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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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LCS crews must undergo retraining

Alabama Media Group

After a series of engineering malfunctions aboard four of the U.S. Navy's controversial littoral combat ships over the past year, Navy top brass announced Monday that all engineering crews were to stand down and undergo engineering procedure retraining.

The order to stand down was first given on Aug. 31, just days after the USS Coronado, an Austal-built Independence-class LCS, experienced engineering problems while on patrol in the Western Pacific. In addition to retraining personnel, the Navy is also conducting an investigation into possible engine design issues on ships built by the Mobile, Ala.-based Austal and those built by Lockheed Martin in Wisconsin.

"The required engineering training will be conducted by the Navy's Surface Warfare Of-

ficer School (SWOS) engineering team, who will develop both a level of knowledge test and specialized training that will be deployed in the next 30 days to the LCS engineering force," a Navy statement said. "The commanding officer of SWOS is also conducting a comprehensive LCS engineering review, which will likely take 30-60 days. From there, more adjustments may be made to the engineering training pipeline."

However, the Coronado, which was built at Austal's Mobile manufacturing facility, is just the latest of the LCS ships to be hampered by engineering problems. On July 11, the USS Freedom, a Freedom-Class LCS built by Lockheed Martin, had seawater leak into one of its main diesel propulsion systems and was forced to return to port for repairs.

In January, the USS Fort Worth, another Lockheed-built

ship, also suffered propulsion issues after engineers attempted to use gears without adequately oiling them. The subsequent damage will cost \$23 million to repair, according to the Navy.

Similarly, the Lockheed-built USS Milwaukee broke down after metallic debris was discovered in its filtering system, which subsequently damaged the ship's clutch system.

While teething problems are expected on newly built ships, the extent of the issues experienced aboard the Navy's newest ships are largely unprecedented in modern shipbuilding, and have subsequently brought the ire of congressional detractors who consider the entire \$15 billion project to be too expensive and unnecessary.

Such are the scale of the problems experienced by Austal and Lockheed. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., co-signed a letter with Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., in Feb-

ruary in which they wrote that LCS "seaframe failures and system reliability shortfalls" couldn't defeat anything more than "a small number of lightly armed boats."

Despite the comments from the former Navy officer, Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus has contended in the past that his branch requires as many as 52 littoral ships, 12 more than Secretary of Defense Ash Carter said was necessary.

The damning conclusion from the top men inside the Senate Armed Services Committee comes just months after the Pentagon delivered a slimmed-down manufacturing schedule for the LCS program. The five-year planning schedule showed that only three of the ships are to be built between 2017 and 2018, with none planned up to 2021.

House, Obama are at odds over military pay

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Troops will see yet another low pay raise next year if President Barack Obama has his way, but the president's decision to limit an increase to 1.6 percent is not necessarily a done deal.

The House is still pushing for a higher raise, 2.1 percent, enough to keep servicemember pay in step with the private sector. This week, the House resumes what are likely to be hard-fought negotiations with the Senate, which backs the lower Obama-proposed raise.

The outcome of the pay fight could come within weeks but may stretch into the winter as Congress grapples with a de-

fense spending plan during a presidential election year.

The House effort might be a longshot. It lost the fight last year for a 2.3 percent pay increase amid Senate opposition and an order last summer by Obama to limit the increase to 1.3 percent.

"Our men and women in uniform deserve a full pay raise," Rep. Joe Heck, R-Nev., said in a statement. "The global security environment is not getting any safer and deployments aren't getting any easier, yet our military families are constantly asked to do more with less."

Heck called Obama's pay raise order late last month "unacceptable" and said he is fighting for the higher amount. He is a key player because he chairs

the military personnel subcommittee that deals with pay issues and also is one of the House negotiators trying to hammer out an agreement with the Senate.

Troop raises have been capped at 1.7 percent or below since 2010, reining in big boosts during the post-9/11 period and early in the Iraq War when annual paychecks surged from 3 percent to nearly 7 percent. By law, military pay is usually supposed to increase by at least 2.1 percent to keep up with private-sector wage growth, but the president has the power to set it at other levels.

The difference in Obama's pay decision and the House plan is about \$11 per month for an E4 with more than three years of service and nearly \$28 for an

O3 with more than six years of service, according to the Armed Services Committee.

That has rankled Heck and Republican hawks in the House such as Rep. Mac Thornberry of Texas, who is spearheading higher pay as part of a controversial \$18 billion increase in defense spending for the coming year. The money would come from the Islamic State war budget and cause operations in Iraq and Syria to run out of funding at the end of April, requiring new spending legislation then.

The Pentagon has called the \$18 billion increase that includes the pay raise a gimmick and a gamble. The full House passed the plan earlier this year as part of its annual defense policy bill.

Ex-Japanese PM's fund to aid sick US sailors

Associated Press

TOKYO — Several hundred American service personnel who say they became sick from radiation after participating in relief operations for the 2011 tsunami that set off the Fukushima nuclear disaster are getting high-profile support in Japan.

Junichiro Koizumi, prime minister from 2001 to 2006, told reporters Wednesday he has set up a special fund to collect private donations for the former servicemembers, with the goal of collecting \$1 million by the end of next March, mainly to help with medical bills.

"I felt I had to do something to help those who worked so hard for Japan," he said. "Maybe this isn't enough, but it will express our gratitude, that Japan is thankful."

Koizumi, 74, one of Japan's most popular prime ministers in recent decades, was in San Diego in May to meet with 10 of the former servicemembers, who have joined a class-action lawsuit against Tokyo Electric Power Co., or TEPCO, the utility that operates the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant.

