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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Navy scuttles enlisted ratings system

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy has scrapped its 2-century-old enlisted ratings system that identified sailors by their occupations and military ranks in a controversial plan to provide them greater career flexibility, the service announced Thursday.

Enlisted sailors now will be addressed only by their attained military ranks, similar to how servicemembers in the other military branches are recognized. For example, a sailor previously addressed as yeoman second class, or YN2, will now simply be called petty officer second class, said Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Steven S. Giordano.

Sailors in pay grades E-1 through E-3 will be addressed as seaman. Sailors in pay grades E-4 through E-6 will be called petty officer third class, second class and first class, respectively. Sailors in the senior enlisted pay grades of E-7 through E-9 will be addressed as chief, senior chief and master chief, respectively.

Giordano said Navy leaders understand the change “represents a significant cultural shift,” but he added it also will allow sailors to train and serve in more than one single job.

“This is about giving sailors more choice and flexibility and ultimately providing the Navy opportunities to get the right sailors with the right training

and experience in the right billets,” he said.

Yet some sailors across the service said they were surprised by the rating change.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Kelly Lane, an information systems technician for Yokosuka Naval Base’s Naval Computers and Telecommunications Station, said it was a “big change” that came with no warning.

More changes expected

“It seemed to come out of nowhere, without much notice, so a lot of people were surprised it happened,” Lane said. “Usually you hear chatter about things before they happen.”

The new system, implemented immediately upon announcement Thursday, was the result of a months-long review of the Navy’s titles ordered by Navy Secretary Ray Mabus in January as part of the service’s plan to implement women into all positions. The Marine Corps, also under Mabus’ leadership, conducted a similar review that resulted in the service’s decision to eliminate “man” from many of its occupation titles, though the Corps will keep some of its traditional titles, including rifleman and mortarman.

More changes to modernize the Navy’s enlisted ratings system are expected in the future, a Navy statement said. They will occur in phases over multiple years, and sailors are expected to get plenty of advance notice

prior to changes to career processes such as advancements, training and detailing.

The new system groups enlisted sailors into broad Navy Occupational Specialties, similar to the Army and Marine Corps’ Military Occupational Specialties and the Air Force’s Air Force Specialty Code systems. The new structure will give enlisted sailors a wider pool of potential jobs and duty assignments, according to a Navy statement.

Sailors can acquire more than one NOS, further broadening their skill sets and their chances for advancing within the service.

Easier transition to civilian world

The new designations also could help sailors adjust to civilian life once they leave the service, Mabus said in a statement.

For example, sailors serving in the position that used to be known as hospital corpsman will now serve in the NOS entitled medical technician. The new title “better reflects the work and responsibilities” of that job and is “better aligned with the civilian medical profession,” according to the Navy statement.

“In aligning the descriptions of the work our sailors do with their counterparts in the civilian world, we more closely reflect the nation we protect while also making it easier for

our sailors to obtain the credentials they’ll need to be successful in the private sector,” Mabus said.

Sailors contacted by Stars and Stripes had mixed reactions to the rating changes.

Lane, the petty officer 3rd class at Yokosuka Naval Base, said he was pleased the new system would better align with civilian-sector jobs and would open up new opportunities outside of the old rating system.

However, Petty Officer 3rd Class Jonathan Guerra said he did not like that the new system broke with the Navy’s long tradition.

“I’m kind of against it ... The Navy is the only branch that has ratings like this,” said Guerra, a master at arms stationed at Naval Support Activity Bahrain. “And everyone, especially Master at Arms, are extremely prideful on being an MA, having that rate to ourselves.”

The decision to get rid of the traditional Navy rating system also has spawned an Internet petition at whitehouse.gov that garnered more than 16,500 signatures in a day.

The petition description reads: “For 241 years, Navy personnel have been identified by their job specialty ... Being known by your job title was a sense of pride. A sign of accomplishment. The Secretary of the Navy and Chief of Naval Operations just senselessly erased this tradition.”

Wells Fargo to pay \$20M penalty over loans to troops, sources say

Wells Fargo, reeling from weeks of pummeling over fraudulent customer accounts, is now facing a Justice Department sanction over improperly repossessing cars owned by members of the military, according to two people with knowledge of the

investigation.

Federal prosecutors and the bank’s regulator, the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, are planning to punish the San Francisco-based lender for alleged violations of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, said the people, who asked not to be named because the investigation isn’t public. A penalty of as much as \$20 mil-

lion is expected from the OCC, one of the people said. That’s an unusually large fine for abuse of this law, which in most cases requires that firms obtain court orders before seizing vehicles from soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines who are delinquent on their loans.

From Bloomberg

Carter: US-Philippines relationship is 'ironclad'

By TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

ABOARD THE USS CARL VINSON — The United States will continue to invest in five military bases in the Philippines as the relationship between the two countries remains “ironclad,” Secretary of Defense Ash Carter said Thursday.

His remarks, part of a speech to sailors aboard the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson in San Diego, came as new Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has tried to distance his government from U.S. influence, most recently by announcing the Philippines would cancel all future military exercises with the U.S.

