a player or two.

"If I'm not on the floor, I'm not valued," Gasol said. "I'm sure (the coaching staff) knew that would hurt me the most."

The move caught the NBA by surprise. Dwyane Wade, who played with the Miami Heat when Fizdale was an assistant coach, wrote on Twitter that he needed answers. LeBron James retweeted a comment that called the move "stunning."

"I need some answers. Feels like my man was a fall guy," James wrote.

Golden State coach Steve Kerr said he was "shocked" by the firing.

"I think David Fizdale is one of the best coaches in the league," Kerr said. "He's a brilliant guy, he's got an edge to him, he's tough, he's smart. Their whole team is injured, Mike Conley is out. Like, this

is what happens, you lose when your best players are out and when your whole team is wiped out. It caught me off guard."

Portland coach Terry Stotts called Fizdale's firing very disappointing.

"Losing in this league and not meeting expectations in this league takes its toll on everybody," Stotts said before a game in New York. "Owners, general managers, coaches, players, and handling that is a strain on relationships, and it's disappointing. It's probably the most difficult part of being in the NBA, is managing that part of the season."

Fizdale became the franchise's 13th head coach on May 29, 2016, and he went 50-51.

The Grizzlies reached the postseason for a seventh straight time in Fizdale's first season, when they lost to the San Antonio Spurs. Fizdale was fined \$30,000 by the NBA for a rant over officiating after a loss in Game 2.

Memphis let Zach Randolph, Vince Carter and Tony Allen all leave as free agents and signed Ben McLemore, Tyreke Evans and Mario Chalmers to retool

the roster around Gasol and point guard Mike Conley and give Fizdale a faster lineup.

The moves appeared to be working when Memphis started this season an NBA-best 5-1. The Grizzlies stood atop the Western Conference with a win over the Golden State Warriors and two over Southwest Division rival Houston.

But Conley has been out since Nov. 17, resting an aching left Achilles tendon. Then the team lost its eighth straight on Sunday, matching the longest skid for this franchise since Feb. 11-March 3, 2009.

Now Fizdale is the second NBA coach fired this season, joining Earl Watson, who was fired by Phoenix three games into the season.

This will be the second time as an interim coach for Bickerstaff, who will start Wednesday night in San Antonio against the Spurs. He joined the Grizzlies in June 2016 after five seasons with the Houston Rockets, including an interim coach stint that lasted most of 2015-16 and included a playoff berth. Bickerstaff went 37-34 in that role.

NBA roundup

Drummond leads Pistons past Celtics

Associated Press

BOSTON — Avery Bradley had his homecoming, but nobody on the Pistons enjoys a trip to Boston more than Andre Drummond.

The Detroit center had season highs of 26 points and 22 rebounds on Monday night to lead Detroit to a 118-108 victory and send the Celtics to their first loss on the parquet floor since their home opener. Tobias Harris scored 31 in the matchup of old-school rivals who are once again the top teams in the Eastern Conference.

"They'll remember it. That's one of those memorable

games," said Drummond, who went to high school and college in Connecticut. "We came in, them being the No. 1 team and us getting a lot of points. Me being the hometown kid, having the night I did, that's something they'll have to remember."

Drummond had 10 rebounds in the first quarter and 11 points in the last 5:36 to help Detroit win for the third time in four games. In 10 games in Boston, he has averaged 16.2 rebounds; it was the third time he had grabbed 22 boards in the building.

Cavaliers 113, 76ers 91: LeBron James had 30 points, 13 rebounds and six assists to lead

visiting Cleveland over Philadelphia for its eighth straight win.

Trail Blazers 103, Knicks 91: Damian Lillard scored 32 points and Portland wrapped up a strong five-game road trip with its third straight victory.

Spurs 115, Mavericks 108: LaMarcus Aldridge had a season-high 33 points and 10 rebounds and host San Antonio celebrated Tony Parker's first game of the season by beating Dallas.

Rockets 117, Nets 103: James Harden scored 20 of his 37 points in the first quarter to lead host Houston over Brooklyn.