The lawsuit, filed in 2012, is ongoing, and a California judge has ruled it will proceed. More Navy personnel and Marines are joining the suit, now numbering about 400, according to Koizumi. Some 70,000 Americans took part in Operation Tomodachi, or Friend, flying in aid from an aircraft carrier and other warships off the coast of northeastern Japan. Since then, some have become sick with cancers, leukemia, thyroid ailments, brain tumors and other diseases, and they blame radiation.

The lawsuit alleges that TEPCO withheld key information and caused the Americans to be sent in harm's way.

Seven of those who joined the lawsuit have already died.

Trump vows DOD funding boost

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Republican Donald Trump unveiled a plan to boost military spending by tens of billions of dollars on Wednesday, promising major increases in the number of active troops, Navy ships and submarines, and fighter planes as he works to convince skeptics in both parties that he's ready to lead the world's most powerful military.

The New York businessman, who has struggled at times to demonstrate a command of foreign policy, also seemed to acknowledge he does not currently have a plan to address cybersecurity or the Islamic State group.

If elected, Trump said he would give military leaders 30 days to formulate a plan to defeat the group, commonly known as ISIS. And he would ask the joint chiefs of staff to conduct a review of the nation's cyberdefenses to determine all

vulnerabilities.

Trump's address came hours before his national security acumen is tested at a "commander in chief" forum on NBC.

"We want to defer, avoid and prevent conflict through our unquestioned military strength," Trump declared in his Wednesday speech, delivered inside the exclusive Union League of Philadelphia.

The appearances mark an intense, two-day focus on national security by Trump, who has offered tough rhetoric on America's challenges abroad but few details.

The U.S. currently spends more than \$600 billion a year on the military, more than the next seven countries combined.

Trump's rival, Democrat Hillary Clinton, has tried to paint the businessman as erratic, making the case that his disposition would be a major liability on the world stage.

"They know they can count on me to be the kind of command-

er in chief who will protect our country and our troops, and they know they cannot count on Donald Trump," Clinton said Tuesday. "They view him as a danger and a risk."

Trump's team has worked aggressively in recent days to turn deflect such criticism back at Clinton.

While Clinton and Trump will be featured at the Wednesday night forum, they will appear at separate times and will not face each other on stage. The forum could serve as a warm-up to their highly anticipated first presidential debate, Sept. 26 in New York.

Trump's Union League address also included his plans to eliminate deep spending cuts, known as the "sequester," enacted when Congress failed to reach a budget compromise in 2011. Republicans and Democrats voted for the automatic, across-the-board cuts that affected both military and domestic programs.

Philippines releases photos that officials say show Chinese ships in disputed sea

Associated Press

VIENTIANE, Laos — The Philippine government on Wednesday released what it says are surveillance pictures of Chinese coast guard ships and barges at a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, in an apparent diplomatic gambit to publicize its concerns at a regional summit being attended by China's premier and Southeast Asian leaders.

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte plans to ask Premier Li Keqiang at the summit in the Laotian capital whether the vessels were on another island-making mission on the Scarborough Shoal. China has built seven such islands in the disputed, resource-rich sea, alarming neighbors and rival claimants.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said that China hadn't done anything to alter the circumstances in the waters surrounding the shoal.

"What I can tell you is that the situation in waters near Huangyan Island remains unchanged and China hasn't made any new moves," Hua said in Beijing, using the shoal's Chinese name. "We should be highly alert against the mischief-making intentions of people who spread such groundless information in such situations."

Asked how disturbed the Philippines was by the presence of the Chinese ships, Duterte's spokesman, Ernesto Abella, told a news conference, "Enough to announce it." He said that China and the Philip-

ippines were discussing the issue, but gave no details.

"There are talks at this stage," Abella said. He refused to comment on whether the Philippine policy was to prevent any country from constructing at or transforming Scarborough, a coral reef, into an island.

If the Chinese government confirms the photos, the Philippines will lodge an official protest, said Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana.

The U.S. military has also expressed concerns over the possibility that China might turn Scarborough into another island, something that would give Beijing's forces control over a swath of the South China Sea used as a passageway to the Taiwan Strait.

Captives seek to set record straight

BY HANNAH ALLAM

McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Jan. 15 was a relatively quiet day for Baghdad, the bomb-battered capital where Waiel El-Maadawy, an Army veteran and former Florida sheriff's deputy, had spent years as a contractor for the U.S.-led effort to train Iraqi security forces.

El-Maadawy was feeling relieved. He had just hired an Iraqi he knew, a man nicknamed Abu Marina, as an interpreter to help with training Iraqi commandos to fight Islamic State jihadis. He and two fellow contractors — his cousin, Amr Mohamed, of Bullhead City, Ariz., and Russell Frost, of Wichita, Kan. — sealed the deal over tea at Abu Marina's apartment in southeastern Baghdad.

About half an hour into their visit, the commander of a Shiite Muslim militia showed up, demanding to know who the Americans were and ordering them to stay put. At first, the contractors scoffed at the intrusion — they had pistols on their hips and Iraqi Special Forces authorization in their pockets.

"We walk outside and he was right — we can't leave. There were 40 guys there with heavy weapons," El-Maadawy said. "That's when everything went downhill. We realized we were going to be taken."