Duterte also has insulted President Barack Obama, prompting the U.S. leader to cancel a meeting during a Laos summit in early September. Soon afterward, the Philippine president demanded the withdrawal of U.S. special operations forces fighting Islamic extremists on the southern island of Mindanao.

Those developments, while a stark difference from the closer relationship the U.S. had with Duterte's predecessor, are not affecting plans to increase U.S. investment there, a senior defense official said during a background briefing to reporters traveling with Carter.

“I expect we'll get through this,” the official said on condition of anonymity. “The U.S. has a strong security interest in the Philippines regardless of who is president.”

Carter was to meet with Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana in Hawaii later Thursday as part of a regular meeting between the U.S. and 10 Southeast Asian defense ministers known as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN.

The speech aboard the Carl Vinson was described by a senior defense official as a preview to the ASEAN meeting to set the stage for continuing dis-

cussions the ministers have on regional security.

In his speech, Carter said the continued focus on the ASEAN relationships marked the “third phase” of the Obama administration's efforts to rebalance America's military and political influence in the Pacific region as China continues to develop economically and militarily. The third phase, which continues an effort started in 2012 to move more U.S. military assets to the region and to shore up alliances there, “will continue to sharpen our military edge so we remain the most powerful military in the region and the security partner of choice,” Carter said.

To execute the first and second phases of the rebalancing, the Pentagon made plans to shift 60 percent of its military assets to the region by 2020, and worked to strengthen the relationships with many of the countries that defense officials say the U.S. will need to counterbalance China's rise and increased militarization of the South China Sea.

This is Carter's sixth trip to the Asia-Pacific region as defense secretary. On each of those visits, he has worked to secure new trade and military cooperation agreements with countries such as India, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, South Korea and Japan.

The Philippines agreement, called the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, was considered an important part of the U.S. rebalancing, particularly given the country's proximity to the Spratly Islands, where China has claimed sovereignty.

The agreement was signed in April between Carter and Gazmin Valtierra, the Philippines' former defense secretary, and called for the U.S. to help modernize five Philippine bases in preparation for increased rotations of U.S. forces there.

In the past few days, the most recent rotation of U.S. air power arrived at Clark Air Base, one of the five locations that were part of the agreement.

Critics question LCS program after bumpy start

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT
Associated Press

NEWPORT, R.I. — Five of seven of the U.S. Navy's speedy new warships have had engine problems in the past year, and four of them are now considered “test” ships that'll rarely, if ever, be deployed.

The Navy insists the costly littoral combat ship program is going to be fine after a bumpy start.

Adm. John Richardson, the chief of naval operations, said recently in Newport, R.I., that most major shipbuilding programs have “startup types of issues.”

“They're very complex programs, and so I think, overall, this program is on track, and we are seeing that we're learning lessons as it starts up,” he said.

But two senior senators, John McCain, R-Ariz., and Jack Reed, D-R.I., say it's time for the Navy to question all of its assumptions about the littoral combat ship program, which has been criticized for its growing costs, questions about the warships' warfighting ability and now, the ships' mechanical reliability.

They said acquisition mistakes and the ship's complexity have led to problems now.

Earlier this month, the newest littoral combat ship, the USS Montgomery, suffered two major engineering problems just three days after its commissioning that will require potentially costly changes to other ships, and most of the replaceable mission modules for the ships are years delayed, said McCain, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The program has “new problems,” McCain said in a

statement, “but it is not a new program.” He said that's why he and Reed are calling on the Navy to reconcile their aspirations with reality.

Two versions of the littoral combat ship were sped into production because the Navy wanted an affordable, fast ship to operate in shallow coastal, or littoral, waters.

Lockheed Martin is building the Freedom-variant in Marinette, Wis. Austal USA is building the Independence-variant in Mobile, Ala.

The Navy originally spoke of building the ships for about \$220 million each in constant fiscal 2005 dollars but the costs for the first few subsequently more than doubled, according to the Congressional Research Service.

The cost for subsequent ships then came down under the current block buy contracts to roughly \$380 million in fiscal 2005 dollars, or about \$450 million each in current dollars, the research service said.

McCain and Reed, ranking member on the Senate Armed Services Committee, want the Navy to consider deploying the ships less often, establishing a site on land for engineering and technical support and reviewing the number of sailors assigned to each ship.

The Navy is overhauling how it operates the ships. The first four ships will be used for testing developing technologies and systems being installed on the littoral combat ships.

Richardson said the Navy is learning engineering, technological and training lessons that will be rolled forward to improve future ships and the preparedness of crews to operate them.

Army names new leader of 1st Infantry Division

BY ALEX HORTON
Stars and Stripes

SAN ANTONIO — The commander of the National Training Center will lead the 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley in Kansas after the Army relieved Maj. Gen. Wayne Grigsby of command, the Pentagon said Thursday.

Maj. Gen. Joseph Martin will assume command of “The Big Red One” after the removal of Grigsby as the division prepares one of its brigades for deployment to Iraq, said Cynthia O. Smith, an Army spokeswoman.

Grigsby was pulled from command last week for what the Army described as “a lack of confidence.” Army officials have offered few details, other than Grigsby is the subject of an official investigation. The violation or violations that spurred his removal from command have not yet been made public.

