

# STARS AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## House moves ahead with DOD budget 'gamble'

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Despite Pentagon objections, the House Armed Services Committee on Thursday approved a plan to take \$18 billion out of the Islamic State war budget in 2017 and instead to pay for more soldiers, military training and equipment.

The Republican-led panel voted overwhelmingly, 60-2, to make that trade-off part of the \$610 billion National Defense Authorization Act policy bill and the foundation of the coming year's defense budget, a move that could throw the Iraq and Syria war into financial uncertainty. Defense Secretary Ash Carter called the budget maneuver "deeply troubling and flawed," and a "gamble" that could lead to downrange troops running out of money next spring.

Defense hawks in the House are pushing ahead with the high-risk and potentially high-reward budget tactic, hoping they can skirt caps on defense spending now and bolster the military, while forcing the next president to work out a deal with Congress to provide money to continue the war next year.

"This year, something is going to be shortchanged," said Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, chairman of the Armed Services panel. "But the bottom line for me this year is that it is fundamentally wrong to send servicemembers out on missions for which they are not fully prepared and fully supported."

A similar GOP tactic resulted in a rare presidential veto of the defense budget in October, and Thornberry has said he would not be surprised if President Barack Obama threatens another veto.

Along with boosts in training and equipment, the bill blocks the Army's plan to cut 15,000 soldiers during the coming year and instead adds 5,000 more to the current end strength. The Marine Corps would increase by 3,000, and the Air Force would increase by 4,000 over what those services have planned.

The bill also includes perks and reforms for servicemembers and their families, including a 2.1 percent pay increase after years of Obama's opting to keep raises below private-sector increases.

## Female Ranger School grad makes history, joins infantry

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — One of the first female soldiers to earn the coveted Ranger Tab last summer has now become the Army's first woman in the infantry.

Capt. Kristen Griest, a West Point graduate who in August completed several grueling months of Ranger School, was approved Monday to transfer from the Army's military police branch into the infantry, said Lt. Col. Jerry Pionk, a spokesman for the service.

She is attending the Maneuver Captains Career Course at Fort Benning, Ga., which physically and mentally prepares infantry and armor officers to command frontline fighting companies.

"Like any other officer wishing to branch-transfer, Capt. Griest applied for an exception to Army policy to transfer from military police to infantry," said Bob Purtiman, spokesman for the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning. "Her transfer was approved by the Department of the Army on April 25, and she is now an infantry officer."

Griest, 27, of Orange, Conn., had served as a military police officer and deployed to Afghanistan since graduating from the U.S. Military Academy in 2011.

In April 2015, she was among 19 female soldiers approved to attend Ranger School as part of a pilot program to help the Army determine whether it could safely open front-line combat jobs to women.

Griest, alongside 1st Lt. Shaye Haver, an Apache pilot and fellow West Point graduate, made history in August when they became the Army's first women to complete Ranger School. Two months later, a third West Point graduate, Maj. Lisa Jaster, also completed the course.

The Army permanently opened Ranger School to women in September, but no additional female soldiers have graduated, Purtiman said.

Defense Secretary Ash Carter in December ordered all military jobs, including special operations, opened to women. His

directive followed a 2013 Pentagon order that the military services open all positions to women by early 2016. The services conducted extensive studies to determine whether any jobs should remain closed to women.

Only the Marine Corps asked Carter to keep some positions — namely in the infantry and armor fields — male-only, but the secretary declined the request.

Griest's transfer into the infantry fits with the Army's established "leaders first" approach to integrating women into the traditionally all-male infantry. According to the Army's gender-integration plan that it submitted last month to Carter, Army leaders believe establishing female officers in the infantry and armor units before enlisted women join those branches will help ease the transition.

The Army earlier this month approved 21 female West Point and ROTC cadets and an Officer Candidate School student to commission into the infantry and armor branches in the coming months. Nine aim to serve in the infantry and 13 hope to serve as armor officers.

Those future officers first must complete months of job-specific training and meet a series of physical requirements before they are assigned to a unit to serve as platoon leaders.

It was not immediately clear Wednesday what Griest's next assignment would be nor when she would arrive at her next unit.

Griest, who was not made available for interviews Wednesday, told reporters in August that she hoped to serve in the Army's Special Forces.

Special Forces training and the elite 75th Ranger Regiment are now open officially to female soldiers, though it will be some time before a woman serves in those special operations positions, Pionk said.

Officers traditionally serve in the regular Army before joining such units, Pionk said, adding it will likely be "well over a year" before a woman serves in the Rangers or the Green Berets.

dickstein.corey@stripes.com  
Twitter: @CDicksteinDC

## Congress asks DOD why US isn't hitting Assad

By TARA COPP  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon on Thursday defended the deployment of an additional small force to fight Islamic State militants in Syria to Senate lawmakers who suggested a stronger U.S. response against Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime must be pursued to keep that country from dissolving into greater violence.