That was the beginning of a 31-day ordeal the Obama administration has never explained, and which is described in detail here for the first time, through a series of interviews with El-Maadawy, a phone interview with Frost, and with the cooperation of Mohamed, who is currently out of the country.

After weeks of shackles and beatings, the Americans were released Feb. 16, only to find that Iraqi officials had stained their reputations by saying that they'd been detained from a brothel.

There was more dismay when El-Maadawy and Mohamed, Egyptian-American cousins, learned that some U.S. officials initially suspected that they'd been radicalized and perhaps were complicit in the incident.

Even the elation of their re-

lease was dampened when the U.S. forces that retrieved the men from Iraqi interlocutors draped an American flag over Frost, who is white, and told him, "Welcome home!" There was no such gesture for the two Arab-American veterans, who'd been singled out for extra torment by their captors because they were Muslims working for the U.S. government.

"I've served my country as a soldier, a contractor and as a policeman and we're still second-class citizens," said El-Maadawy, who grew up in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and now lives in Boca Raton.

El-Maadawy and Frost say Iraqi officials spread the false story that they were grabbed while visiting a brothel to cloud the fact that it took a month for the Baghdad government to win the release of foreign allies from gunmen who are critical to the Iraqi government but operate outside of Prime Minister Haider Abadi's control.

The contractors say their captors belonged to the latest incarnation of the old Mahdi Army militia led by longtime U.S. enemy Muqtada al-Sadr, a powerful Shiite cleric who protests Abadi's policies but also has pledged to help government forces retake the northern city of Mosul from the Islamic State group. The former captives are incensed that the brothel narrative endures, allowing Iraqi authorities to avoid holding anyone accountable for the abduction.

"They were supporting the Iraqi government, augmenting the Iraqi forces," El-Maadawy said of his captors. "In essence, we were kidnapped by the Iraqi government."

In the first confusing moments of their capture, El-Maadawy said, he and his colleagues assumed their abductors were Sunni Muslim extremists from the Islamic State group. Westerners seldom make it out of Islamic State custody alive, and three U.S. defense contractors wouldn't stand a chance.

Figuring they were going to die anyway, El-Maadawy said, the men exchanged silent looks that telegraphed a plan: Shoot it out rather than be taken hostage for beheading later on camera.

Just then the militia commander answered his cellphone, and the Americans noticed that the screen bore the photo of al-Sadr. A decade ago, when al-Sadr's militiamen were killing dozens of American troops, that face might have meant a death sentence. In the complexities of today's Iraq, however, with the Obama administration working in tandem with the reconstituted militias to defeat the Islamic State, al-Sadr looked like a godsend.

"We knew we had a chance," El-Maadawy said.

The two Arabic-speaking Americans asked their captors whether they were part of the Iraqi government. They replied that the Iraqi government "paid them to be in charge of this neighborhood," El-Maadawy said.

The Americans reluctantly surrendered their weapons and, along with Abu Marina, were taken by van to a villa where two new SUVs sitting outside bore Iraqi government insignia. The men were reassured, thinking government forces would clear up the matter and send them on their way.

"Didn't happen," Frost said.

Instead, the men were led into a room dotted with portraits of al-Sadr and lined with crates of AK-47 ammunition and rocket-propelled grenades. They were interrogated and accused of drinking whiskey at Abu Marina's apartment. They were stripped of their cellphones and put back into the van, which rolled through Baghdad in broad daylight, en route to the Shiite enclave of Sadr City.

They were pushed into a room adorned with prayer carpets and cushions. Up until then, the militants had been menacing but not really violent.

"There was this elevated area, like a stage, and the whole wall behind it had a huge mural of Muqtada al-Sadr," Frost said. "They pull Waiel over and they kicked his knees out from under him."

The captors repeated the same routine with all three Americans and Abu Marina: Kick out the knees, force them to kneel and cover their eyes with filthy rags that were plas-

tered to their heads with packing tape.

Their hands and feet were bound with a combination of metal handcuffs and plastic cuffs; they immediately went numb from the lack of circulation.

The next three weeks brought round-the-clock horror: excruciating pain and utter darkness. They were kept blindfolded and shackled in stress positions, didn't get much food and learned to urinate into empty water bottles to avoid the beatings that accompanied bathroom visits, the men said.

At other times, El-Maadawy said, his captors put an unloaded gun to his head and pulled the trigger. He felt blades pressed against his throat and fingers. The kidnappers would hiss that he's not a real Muslim, that he was a traitor, a two-faced Sunni. In interrogation sessions, they'd hit him so hard he'd fly off the chair.

Both Frost and El-Maadawy said they also endured psychological trauma, such as repeated threats of beheading, or mind games in which they were encouraged to out one another as CIA operatives. El-Maadawy and Mohamed, his cousin, were held separately for most of the time. Frost typically was jailed with the interpreter, Abu Marina, so the captors could communicate with him.

Their treatment improved slightly in their last week in custody, the men said. They were allowed to shower and to remove their blindfolds. They got more food and could eat together. They were told that they would be freed, thanks to al-Sadr.

Just before their release, the Americans were cleaned up, forced into military uniforms and compelled to make a video thanking al-Sadr.

Shortly after making the video, the men were released to Iraqi middlemen who took them to the Green Zone. That day, Feb. 16, was the last the Americans saw of Abu Marina, the Iraqi-held captive with them. Attempts to reach him via his Facebook account failed; his whereabouts are unknown.

Carter cites progress in terrorism fight

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

A monthlong U.S. air campaign against the Islamic State in Libya has helped back the group into “a single neighborhood” in its coastal stronghold of Sirte, where an ongoing offensive seeks to dislodge the militants from their strategic foothold, Defense Secretary Ash Carter said Wednesday.