Pacers 121, Magic 109: Victor Oladipo scored 26 points and Bojan Bogdanovic added 22 to help host Indiana hand Orlando its ninth straight loss.

Clippers 120, Lakers 115: Lou Williams scored a season-high 42 points and the Clippers rallied in the fourth quarter to beat the Lakers for their 11th straight home victory against their Staples Center co-tenants.

Kings 110, Warriors 106: Bogdan Bogdanovic made a go-ahead bank shot with 12.6 seconds left, lifting visiting Sacramento over Golden State with Stephen Curry and Kevin Durant injured and sitting out.

NHL roundup

Crosby's OT goal lifts Pittsburgh over Philadelphia

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Sidney Crosby redirected Jake Guentzel's shot past Philadelphia's Bryan Elliott 1:48 into overtime as the Pittsburgh Penguins rallied for a 5-4 victory over the Flyers on Monday night.

The Penguins lost goaltender Matt Murray to a leg injury in the second period and trailed by two entering the third before storming back against the reeling Flyers, who have lost eight straight for their worst skid in nearly a decade.

Patric Hornqvist and Bryan Rust scored 39 seconds apart early in the third to tie it. Philadelphia reclaimed the lead on Michael Raffl's second goal of the season with 3:19 left in regulation. Guentzel's second goal of the night evened it with 1:04 remaining.

The Penguins began overtime on the power play and controlled the puck until Crosby's 10th of the season zipped over Elliott.

Panthers 3, Devils 2: Jared McCann scored the go-ahead

goal and Roberto Luongo made 23 saves to become the second goalie to win 200 games with two different teams as visiting Florida beat New Jersey.

Luongo's 200th win with Florida was a see-saw affair in the third period. He also won 252 with Vancouver to join an exclusive club.

The other netminder to accomplish the feat was Hall of Famer Patrick Roy with 289 wins for Montreal and 262 for Colorado.

Aleksander Barkov and Vincent Trocheck also scored as the struggling Panthers cooled off the streaking Devils, who were on a 5-1-2 run coming in. The win was the second in the last five games for Florida.

Rookies Nico Hischier and Jesper Bratt scored for New Jersey and Corey Schneider made 35 saves.

Blackhawks 7, Ducks 3: Alex DeBrincat had three goals and an assist, Patrick Sharp stopped a 16-game scoring drought and surging Chicago beat visiting Anaheim.

Nick Schmaltz had a goal and

two assists and Artem Anisimov scored his team-high 11th goal as Chicago won for the fourth time in five games. Brandon Saad also scored and Patrick Kane collected three assists, extending his season-high point streak to seven games.

DeBrincat, who turns 20 on Dec. 18, became the second-youngest player in franchise history to record a hat trick, trailing Jeremy Roenick by four days. The rookie has nine goals and three assists in 11 November games.

The banged-up Ducks dropped their fourth consecutive game.

Canadiens 3, Blue Jackets 1: Carey Price made 37 saves, Brendan Gallagher got his 10th goal and host Montreal ended Columbus' six-game winning streak.

Jonathan Drouin scored in the first period and Andrew Shaw had an empty-net goal for Montreal in Price's second straight victory since returning from injury.

Rookie Pierre-Luc Dubois scored for the Blue Jackets,

who lost for the first time since Nov. 10. Sergei Bobrovsky had allowed just six goals on Columbus' winning streak but gave up two on 27 shots.

It was the second regulation loss for the Blue Jackets in 10 games against Atlantic Division opponents this season.

Jets 7, Wild 2: Linemates Blake Wheeler, Mark Scheifele and Kyle Connor each had a goal and two assists, and host Winnipeg scored seven straight goals to beat Minnesota.

Joel Armia, Jacob Trouba, Mathieu Perreault and Bryan Little also scored for the Jets. Armia added an assist.

Connor Hellebuyck made 17 saves for Winnipeg, which has won four straight and seven of eight at home.

Jason Zucker and Chris Stewart scored for Minnesota. The Wild left Alex Stalock in the entire game, and he stopped 21 shots.

The Jets have won 15 of 24 games this season, the quickest to 15 wins in franchise history.