A unit from the 1st Infantry Division will deploy to Iraq as part of a regular rotation, Smith said. But she stressed it was not related to the Pentagon’s announcement this week of 600 troops deploying to Iraq to bolster the fight against the Islamic State group ahead of the anticipated Mosul offensive.

Col. Patrick R. Seiber, an Army spokesman, downplayed the potential of a sudden command change to cause disruption to a force about to deploy as operations intensify against the Islamic State group.

Martin’s experience as a brigade commander with the 1st Infantry Division in Iraq made him an optimal choice to replace Grigsby, Seiber said Thursday.

Martin now serves as commander of the National Training Center at Fort Irwin in California, a training area that certifies units for combat deployments. He was commissioned as an armor officer at West Point in 1986, Smith said.

DOD expects to pay up to \$8M for gender treatments

USA Today

Starting the first week of October, the government will pay for gender reassignment treatments and surgeries for eligible soldiers. It’s estimated to cost between \$2.4 million to \$8.4 million per year.

There are between 1,320 and 6,630 transgender troops on active duty, according to the Rand Corp., which conducted a study for the Pentagon. Of those, Rand estimates between 30 and 140 would like hormone treatment, and 25 to 130 would seek surgery.

The Defense Department policy states if a servicemember’s ability to serve is hindered by a “medical condition or medical treatment related to their gender identity,” they will be treated. The commander must approve the timing of medical treatment.

Defense Department spokesman Air Force Maj. Ben Sakrisson said starting Monday, the military health program will cover therapy and hormone treatments for Tricare beneficiaries with gender dysphoria. According to Sakrisson, gen-

der reassignment surgeries for active-duty personnel will be conducted at either a military hospital or, if qualified care is unavailable at a military facility, at a private hospital paid by Tricare.

Ron Crews, executive director of Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty, said this is not the best use of government money, because soldiers undergoing treatments or surgeries will be unqualified for deployment for extended periods of time.

New Niger site could boost US drones’ ability in Africa

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A new base under construction in Niger could be capable of hosting armed U.S. drones, a sign that a counterterrorism mission in western Africa, focused until now on surveillance, has the potential to turn lethal, according to a news report.

The military is building a new site to host U.S. unmanned aircraft in Agadez, Niger, a strategic outpost that also puts Libya in the sights of long-range MQ-9 Reaper 9 drones, according to The Intercept, an investigative news site.

The government of Niger, the only western Africa country to allow MQ-9 Reapers, will allow for armed drone flights, The Intercept reported, citing a previously classified U.S. document.

“Moving operations to Agadez aligns persistent ISR (intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance) to current and emerging threats over Niger & Chad, supports French regionalization and extends range to cover south Libya and Nigeria,” says

a Pentagon document obtained by the Intercept.

For several years, the U.S. has been conducting remotely piloted surveillance out of Niger, a launching pad for reconnaissance on Islamic militant groups operating in Nigeria, Mali and elsewhere. Those operations have been based in Niamey, Niger’s capital, but will shift to Agadez.

So far, there have been no reports of offensive airstrikes by the U.S. in the region.

U.S. Africa Command declined to say whether it intended to conduct armed drone flights in the future out of Agadez, where the U.S. base is expected to open next year.

“The types of aircraft operating from Agadez will depend on available assets, the regional requirements of our host nations, and the requirements to meet mutual security goals,” Samantha Reho, an AFRICOM spokeswoman, said in an email. “The arming of any aircraft, including remotely piloted aircraft, is done with the approval of and upon coordination with the Government of Niger.”

AFRICOM, citing operational security concerns, said it would not discuss specifics about military efforts nor “speculate on potential future activities or operations.”

Instability in western Africa has been a growing concern for the United States. In Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country, the militant group Boko Haram has been blamed for the killing of more than 10,000 people in 2015 and ranks as possibly the world’s most deadly terrorist group. While Boko Haram has not demonstrated a capacity to target the West, it has launched attacks on neighboring Niger and Cameroon, where the U.S. also conducts surveillance flights using deployed personnel.

In Africa, the U.S. military has become more overtly focused on counterterrorism operations in recent years. After years of operating in secret in Somalia, the U.S. now acknowledges that it has a small number of special operations forces in the country to assist local troops in their fight against the militant group al-Shabab.

Cybersecurity's campaign role

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hillary Clinton is vowing anew to respond to foreign hacking the same as any other attack against the United States. When she openly blamed Russia for recent U.S. cyber break-ins, Donald Trump wondered whether to blame overseas governments or overweight hackers working from home.

"She's saying Russia, Russia, Russia, but I don't — maybe it was. I mean, it could be Russia, but it could also be China," Trump said during this week's presidential debate. "It could also be lots of other people. It also could be somebody sitting on their bed that weighs 400 pounds, OK?"

These are the unanswered questions about how the U.S. government should defend itself after an attack in the internet age: Whether to fire back, how to fire back, and at whom? The Obama administration is still writing its rulebook.

A lingering challenge involves identifying whose hands were on the keyboard: Foreign hacker spies, cybercriminals, disgruntled insiders or bored teenagers? Skilled hackers can cover their tracks, use software tools traceable to others and feign their location across borders or continents.