The campaign in Libya, along with intensified operations in Iraq and Syria, is a step in delivering a “lasting defeat” to the group, Carter said during a speech at Oxford University in Britain.

“They are still a dangerous adversary, and a lasting defeat will take time, but we will not let up until ISIL is defeated,” said Carter, using an alternate acronym for the Islamic State group.

Carter’s visit to the United

Kingdom, where he held talks with top officials including Prime Minister Theresa May, comes during a time of political turmoil in the country in the wake of a referendum to leave the European Union. Carter, along with President Barack Obama, had urged British voters to elect to stay in the EU, citing the need for political cohesion and unity.

On Wednesday, Carter said that despite the exit vote, the U.S. continues to view the U.K. as a key ally and partner in security operations in places like Iraq.

“That is true before the Brexit vote and it is true today after the Brexit vote,” Carter said. “I am confident the U.S. and the U.K. will now focus on the future, and that is what I am doing.”

Carter praised London for its contributions in the U.S.-led coalition taking part in operations

in Iraq and Syria, but he issued a warning to partners who have taken a back seat.

“We’ve made it clear there are no free riders,” Carter said of the coalition. When the war against the Islamic State group is over, “collectively we will remember who failed to show up for the fight.”

Carter highlighted two primary challenges during his speech: a more aggressive Russia that seeks to “erode the international order” and the threat of terrorism as the Islamic State group metastasizes.

In the case of Russia, Carter touted the U.S.’ enhanced military presence in Europe as a signal that it stands with its NATO allies and is ready to defend alliance territory if pushed.

“The United States does not seek a cold war, let alone a hot war with Russia,” he said. “Also, make no mistake, we

will defend our allies.”

Some NATO members, particularly the Baltic states that border Russia, have voiced concern about Moscow’s aggressive moves in the Ukraine as a sign of Russia’s larger territorial ambitions. Moscow, however, has repeatedly denied any intent to challenge NATO territory and has criticized the U.S. for its growing presence in the Baltics and Poland, saying it threatens Russia’s tiny enclave of Kaliningrad.

Carter, who heads to Norway on Thursday for high-level talks, said a new U.S. military posture in Europe focused on deterrence was a reaction to Russia’s own provocative maneuvers.

“We haven’t had to prioritize deterrence on NATO’s eastern flank for over 25 years; unfortunately, now we do,” Carter said.

Leaked DOD memo prompts fight in Congress

By TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers were barely back to work on the defense budget Tuesday when a bitter fight flared again over a leaked Pentagon memo.

The internal document detailed the Defense Department’s plan to play “hardball” with Congress this year and pit lawmakers against each other to defeat the House’s controversial effort to boost military spending by \$18 billion, which could provide the biggest troop pay raise in years and reverse an Army drawdown.

It became public as House and Senate members were scheduling their first face-to-face budget negotiations after a long summer recess, raising tensions and sparking a reaction from Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, who is a lead architect of the proposed increase and a subject of the memo.

“It is unfortunate and rather sad that some in the Obama administration spend so much time and effort playing political games, as evidenced by this memo,” said Thornberry, who serves as chairman of the Armed Services Committee.

Thornberry is leading House delegates who are trying to hammer out a final agreement on the annual defense spending with

members of the Senate, which voted against his increase.

The leaked memo dated May 13 provides an internal view of the Defense Department’s political campaign against what it calls a “gimmick” funding proposal put forward by Thornberry and passed in the House version of the National Defense Authorization Act earlier this year.

President Barack Obama has also threatened to veto the bill, partly over the \$18 billion in added spending.

“In short, we should attack the ... gimmick and be prepared to play hardball opposing it,” according to the memo written by DOD Comptroller Mike McCord and Stephen Hedger, assistant secretary of defense for legislative affairs. “The veto threat is our primary weapon. However, a veto threat only works if it is supported by the Democratic leadership and their caucuses. Our job is to encourage and support those efforts.”

The Pentagon is deeply opposed and has lashed out publicly against the added spending, saying it violates an agreement by Congress to match defense spending increases with more domestic spending and could hollow out the force by providing short-term funding without any guarantee that it will keep up in the future.

The \$18 billion would also come from the military’s overseas war budget and cause operations against the Islamic State group to run out of money at the end of April. Congress would be required to pass new spending legislation before then to keep the fight in Iraq and Syria going.

The so-called Overseas Contingency Operations account, known as OCO, also funds the thousands of troops remaining in Afghanistan.

McCord and Hedger wrote that the department should also exploit divisions in the Republican Party, particularly in the House. They suggested Thornberry was unlikely to change his mind judging by his “sharp media rebuttals” to Obama administration criticisms and suggested the department instead focus on Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-N.J., because he serves as chairman of the defense appropriations committee and appears to be “less enthused” about Thornberry’s plan.

It was yet another indication of the tough politics ahead as the House and Senate have just four weeks to settle the debate over the \$18 billion increase and a raft of other differences in the military’s annual policy bill, including requiring women to register for the draft.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Hundreds rescued from ocean during swim race

HI HONOLULU — Hundreds of swimmers who were competing in a race off Oahu had to be pulled from the ocean by rescue crews.

Kaia Hedlund, director of the 47th annual Waikiki Roughwater Swim, said some swimmers couldn't handle the strong current after the first buoy. The Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported. At least 455 of the 700 people registered for Monday's event completed the race, she said.