Syria's short-lived cease-fire appeared all but over Thursday as airstrikes on the rebel-held city of Aleppo destroyed a Doctors Without Borders hospital, killing medics and patients. It was not immediately clear who carried out the attack. However, Syrian military forces loyal to Assad and Russian airstrikes have targeted Aleppo during the cease-fire, using a justification that they were targeting members of the Nusra Front, a terrorist group also known as al-Qaida in Syria, that has taken hold of parts of the city and is not protected by the cease-fire.

In a Senate hearing Thursday, lawmakers asked Defense Secretary Ash Carter and Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, why the military was not addressing the Assad regime, which they view as the larger threat to the

Syrian population.

"With the cease-fire breaking down, with millions of refugees ... at least 300,000 people killed, and the resumption of hostilities ... what are we going to do about that situation?" asked Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., chairman of the Armed Services Committee. "I hate [the Islamic State group], but it isn't [the Islamic State group] that's killed 300,000. It isn't [the Islamic State group] that's driven millions into refugee status. It's Bashar Assad. And I wonder what you believe our options are in this obviously deteriorating situation in Syria, which means a resumption of the slaughter; resumption of the flow of refugees."

Carter and Dunford said the focus of U.S. military operations in Syria remains to be eliminating the Islamic State group and did not answer whether they thought U.S. troops should be brought into the effort to oust the Syrian president.

Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., pushed further at the hearing, asking Dunford if the United States could take on Assad's forces.

"We have not declared war on the Syrian regime, Senator," the chairman replied.

copp.tara@stripes.com  
Twitter:@TaraCopp

### Congress: Boost Navy ops in South China Sea

WASHINGTON — Members of Congress urged the Obama administration on Wednesday to order more naval operations close to disputed islands in the South China Sea. The State Department said Beijing risks conflict and isolation through its assertive behavior in those waters.

Twice since the fall, the U.S. Navy has sailed by artificial islands built by China, and Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that

such operations will take place regularly.

Republicans said such "freedom-of-navigation" operations cruising within 12 nautical miles of the man-made islands — what China might consider as its territorial waters — should become routine.

Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., said that China was "dominating" the region. He advocated a tougher U.S. stance, saying American instruments of national power "are only useful when they are fully deployed."

From The Associated Press

## VA sued over tainted Camp Lejeune water

The (Jacksonville, N.C.)  
*Daily News*

A lawsuit has been filed against the Department of Veterans Affairs in connection with the historic water contamination at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Three veterans organizations are suing the VA after a request filed Dec. 7 under the Freedom of Information Act went unanswered.

The complaint, filed Tuesday, opens with a summary: "Between 1953 and 1987, nearly one million Marines, sailors, civilian employees, and military family members aboard Marine Corps Base Camp

Lejeune unknowingly drank, cooked with, and bathed in contaminated water."

The organizations — The Few, The Proud, The Forgotten; Vietnam Veterans of America; and Connecticut State Council of Vietnam Veterans of America — question the authenticity of the Subject Matter Expert program that was created by the VA to handle claims connected to the contaminated water.

The grant rate for Camp Lejeune claims has decreased from 25 percent to 8 percent since the subject matter expert program was created in 2012, according to the complaint.

## Ballistic missile test by North Korea fails

By KIM GAMEL  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea reportedly tried but failed Thursday to fire a midrange ballistic missile for the second time in two weeks.

It was an embarrassing setback to the regime's efforts to show off its military might ahead of a ruling Workers' Party Congress next week, the first in 36 years. South Korea's president said earlier this week the North was poised to stage a fifth nuclear test despite harsh U.N. sanctions.

The missile was believed to be the same model as one that failed on April 15, the birthday of North Korea's founding father, Kim Il Sung, said a South Korean military official who spoke on condition of anonymity. It was launched around 6:40 a.m. from the eastern port city of Wonsan, he said.

"We believe that it failed. It seems to have fallen a few seconds after being launched," said

the official, who stressed the South Korean and the U.S. militaries are still investigating.

The reported crash served as a reminder that the North still has many obstacles and problems to overcome in its stated goal of developing a weapon that can reach the U.S. mainland. But U.S. officials and experts say Pyongyang is making progress and is learning from its mistakes.

That was evident last weekend when leader Kim Jong Un claimed his nation had successfully launched a missile from a submarine. Analysts noted it used solid fuel, which would allow it to launch on mobile platforms with less preparation time than required for liquid fuel.

President Barack Obama warned North Korea that the United States was positioning its missile defense systems and setting up a "shield" to counter low-level threats from an "erratic" country.



# Baseball back in big way in Windy City

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Robin Ventura remembers the excitement in New York when the Mets and Yankees faced off in the World Series, and he can imagine what it would be like in Chicago if both teams made it.

Wait, the Cubs and White Sox playing for the championship?

Don't start planning the parade just yet, but the teams with the two best records in the game through Wednesday just happen to call Chicago home. That's quite a change in a city known more for heartbreak and failure than championship glory when it comes to baseball.

Yet here are the Cubs, dominating with a major league-leading 15-5 mark. And in the American League, the White Sox are leading the way at 16-6. The last time Chicago teams had the two best records in baseball this late in a season was May 29, 1973, and not since then had they both boasted the top marks in their leagues, according to STATS.