The White House has not officially declared Russia responsible and it's unclear whether or when it might, since blaming Russia — with whom the U.S. is locked in a bitter dispute over fighting in Syria — would probably require plans for a response.

Clinton has raised eyebrows among some cybersecurity experts with her hawkish language on the campaign trail about retaliating with political, economic or even military means. Her aggressive policy proposal is especially notable since the State Department, which she led during President Barack Obama's first term, traditionally has a vested interest

in avoiding overt conflict since it might complicate diplomatic efforts.

"We're going to have to make it clear that we don't want to use the kinds of tools that we have. We don't want to engage in a different kind of warfare. But we will defend the citizens of this country," Clinton said during the presidential debate, when asked how she would respond to cyberattacks.

For the first time, cybersecurity led the national security portion of the presidential debate, demonstrating its political stakes and the fact that the next president will shape 21st century cyberwarfare policies, setting rules about how the U.S. responds to foreign hackers.

Trump has not released an official position on cybersecurity. Clinton tackles the issue in one-and-a-half pages of her 288-page campaign book. At the debate Trump mentioned "the cyber" without detailing specifics.

Colo. pot candy gets new look

Associated Press

DENVER — Wondering if that brownie contains pot? Colorado has you covered.

A requirement that edible marijuana products come with a diamond-shaped stamp and the letters T-H-C — not just on the packaging but on the brownies, candies and other edibles, themselves — takes effect Saturday.

The rule referencing marijuana's psychoactive ingredient was added after complaints that the treats look too much their non-intoxicating counterparts. It is the first such requirement in any legal weed state.

Colorado's new "universal symbol" for foods that contain marijuana is designed to give the treats a distinct look even after they're out of the packaging. In other words, a pot cookie being passed around a high school cafeteria no longer will look so innocent, giving parents a way to identify marijuana edibles without smelling or tasting them.

The stamping requirement comes in addition to exhaustive labeling and packaging rules that include childproof zippers and lids, along with warnings that the product should be kept away from children and not eaten before driving or while pregnant or nursing.

"We want to ensure that people genuinely know the difference between a Duncan Hines brownie and a marijuana brownie, just by looking at it," said state Rep. Jonathan Singer, a Democrat who sponsored the law requiring stamped edibles.

There are no numbers in Colorado nor any marijuana state on how many children or adults accidentally eat pot. But a 2016 study tracing admissions at Children's Hospital Colorado just outside Denver found that more kids were treated for accidental pot ingestion after legalization, from 1.2 per 100,000 population two years prior to legalization to 2.3 per 100,000 population two years after legalization.

Trump again shames ex-beauty queen

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump shamed a former beauty pageant winner Friday for her sexual history and encouraged Americans to check out what he called her "sex tape," in an early-morning tweet-storm that dragged him further away from his campaign's efforts to broaden its appeal to women.

A day after he injected former President Bill Clinton's dalliances into the campaign, Trump accused Hillary Clinton's campaign of helping 1996 Miss Universe winner Alicia Machado get U.S. citizenship, but offered no proof.

He claimed Clinton sought to exploit her as a campaign cudgel against Trump, who had shamed Machado for gaining weight when he owned the pageant. Clinton had cited Trump's comments in Monday's debate.

On Friday, Trump said Machado had a "terrible" past

that a "duped" Clinton had overlooked before holding her up "as an 'angel.'"

"Did Crooked Hillary help disgusting (check out sex tape and past) Alicia M become a U.S. citizen so she could use her in the debate?" read mis-sive from Trump posted on his verified Twitter account at 5:30 a.m.

"Using Alicia M. in the debate as a paragon of virtue just shows that Crooked Hillary suffers from BAD JUDGEMENT! Hillary was set up by a con," he tweeted.

Trump's taunt appeared to refer to footage from a Spanish reality show in 2005 in which Machado was a contestant and appeared on camera in bed with a male contestant. The images, posted this week to a newspaper's website, are grainy and do not include nudity. The show took place almost a decade after Trump invited reporters to watch Machado ex-

ercise after she won Miss Universe and then gained what he's recently described as "a massive amount of weight."

The outburst was an extreme reminder of how Trump has seemed unable to restrain himself from veering into unhelpful territory, even with the election less than 40 days away. Trump's allies have implored him to stick to attacks on Clinton over her family foundation, her emails or her long history as a political insider, critiques that fall further out of view whenever Trump sparks a new controversy.

Shaming Machado over intimate details from her past was particularly risky as Trump tries to broaden his appeal to female voters, many of whom are turned off by such personal attacks. It also risks calling further attention to the thrice-married Trump's own history with women.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Driver uses Trump cutout in carpool lane

WA SEATTLE — A cardboard cutout of a head in a passenger seat definitely caught the attention of a Washington State Patrol trooper Tuesday morning.

That's because it wasn't just any old cardboard head but that of Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

A trooper stopped the motorist who was driving with the cardboard likeness in a carpool lane south of Seattle. The stunt netted the driver a \$136 ticket.

Another trooper Tweeted a photo of the cardboard Trump head affixed to the seat headrest.