Those who struggled with the strong current during the 2.4-mile race were picked up and taken to shore via boat or jet ski by lifeguards, fire crews and volunteers.

Event organizers said about 200 swimmers received assistance, but Shayne Enright, with the Honolulu Emergency Services Department, said the number was more than 300.

There were reports of injuries during the race, including a woman who was treated by paramedics and hospitalized in serious condition after she suffered an injury on the reef. A 15-year-old swimmer was taken to the hospital by her father after she suffered an asthma attack.

School offers free pads, tampons in bathrooms

RI PROVIDENCE — Brown University students are returning to classes this semester to find free tampons and sanitary napkins in academic building bathrooms.

The students leading the initiative at the Ivy League school say the products are a necessity, not a luxury — an argument that's being made across the country in efforts to stop taxing feminine hygiene products.

The products will be avail-

able in women's, gender-inclusive and men's bathrooms in nonresidential buildings. Students wanted to offer the products in all bathrooms to be inclusive of transgender people, said Viet Nguyen, president of the Undergraduate Council of Students.

Coroner fears dealers using area as 'test tube'

OH CINCINNATI — An Ohio county coroner fears the Cincinnati area has been used as a "test tube" by heroin dealers for use of a powerful animal tranquilizer.

Hamilton County coroner Dr. Lakshmi Sammarco said Tuesday that tests have confirmed carfentanil in the bodies of eight recent overdose casualties, and more cases are suspected. The drug can be thousands of times more powerful than morphine.

She said the intense and focused spike in the area raises concerns that dealers wanted to see what would happen to users of carfentanil. Authorities say nearly 300 overdoses have been reported in the Cincinnati area beginning Aug. 19, including 174 in a six-day period, and at least three deaths.

Website pokes fun at delays on oldest subway

MA BOSTON — Be-leaguered Boston straphangers may find solace in a new website that pokes fun at the nation's oldest subway system.

A pair of longtime Boston commuters created what they call the "MBTA excuse generator." It can be found at MBTAexcuses.com. The site randomly generates sarcastic alerts for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority with the click of a button.

One recent faux alert about

the green line read: "Severe residual delays due to an earlier Tom Brady suspension hearing at Reservoir. We are pretty sure this makes us a World Class City."

An MBTA spokesman told The Boston Globe that the agency welcomes "constructive comments and suggestions" on its website. He said the agency remains focused on improving aging infrastructure and providing safe and reliable service.

Emergency landing after passenger gets unruly

TN NASHVILLE — A United Airlines flight made an emergency landing in Nashville after an apparently intoxicated passenger caused a disturbance.

An arrest affidavit from Metro Nashville Police said the passenger, Mohammed Nasser Aldoseri, told officers he had eight drinks before boarding Monday's flight from Cincinnati to Houston. The pilot diverted the flight, according to police, after Aldoseri broke one of the plane's bathroom doors, threw up in a sink and then started speaking loudly.

News outlets reported that the affidavit says officers found Aldoseri passed out in his seat when the plane landed. Police said he had slurred speech, red, glassy eyes and was unsteady on his feet.

Police charged Aldoseri with public intoxication and disorderly conduct.

600 pot plants found growing behind day care

CT WEST HAVEN — State inspectors have found more than 600 marijuana plants growing behind a Connecticut day care center, and police say arrests are

forthcoming.

Police were called to a home day care center in West Haven on Friday after inspectors discovered the plants during a routine inspection.

Sgt. David Tammaro said the marijuana plants were enclosed by a recently installed wooden fence in the backyard of the home. He said the plants were 6 to 10 feet tall, with an estimated street value of more than \$1 million.

A spokeswoman for the state Office of Early Childhood said the day care center's license was suspended following the inspection, but the action was unrelated to the police investigation.

State records show the house had been a licensed day care center since 1995.

Hunter saves deer from python in swampy woods

FL OCHOPEE — Miami hunter Jimmy Wilson was hiking through the swampy woods near Ochopee in rural Collier County this summer when he came upon an amazing sight.

The Naples Daily News reported that Wilson saw a huge python — a non-native invasive species overrunning the Everglades — had wrapped itself around a white-tailed deer. Both were lying still at his feet as he walked up, capturing the scene on cellphone video.

In the video, Wilson utters an expletive and starts firing his gun. After the first of several shots, the snake slithers off. Wilson eventually kills it and then coaxes the deer into running off.

Wilson's video doesn't show the deer jumping back to life, but movement can be heard in the brush as Wilson reports the outcome.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Who will win the AFC is anyone's guess

Associated Press

NEW YORK — No Manning. No Brady, for the first four games. No clear-cut favorite in the AFC.

With the regular season about to kick off, it's anybody's guess who'll be the conference's representative at the Super Bowl in Houston in February.

The defending champion Denver Broncos will try to become the first team to repeat since New England in 2004-05. But they won't have the retired Peyton Manning leading the way. Or even Brock Osweiler, who bolted from the Broncos and headed to Houston.

Instead, Gary Kubiak and the Broncos will turn to 2015 seventh-rounder Trevor Siemian, who has not thrown a pass in a regular-season game, after sorting through a quarterback mix that included veteran Mark Sanchez and rookie Paxton Lynch, the team's first-rounder this year.

Sanchez was among the final cuts and headed to Dallas to help replace an injured Tony Romo.

While their chances for success at quarterback is still a big uncertainty, the Broncos know they've got one of the league's best defenses back, especially with the return of Super Bowl

MVP Von Miller.