Washington State Patrol spokesman Rick Johnson said they've seen everything from teddy bears to mannequins sitting beside drivers.

Court: Man has 30 days to catch rooster

PA PITTSBURGH — A Pittsburgh man has 30 days to figure out how to catch a noisy rooster or the city will penalize him.

The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported the rooster's piercing calls have plagued residents for years. Because it appears to live on Henry Gaston's property, it has put him in violation of the city's ban against roosters.

But Gaston told a judge Wednesday he's tried to catch the animal and has failed. He says he called animal control and the zoo, but he still hasn't come up with the rooster.

Man enters couples' home, shaves head

OR KEIZER — Burglary and criminal mischief charges have been filed against a man who shaved his

head after entering an Oregon couple's home.

A man who lives at the home in Keizer told the Statesman Journal he confronted the intruder after hearing a noise coming from the bathroom.

Rather than panic, the man tried to have a peaceful conversation with the stranger. The intruder then swept a three-bladed razor across his own head, using hand sanitizer as lubricant instead of shaving cream.

The couple eventually persuaded the man to leave. He asked the woman for a hug at the doorstep but was denied.

Officers were able to identify the suspect, Eric Avila, 39, because of his partially shaved head.

Fan drops ring during televised engagement

NY NEW YORK — In the end, Andrew Fox wasn't charged with an error.

The 29-year-old had the engagement ring, the perfect woman and a beautiful night at Yankee Stadium, which broadcast the big moment on the center field video board.

What Fox didn't have was steady hands.

When he pulled the ring from his pocket and dropped to one knee before girlfriend Heather Terwilliger, 29, to propose, the ring fell to the ground.

The crowd gasped and jeered the fumble. Fox and Terwilliger scrambled to find the jewelry. Several other fans joined the search.

Finally, Terwilliger looked down and saw something shiny in the cuff of her pants leg — earning a save. The crowd roared.

Fox sank to a knee again to present the ring. Terwilliger said yes, then gave him a long kiss and a hug.

Satanic Temple brings club to elementary

OR PORTLAND — The Portland chapter of The Satanic Temple has succeeded in their efforts to bring an after-school program to a Portland elementary school.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reported the organization has been approved to begin a program on Oct. 19 at Sacramento Elementary School.

Finn Rezz, one of the group's leaders, said the program focuses "on science and rational thinking," and will promote "benevolence and empathy for everybody."

The Satanic Temple has been targeting schools that have a Good News Club.

That club is put on by the Child Evangelism Fellowship, "a Bible-centered organization composed of born-again believers whose purpose is to evangelize boys and girls."

Grumpy Cat heads to Broadway with 'Cats'

NY NEW YORK — Life will imitate art — or is it the other way around? — when internet sensation Grumpy Cat joins the cast of the Broadway musical "Cats" on Friday for what will likely be a feline-good moment.

The kitty with the comical frown "will be worked into the end of the show and will become an honorary Jellicle Cat," according to a spokesman for the show.

Grumpy Cat has become an online phenomenon with 8.7 million Facebook followers and a career selling books, T-shirts, mugs and cat food. She's been in ads for cereal and fast-food restaurants.

She'll likely be at home at the Neil Simon Theatre, where Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical

returned this summer with a cast hissing loudly while wearing legwarmers and spiked hair.

Deer tries to jump into SUV that hit it

NJ HOWELL — A deer that was hit by an SUV in New Jersey wasn't going down without a fight.

A police car video camera captured what happened after Ellen Sager struck the animal on Oak Glen Road on Sept. 17 in Howell Township.

Sager stopped and was attempting to look at the damage. The patrolman pulled over to help Sager when the buck ran back across the road and tried to jump into the driver's seat.

The deer attempted to climb over her before she managed to kick the animal away and close the door.

Sager sustained a minor injury to her knee, and the deer died from its injuries.

Caregiver in 'baby fight club' gets jail

VA MANASSAS — A former Virginia child care worker convicted on child cruelty charges in what prosecutors described as a "baby fight club" has been sentenced to nearly three years in prison.

A jury convicted Kierra Spriggs earlier this year after testimony she and a co-worker abused numerous 2-year-olds by stepping on toes, feeding them Flamin' Hot Cheetos and making them fight each other.

The abuse occurred at a Minnieland Academy in 2013.

A second worker, Sarah Jordan, was also convicted on similar charges and sentenced to nearly two years in prison.

From wire reports

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Star wideout leads way in Cincinnati win

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — A.J. Green's big game got the Bengals back to break-even and left them with reasons for optimism heading into a tough stretch of their season.

Green had 10 catches for 173 yards and a touchdown on Thursday night, leading Cincinnati to a 22-7 victory over the Miami Dolphins. After back-to-back losses, the defending AFC North champions are 2-2 and getting a little more complete as key players return.

Their best receiver led the way on Thursday.

Unhappy with how he failed to make an impact during a loss to Denver last Sunday, a motivated Green beat the Dolphins (1-3) on every type of route.

"I hold myself to a very high standard," Green said. "I know what I'm capable of. Last week I didn't perform to that level. I had to refocus on a short week."