"If we're like last year, our team didn't worry about the other side of the ball," defensive coordinator Wade Phillips said. "They worried about how well they played. That's what we want to do. We have to outplay the other team's defense. If they hold our team to not much, then we hold them to less. That's the way we play the game."

New England has known for several weeks who its quarterback will be at the start of the season. Jimmy Garoppolo steps in for the suspended Tom Brady, who'll have to sit four games as a result of his role in the "Deflategate" scandal.

That might make the Patriots' stranglehold on the AFC East appear looser after winning the division the past seven years. Well, not so fast on writing off Bill Belichick's bunch.

"Belichick is Belichick," Buffalo safety Corey Graham said. "He's one of the best, so when it's all said and done, you know he's going to get those guys prepared and make sure they're ready to go."

Pittsburgh might have as good a chance to win the AFC crown as anyone, especially if Ben Roethlisberger remains healthy. The Steelers went 10-6 and won a playoff game last season despite a down year for

their playmaking quarterback because of injuries.

Wide receiver Antonio Brown, among the most dynamic offensive players in the league, broke his own franchise records by catching 136 passes for 1,834 yards. Running back Le'Veon Bell is back from torn knee ligaments and should provide a boost, but will be suspended the first three games of the regular season for missing multiple drug tests.

The Steelers will also have to contend with AFC North rival Cincinnati, which has made the postseason five straight years.

Quarterback Andy Dalton is recovered from a broken thumb that kept him out of the Bengals' first-round playoff loss to the Steelers. He was having a breakout season when he got hurt last December, setting a team record with a passer rating of 106.3. But Marvin Lewis' offense will have a different look this season with coordinator Hue Jackson leaving to become Cleveland's head coach and wide receivers Marvin Jones (Lions) and Mohamed Sanu (Falcons) signing elsewhere as free agents.

The AFC South could be a toss-up, with Andrew Luck back from an inconsistent and injury-plagued season for Indianapolis. Houston has a new

quarterback in Osweiler and running back in Lamar Miller, but star defensive end J.J. Watt has been slowed after having back surgery. Jacksonville is coming off a 5-11 year, but showed promise with quarterback Blake Bortles' breakthrough season with receivers Allen Robinson and Allen Hurns, who combined for 24 touchdown catches.

Any stumbles by Denver might create an opening in the AFC West for Kansas City, which was a win away from the AFC title game despite not having running back Jamaal Charles for most of the season because of a torn knee ligament.

Oakland also appears to be a team on the rise, led by quarterback Derek Carr. The Raiders could get off to a good start because they face just one playoff team from last season (Kansas City) in their first eight games.

"I believe we have a chance to be better," Broncos general manager John Elway said. "There's no question that the Raiders are better, the Chargers and Kansas City are going to be better, so that's what makes it tough. Our division is one of the top divisions in the league now. It's going to be a battle within and that's why every game is going to count."

NFL season kicks off with rematch of Super Bowl 50

Associated Press

DENVER — Cam Newton and Von Miller won't be watching much film of Super Bowl 50 as they prepare for Thursday night's NFL kickoff between the Carolina Panthers and Denver Broncos.

The Panthers don't really want to relive the nightmare, and the Broncos don't want to live in the past.

Besides, "it's two completely different teams," Newton explained.

Not exactly.

The Panthers return 18 of 22 starters, the Broncos just 13.

Carolina's secondary features a new starting free safety in Tre Boston and two rookie cornerbacks in James Bradberry and Daryl Worley.

"I'm not going to look at them like they're rookies," Broncos receiver Emmanuel Sanders said. "I'm going to treat them like they're Darrelle Revis and Richard Sherman."

Also back for the Panthers are star receiver Kelvin Benjamin, who missed last season with a knee injury, and running back Jonathan Stewart, who was nicked up in the Super Bowl and held to 29 yards on 12 carries.

The strength of Carolina's defense is its fear-inducing front seven, and so star cornerback Josh Norman was deemed expendable. He signed with the Washington Redskins.

Pass rusher Jared Allen retired, but his replacement, Kony Ealy, was the Panthers' biggest bright spot in their otherwise miserable 24-10 loss to Denver seven months ago. He disrupted Peyton Manning with three sacks, a forced fumble, a fumble recovery and an interception.

"They're returning 18 starters, same coaching staff and same players, really," said

Broncos linebacker Brandon Marshall. "I think you could use a lot from that game, but you'd be fools to think that they're going to run the same plays."

Anyway, the Broncos have tried their best to put their Super Bowl triumph behind them.

The only diamond-encrusted championship ring you'll see around team headquarters is the one in the big trophy case in the lobby, subbing for the Lombardi trophies that are on display elsewhere in the city this week.

Another pass for Djokovic into semis

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Normally, it takes wins in five full matches to reach a Grand Slam semifinal. Novak Djokovic has made it that far at the U.S. Open by playing only two, because three opponents pulled out of the tournament with injuries.

Djokovic, the No. 1 seed and defending champion, once again needed to put in very little work, advancing to the final four at Flushing Meadows for the 10th consecutive year when No. 9 Jo-Wilfried Tsonga stopped because of a hurt left knee Tuesday night.

The first two sets of their quarterfinal went Djokovic's way, 6-3, 6-2. At the ensuing changeover, Tsonga was visited by a trainer and had his left leg taped below the knee. They played one point to begin the third set: Tsonga double-faulted, then retired from the match.