During the first three quarters, Green had 166 yards on nine catches while Miami had 152 total yards.

Green had catches of 51 yards and 43 yards. He caught a 7-yard pass for Cincinnati's

only touchdown — the Bengals stalled near the goal line and needed Mike Nugent's five field goals.

The Dolphins' depleted offense couldn't muster much beyond Ryan Tannehill's 74-yard touchdown pass to Kenny Stills on their second play of the game.

"Not a lot worked," said Tannehill, who was 15 of 25 for 189 yards with a touchdown, an interception, a fumble and five sacks.

"We really didn't do anything well. It was one of our worst performances from our offense in a long time."

Some takeaways from the Bengals' solid win:

The Dolphins had man-to-man coverage on Green much of the time, and he made quick work of it.

Green also shredded man-to-man coverage in a season-opening win over the Jets, catching 12 passes for 180 yards.

"When there were times he was able to get single coverage, we were able to make plays," said Andy Dalton, who was 22 of 31 for 296 yards with a touchdown and a sack.

"You can't double (cover) him every single snap, so it def-

initely worked for us today."

The Bengals' defense expected to be better with linebacker Vontaze Burfict back from his three-game NFL suspension for illegal hits.

He broke up a pass, had three tackles, and helped the defense look sharper all-around.

The Bengals are expecting the offense to get a boost when tight end Tyler Eifert returns soon from ankle surgery.

"I just try to be a leader," Burfict said. "I know the defense's ins-and-outs. I just want everyone accountable, even myself."

A patchwork line had trouble giving Tannehill time.

There was a reason for the problems — Miami had a lot of players in different positions. The Dolphins were missing four starting offensive linemen, two linebackers, running back Arian Foster and tight end Jordan Cameron.

Left tackle Branden Albert and center Anthony Steen were inactive with sprained ankles suffered during a win over Cleveland last Sunday.

Center Mike Pouncey has missed all four games with a hip injury.

"We have to put it all together and figure out what we do

well and start working on that a little more," coach Adam Gase said.

Miami had seven penalties for 68 yards.

The most egregious was by Terrence Fede, who pushed Kevin Huber to the ground after he punted in the third quarter.

The penalty gave Cincinnati the ball, and the Bengals got a field goal.

"That's just one of those things you don't see that often," Gase said.

"It was really a bad mistake and a costly mistake for us. To be honest, I was surprised it came from Fede."

The Dolphins begin a stretch of four straight home games against Tennessee, Pittsburgh, Buffalo and the New York Jets. The Bengals have a tough two-game stretch, playing Dallas and New England on the road. They're 1-5 in Dallas, dropping their last three.

They've dropped their last six at New England, last winning there in 1986.

Back surgery may sideline DE Watt

BY KRISTIE RIEKEN

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — A person familiar with J.J. Watt's condition said the Houston Texans' star defensive lineman had back surgery Thursday and is expected to miss the rest of the season.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on Thursday night on condition of anonymity because the team hasn't announced the surgery.

Watt was placed on injured reserve Wednesday with a back injury.

It's his second back surgery in two months after he missed training camp and Houston's four preseason games after surgery in July to repair a herniated disk.

He started each of the team's three regular-season games and was hurt again last Thursday night against the New England Patriots.

Watt, who has won Defensive Player of the Year for the past two seasons, will miss a game for the first time in his career Sunday after starting 83 straight games since he was

drafted in the first round in 2011.

Watt has played through various injuries in the past, including torn core muscles and a broken hand last season.

This was a tough offseason for Watt, who had surgery in January to repair five torn core muscles before going under the knife again in July to repair his back.

Watt, who led the NFL with 17½ sacks last season, has 1½ sacks this season to give him 76 for his career.

The 27-year-old is a three-

time Defensive Player of the Year and a four-time Pro Bowler.

He's been a force since entering the league not only because of his pass-rushing prowess, but also because of his uncanny ability to swat down passes.

He has 45 passes defended in his six-year career.

He has forced 15 fumbles and recovered 13.

The news was first reported by ESPN.

No. 6 Houston hammers Connecticut

Associated Press

HOUSTON — The sixth-ranked Houston Cougars were determined to take care of business this year after Connecticut derailed their perfect season a year ago.

Greg Ward Jr. made sure they did just that.

Ward Jr. threw for a career-high 389 yards and accounted for five touchdowns in just more than three quarters to help Houston beat Connecticut 42-14 on Thursday night.

Houston's only blemish last season came in the 20-17 loss to the Huskies when they were 10-0.

"We never use the word revenge," coach Tom Herman said. "The word we used was atonement — to make a wrong a right. We had a chance to atone for the transgressions of last year's team."

Ward didn't start that game because of an ankle injury, and there was a scary moment early in the second quarter when he took a hard hit in the midsection by Junior Joseph on a flea-flicker and had to leave the game.

But he missed just one play before returning and showed no ill effects from the blow,

leading the Cougars (5-0, 2-0 American) on three more touchdown drives in the half to leave Houston up 28-7 at halftime.

Herman didn't think missing last year's game against UConn made this one more important to Ward.

"I think Ward's got a chip on his shoulder every week, I don't know that it was any bigger this week," Herman said. "I think the whole team had a juice and a pep in their step knowing what this opponent did to last year's team and they wanted to make sure it didn't happen again."

Ward and Joseph got in each other's faces after another hit by the linebacker on a touchdown throw by Ward later in the second quarter, and it earned Joseph an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.

Joseph said the run-in was "totally my fault" before raving about the quarterback.

"He's probably the best player I played against," Joseph said. "He's very electric. That's why he's in the race for the Heisman. Just a great player."

Ward had touchdown runs of 30 and 10 yards and threw scoring passes of 3, 15 and 4 yards.

He was replaced by Kyle Postma with 12 minutes remaining.

Ward doesn't like talking about himself and deflected questions about his big game.

"The stats, I don't think about that at all," he said. "The only stat that I worry about is win-loss."

Noel Thomas had a career-high 135 yards receiving and a touchdown for Connecticut (2-3, 0-2), and Bryant Shirreffs threw for 239 yards and ran for a TD.

"Losing is terrible," Bob Diaco said. "We obviously wanted to finish phase one of our season better than 2-3. A play here and a play there, and that would have been the case."

The takeaway

Connecticut: The Huskies didn't commit any turnovers after being plagued by them in recent weeks, but they were simply overmatched by the Cougars on both sides of the ball.

Houston: The Cougars continued the dominance they've shown all season, having no trouble putting away the Huskies after last year's misstep. With Ward leading the of-

fense and a swarming defense which finished with four sacks, it's hard to imagine that anyone has much of a chance to beat the Cougars before their Nov. 17 showdown with No. 3 Louisville.

Poll implications

The Cougars should maintain their spot in the poll after cruising past an opponent they were expected to beat. But they could jump a spot or two if any of the teams above them lose on Saturday.

Bonner imitates idol

Linell Bonner had a highlight-reel play when he stretched out to grab a reception with one hand for a touchdown that pushed Houston's lead to 42-7 in the third quarter. He finished with 12 receptions for 159 yards — both career highs. The one-handed catch was reminiscent of some of the grabs DeAndre Hopkins often makes for the Houston Texans.

Bonner was asked if that catch was a Hopkins impression.

"That's my favorite NFL receiver right now. I really look up to him so I could say yeah," Bonner said before flashing a huge smile.

Canada claims World Cup by finishing off Europe

Associated Press

TORONTO — Canada was not the best team on the ice until it mattered.

Down a goal with 3 minutes left, the high-powered Canadians kicked it up a notch and Team Europe simply couldn't stop them.

Brad Marchand scored a short-handed goal with 43.1 seconds left after Patrice Bergeron tied it with 2:53 to go on a power play, lifting Canada to a 2-1 victory and the World Cup of Hockey title Thursday night.

"You can say anything you want about the game tonight, but we delivered," Canada coach Mike Babcock said.

Sidney Crosby's line with the Boston Bruins pair of Marchand and Bergeron dominated in the final minutes as the trio did throughout the two-week tournament.

"They're addicted to winning and they just make it happen," Babcock said.

The Canadians won the best-of-three finals 2-0.

They've won 16 straight games, including Olympic gold medals at the Sochi and Vancouver Games, since losing to the U.S. in the 2010 Olympics.

"It's pretty special," Crosby said. "It's not easy to do and for a good chunk of us, a lot of us were there in Russia."

Europe seemed as if it had a chance to score a go-ahead goal

late when Drew Doughty was called for high-sticking with just under 2 minutes left, but Canada was the team that took advantage when Marchand got the puck into open space and beat Jaroslav Halak with a shot from the slot to win the first World Cup since 2004.

"It's just crazy the way everything worked out," said Crosby, selected the MVP of the tournament after scoring three goals and finishing with a World Cup-high 10 points. "When you get a penalty that late in the game, you're just trying to force overtime."

After Crosby got his latest personal reward, he was presented with a silver World Cup of Hockey trophy and skated

with it around the ice just months after hosting the Stanley Cup for the second time in his career.

He set up the tying goal, passing the puck off the boards to Brent Burns, whose shot just inside the blue line was redirected by Bergeron's raised stick.

Carey Price made 32 saves for the Canadians.

Zdeno Chara scored early for Europe, and Halak made 32 saves for the eight-nation team.

In front of an unenthusiastic crowd and a lot of empty seats in the home of the Toronto Maple Leafs, the Canadians started flat and the Europeans made them pay for their apparent apathy.

Cards win on Molina's disputed double

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — There was no dispute the St. Louis Cardinals shouldn't have won on Yadier Molina's double.

But they did — because by the time Cincinnati figured out what happened, it was too late.

A game with playoff implications turned on a missed call Thursday night when Molina got credit for a winning double with two outs in the ninth inning to beat the Reds 4-3.

"I just kept my head down and kept running," Molina said. "I didn't really hear or see anything."

The Cardinals are one game behind San Francisco for the second NL wild-card spot. Each team has three games left.

Matt Carpenter drew a one-out walk from Blake Wood (6-5). With two outs, Molina's one-hop hit clearly bounced off

a sign above the left-field wall and caromed back into play.