This came after Djokovic's second-round opponent, Jiri Vesely, withdrew from the tournament with a sore left forearm. And then the man Djokovic was supposed to play

in the third round, Mikhail Youzhny, quit after six games and only 31 minutes with a strained left hamstring.

"I put myself in a position again to be one match away from the finals. As the tournament progresses, I feel like I'm getting better," Djokovic said. "Of course, this Grand Slam is very unique for me: I never experienced something like this — to have three retirements on the road to the semifinals."

Tsonga said when the pain came Tuesday, "I knew it was over for me straightaway."

"It's already tough to play against one of the best tennis players," Tsonga said, "but when I don't have my knee, I have no chance to come back from two sets to love."

On Friday, Djokovic will play No. 10 Gael Monfils, who advanced earlier against No. 24 Lucas Pouille, the man who eliminated Rafael Nadal in the fourth round. Playing steadily, and with only a dose of the spectacular, Monfils reached his first major semifinal since 2008 by beating an error-prone Pouille 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 in an all-

French quarterfinal.

For all of his deep runs at Flushing Meadows, Djokovic has won only two of his 12 Grand Slam titles at the hard-court tournament, in 2011 and 2015. He's lost in four finals and three semifinals over the past decade.

It's tough to know exactly how well he's playing at the moment, simply because no one has seen him on court all that much lately: less than 6½ hours through five rounds.

After his streak of four consecutive major championships — the first time a man had done that in nearly 50 years — was capped by his initial French Open title, Djokovic was upset in the third round at Wimbledon. He returned to action by winning the Toronto Masters, but since then, Djokovic lost in the first round of the Rio Olympics while dealing with a sore left wrist that he then cited in skipping the Cincinnati Masters.

Djokovic's right arm was massaged by a trainer in his first- and fourth-round matches at the U.S. Open, so getting all of these free passes hasn't been

a bad thing.

"In this stage of the season, considering some physical issues I have had in the last month, month and a half, this was the scenario that I needed and I wished for. I got a lot of days off and recovered my body," Djokovic said. "Right now, I'm feeling very close to the peak. That's the position where I want to be."

Monfils, who turned 30 last week, only once before made it to a Grand Slam semifinal, 8½ years ago in front of a partisan crowd at the French Open. But he has been fantastic during this tournament, winning all 15 sets he's played.

In the first women's quarterfinal, Roberta Vinci fell apart after losing the opening set on a foot fault, allowing No. 2 seed Angelique Kerber to take the last nine games and win 7-5, 6-0. In the other, two-time runner-up Caroline Wozniacki was a 6-0, 6-2 winner against Anastasiya Sevastova, who injured her right ankle in the second game and was never able to get going.

Woods aims to be back on Tour in October

Associated Press

Tiger Woods says he hopes to play next month in the PGA's Safeway Open in Napa, Calif., his first competitive golf since August 2015.

The winner of 14 major tournaments, Woods has been recovering from back surgery and missed all four majors for the first time in his pro career.

Woods made the announcement on his website. The Safeway Open is Oct. 13-16.

He says "my rehabilitation is to the point where I'm comfortable making plans, but I still have work to do. Whether I can play depends on my continued progress and recovery. My hope is to have my game ready to go."

Woods also says he hopes to compete in several other events before the end of the year, including the Turkish Open Nov. 3-6. He also plans to play in the Woods Foundation-run Hero World Challenge on Dec. 1-4 in the Bahamas.

Bills' OT appealing suspension

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Buffalo Bills offensive tackle Seantrel Henderson is appealing the NFL's four-game suspension for testing positive for marijuana, according to a person with direct knowledge of the situation.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity Wednesday because the suspension is being appealed and the NFL has not announced its ruling.

The person said Henderson's appeal is based on him using marijuana for medicinal purposes to relieve the effects of Crohn's disease.

Henderson was diagnosed with the inflammatory bowel disease late last year, and has since had two operations on his intestines. The first operation occurred in January, when doctors removed a section of diseased tissue. In April, he had surgery to have his intestine reattached.

Altidore, Pulisic make history

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Jozy Altidore made U.S. history. So did Christian Pulisic.

Altidore scored twice in a three-minute span of the second half, Sacha Kljestan and Paul Arriola had goals and the United States beat Trinidad and Tobago 4-0 on Tuesday night to reach the final round of qualifying for the 2018 World Cup.

The Americans (4-1-1) finished atop Group C of the semifinal round in the North and Central American and Caribbean region.

Altidore etched his name in the record book by becoming the United States' leader with 16 qualifying goals, two more than Clint Dempsey.

Pulisic made his first U.S. start after seven appearances as a substitute, and at 17 years, 353 days, became the youngest American to start a qualifier. Landon Donovan had set the mark of 18 years, 184 days.

3 homers in the 9th lift Cardinals

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Down to his final strike and his team trailing by a run with two outs in the ninth, St. Louis pinch-hitter Matt Carpenter told himself to just find a pitch he could handle.

When the fastball from closer Tony Watson ended up right down the middle and not up and away as Watson hoped, Carpenter pounced. His solo homer — a major league record 15th by a St. Louis pinch-hitter this season — tied it and sent a jolt through the Cardinals. A home run each from Randal Grichuk and Jhonny Peralta followed, and St. Louis rallied for a stunning 9-7 win over the Pittsburgh Pirates on Tuesday night.

“We’ve got a team that I think the best way to describe it is a dangerous team,” Carpenter said. “We’ve got a team that I don’t think anybody wants to match up with, especially in a postseason scenario. It’s a fun team to play on. We never quit, and tonight was a good example of it.”

St. Louis blew an early five-run lead and the Pirates were a pitch away from ending a seven-game losing streak when Watson’s 0-2 fastball turned into Carpenter’s 18th home run. An All-Star two years ago as a setup man who moved into the closer role when Mark Melancon was traded to Washington at the deadline, Watson gave up as many homers in the ninth as he did during the entire 2015 season.

“We’re not playing good ball and to go out there and (have) guys fight back and be a strike away and serve up four more runs, it’s tough to swallow,” Watson (2-4) said after his third blown save since replacing Melancon.

Yadier Molina went 4-for-5, including a first-inning grand slam for St. Louis. Mike Mayers (1-1) tossed a scoreless eighth for the win, and Seung-Hwan Oh worked around a solo homer to Jung Ho Kang in the ninth for his 16th save.

The Cardinals finished with five home runs in all, including Matt Adams’ 436-foot drive over the seats in right field that plopped into the Allegheny River on the bounce. The comeback allowed St. Louis to remain a game in front of the

New York Mets for the second wild card in the National League.

“I’m speechless,” St. Louis manager Mike Matheny said. “Just, I love how this team competes, right down to the last out. Having a guy like (Carpenter), who hadn’t felt quite right, to be able to come into that situation, and then right after that ... I’m at a loss.”

Jung Ho Kang had two homers for Pittsburgh and Jordy Mercer hit a two-run double in the fifth as the Pirates took advantage of some sloppy defense by the Cardinals to overcome an early five-run deficit. Watson’s implosion, however, sent Pittsburgh to its eighth straight defeat.

Gardner’s grab preserves Yanks’ win

Associated Press

NEW YORK — If the New York Yankees eventually catch up in the AL wild-card race, they’ll long remember this catch by Brett Gardner.

Two outs in the ninth inning, bases loaded, one-run lead. Does it get much better?

Gardner made a leaping grab at the top of the left-field wall, clutching the ball as he banged into the fence on Justin Smoak’s drive for the final out, and the Yankees held off AL East-leading Toronto 7-6 Tuesday night.

“I knew I was going to be able to catch up to it and get to it, I just didn’t know if I was going to run out of room or not,” Gardner said.

“I knew it was going to be close to the wall — thank goodness it wasn’t much higher,” he said.

A scrambly September game with October implications saw-sawed to the last swing, and turned at the end in favor of the Yankees. New York won its third in a row and sent the Blue Jays to their fourth loss in five games.

At a season-high seven games

over .500, the Yankees closed within 4½ games of first place, their smallest deficit since April, and remained 3½ back for the AL’s second wild card.

The Blue Jays had already scored twice in the ninth off Dellin Betances when they loaded the bases with one out. Blake Parker, the eighth New York pitcher, suddenly became an unlikely closer, and he struck out Kevin Pillar.

Smoak was up next — in August 2015, he became the first Toronto player to hit a grand slam in the Bronx.

This time, he sliced a deep shot to left.

Gardner ran back, squared himself on the warning track and jumped high and back into the padding. He held on for the catch, immediately leaped in the air to celebrate and tossed the ball high.

Red Sox 5, Padres 1: Jackie Bradley Jr. and Chris Young homered and Clay Buchholz pitched six-plus solid innings, and visiting Boston moved into a tie with Toronto atop the AL East.

Astros 4, Indians 3: Corey Kluber lost for the first time

since July 3 after Marwin Gonzalez connected for a three-run homer off host Cleveland’s ace in the second inning.

Rangers 10, Mariners 7: Elvis Andrus had a homer and three doubles, Jonathan Lucroy hit a two-run homer and Texas held off slumping host Seattle.

Royals 10, Twins 3: Kendrys Morales had two home runs, including a three-run blast in visiting Kansas City’s seven-run ninth inning.

White Sox 2, Tigers 0: Jose Abreu hit his fifth homer in seven games, Miguel Gonzalez came off the disabled list to throw 6⅓ innings of six-hit ball and Chicago cooled off visiting Detroit.

Giants 3, Rockies 2: Kelby Tomlinson hit a one-out, tie-breaking single in the ninth and San Francisco rallied to beat host Colorado.

Mets 5, Reds 3: Yoenis Cespedes hit the most damaging of New York’s four homers, a two-run shot in the seventh inning, as the Mets rallied for their 13th straight victory over host Cincinnati.

Orioles 11, Rays 2: Manny Machado capped a six-run

fourth inning with a grand slam off Jake Odorizzi, leading Baltimore over host Tampa Bay.

Dodgers 5, Diamondbacks 2: Ross Stripling and four relievers combined on a four-hitter and the rookie helped himself with a go-ahead single in the second inning, leading host Los Angeles to its fourth straight win.

Brewers 12, Cubs 5: Jonathan Villar homered to start a five-run first inning against Jason Hammel, and host Milwaukee cooled off Chicago.

Nationals 9, Braves 7: Pinch-runner Michael Taylor scored the go-ahead run for host Washington on catcher Tyler Flowers’ throwing error as part of a three-run eighth inning.

Phillies 4, Marlins 3: Adam Morgan snapped his major league-worst streak of nine consecutive losses, Odubel Herrera scored three runs and visiting Philadelphia spoiled Miami slugger Giancarlo Stanton’s return.

Athletics 3, Angels 2: Joey Wendle hit a go-ahead single during a three-run eighth inning and host Oakland rallied.