Carpenter kept running and scored from first. It should have been a ground-rule double, putting Carpenter on third. Instead, the Cardinals celebrated.

Reds manager Bryan Price ran after the umpires to argue. He said he was later told he had 10 seconds after Carpenter scored to appeal for a replay.

"It's a terrible rule," Price said. "I mean that's ridiculous."

The Cardinals hurried their on-field party and zipped to the clubhouse while the Reds milled around on the field waiting for something to happen.

Crew chief and plate umpire Bill Miller said he felt he gave the Reds enough time to ask for a replay.

"In this situation, Bryan

Price did not come up to the top step," Miller told a pool reporter. "I looked into the Cincinnati dugout and Bryan Price made no eye contact with me whatsoever. And then after 30 seconds, he finally realized somebody must have told him what had happened and we were walking off the field."

There is no disputing that the ball hit the sign, which is considered out of play and a ground rule double should have been called.

Reds left fielder Adam Duvall said the ball "definitely hit the sign."

"I saw it. I heard it. There's a gap in between the sign and the fence. I wasn't sure if it was in play or not," he said.

Duvall retrieved the ball and made a relay home.

"I'm not blaming the umpires. I'm blaming the system,"

Price said. "You couldn't hear anything. And then all of a sudden, someone is screaming, 'the ball hit the top of the back wall.' Which would have made it a ground-rule double."

Price and staff didn't get the message fast enough from their video review crew.

"Because of the crowd noise, we couldn't hear the phone ring," Price said. "There was no siren or blinking light to let you know."

Said Carpenter: "The ball's hit, I was running as hard as I can."

"It was a fun way to win a game," he said.

Molina and Jedd Gyorko hit solo homers for the Cardinals.

Seung Hwan Oh (6-3) wound up with the win after blowing his third save in 21 tries this season.

Yanks eliminated from playoff contention despite win

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Starlin Castro was at the plate in the bottom of the seventh inning Thursday night when Baltimore finished a 4-0 win at Toronto, eliminating the Yankees from postseason contention.

Knowing New York had failed to reach the playoffs for the third time in four years, the mind of Yankees manager Joe Girardi immediately shifted attention to 2017. He removed CC Sabathia after one more batter and pinch ran for Brett Gardner in the eighth when Girardi didn't like the way the speedy outfielder was running.

"It's kind of how I'm wired, and you start thinking about, OK, what do we need to do?" Girardi said following the Yankees' 5-1 win.

Sabathia (9-12) allowed one run and four hits over a season-high 7¹/₃ innings for his first win in a month and finished with a 3.91 ERA, his lowest since 2012.

But the Yankees' thoughts were on another subpar season. They have not won a postseason game since Derek Jeter broke an ankle in the 2012 AL Championship Series opener.

After a 9-17 start, the Yankees did not get back above .500 until June 10. They were 53-53 when they brought up rookie catcher

Gary Sanchez on Aug. 3.

"Everybody gave up on us," Didi Gregorius said. "I think we scared everybody, actually, to be honest, because nobody expected us to be all the way here."

Orioles 4, Blue Jays 0: Ubaldo Jimenez and two relievers combined on a three-hitter as Baltimore beat Toronto, leaving the teams tied in the AL wild-card race.

Giants 7, Rockies 2: Johnny Cueto struck out 11 Colorado batters as host San Francisco set up a wild race to the finish for the NL wild-card spots.

With three games left, the Giants are one game behind the New York Mets and one game ahead of St. Louis.

Cubs 1, Pirates 1 (6): Chicago and visiting Pittsburgh recorded the first tie game since 2005 when rain forced them to stop in the sixth inning.

The Cubs and Pirates aren't scheduled to play again this season, and the game won't be made up because it doesn't affect postseason positioning. So instead of becoming a suspended game, it was declared a tie — the first since Houston and Cincinnati on June 30, 2005.

Mariners 3, Athletics 2: Struggling Mike Zunino delivered the go-ahead home run in the seventh inning as host Seattle stayed on the edge of the AL wild-card chase.

Dodgers 9, Padres 4: Joc Pederson doubled twice and drove in three runs as NL West champion Los Angeles avoided a three-game sweep in San Diego.

Rays 5, White Sox 3: Chris Archer overcame a shaky seventh inning to avoid becoming the majors' first 20-game loser since 2003 and led visiting Tampa Bay.

Braves 5, Phillies 2: Freddie Freeman's 30-game hitting streak ended when he struck out in the eighth inning, but Atlanta later scored four runs off visiting Philadelphia closer Jeanmar Gomez.

Nationals 5, Diamondbacks 3: Wilmer Difo hit his first major league homer, and Pedro Severino his second, helping injury-depleted NL East champion Washington win at home and move closer to clinching home-field advantage in the Division Series.

Twins 7, Royals 6: Byron Buxton tripled, doubled, drove in two runs and scored twice as Minnesota defeated host Kansas City.

Tigers 6, Indians 3 (5, Ppd.): Thursday's game between the Detroit Tigers and Cleveland Indians was postponed because of bad weather, a move that could force the teams to squeeze in a makeup game next week if it needs to be played because of postseason implications.