"You're happy for our fans that we can play a better brand of baseball and give them some hope that there can be meaningful games later in the year and hopefully make the playoffs," said Ventura, the White Sox manager who played for the Mets in the 2000 Subway Series against the Yankees. "Having played in New York where both teams made the playoffs, it's an exciting atmosphere for a city that has two teams capable of doing that."

Not since 2008 have both teams made the playoffs, but

that's starting to look like a possibility. With the Bulls missing the playoffs for the first time since 2008 and the Blackhawks' Stanley Cup defense ending with a first-round playoff loss to St. Louis, the timing couldn't be better for Chicago fans.

The Cubs, coming off a 97-win season and a trip to the NLCS after five straight losing years, were among the major league leaders in runs and on-base percentage. The two teams have shown a knack for scoring late, with the North Siders second in the majors in runs after the sixth inning and the South Siders fourth.

Both have also been dominating on the mound, with Jake Arrieta throwing a no-hitter for the Cubs last week and Chris Sale off to a sizzling start for the White Sox. The White Sox were also leading the majors with five shutouts while the Cubs (four) were tied for second.

"I know in New York, we fed off each other," said Cubs pitcher Adam Warren, in his first season in Chicago after a stint with the Yankees. "You wanted to be the team — and not the second-tier team. I think it does motivate you a little bit. You want to be the team of the city."

One major difference between the teams was the path they followed to this point. The Cubs spent years loading up their farm system and then filled in gaps through trades and free agency. The White Sox have continued to rebuild on the fly, sticking with that approach even after last season's collapse. A team that expected to contend after making several high-profile moves finished fourth in the AL Central at 76-86.

That didn't stop them from going for it again, trading for All-Star third baseman Todd Frazier and bringing in several other players to boost a team that ranked among

the game's biggest disappointments.

So far, the results are promising. There's excitement on both sides of town.

"You can't help but hear the Cubs talk when you're in Chicago," White Sox pitcher John Danks said. "I obviously know they're doing well but shoot man, we're having a blast. We're playing good baseball. It's only April but these games matter, too."

There's plenty of motivation on both sides of town, starting with a championship drought on the North Side that dates to 1908.

The White Sox won the World Series in 2005 but have made just one trip to the playoffs since. They're coming off three straight losing seasons, and they had a quiet spring training interrupted by an unusual breakup, when Adam LaRoche decided to retire after team executive Ken Williams asked him to cut back on his teenage son Drake's access to the team.

Now, the White Sox are attracting attention because of their performance. And Cubs manager Joe Maddon is "digging" what's happening on both sides of town. He is particularly happy for Ventura, his fellow wine aficionado who is in his fifth season has an expiring contract.

"This past spring training, I went out to dinner with he and (Mike) Scioscia and Buddy Black and Ron Roenicke and Sandy Koufax — did I say Sandy Koufax?" Maddon said. "Robin digs wine. ... I'm really happy for him and their success. I think it's great for the city. If we could both sustain this kind of play, it would make for a very interesting summer."

## HRs help Angels complete sweep of Royals

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — The Los Angeles Angels lost closer Huston Street because of a pregame injury, and that put a damper on their three-game sweep of the defending World Series champions.

Street strained his left oblique muscle playing catch and could be headed for the disabled list, so setup man Joe Smith had to close out the Angels' 4-2 victory over the Kansas City Royals — a win fueled by Mike Trout's tying two-run homer and solo shots by Yunel Escobar and Andrelton Simmons.

Escobar, the Angels' leadoff hitter, drove Chris Young's 3-1 pitch to center field for his third homer of the season leading off the sixth to put the Angels ahead 3-2. He had four hits in Tuesday night's 9-4 victory.

"Chris did a great job. He gave up three hits, but two of them were home runs," Royals manager Ned Yost said. "They didn't have a guy in scoring position all night long. Every run scored in that game was on a home run."

Simmons ended the scoring in the seventh with his first homer as an Angel. His other 31 came with Atlanta, which sent the two-time Gold Glove shortstop to the Angels in a multiplayer trade that sent Erick Aybar to the Braves in November.

Fernando Salas (1-1) got the victory in relief and Smith got three outs for his first save in two chances. Nick Tropeano pitched 5 1/3 innings for the Angels, allowing two runs and eight hits with six strikeouts.

"I think today was just a battling day for me," Tropeano said. "I don't think I

had my best stuff location-wise and was a little inconsistent with my fastball. But I made pitches when I had to and these guys picked me up offensively."

Eric Hosmer hit a two-run homer in the Royals' first, extending his hitting streak to a career-best 17 games.

Young (1-4) allowed three runs and three hits over 5 2/3 innings. The 35-year-old right-hander has allowed at least one home run in each of his first five starts.

"Physically, I felt great. I felt like I pitched better than my results," Young said. "I feel bad that I didn't make that lead hold up. This was a night where I could have picked up the hitters a little bit and get us back on track. I'm frustrated that we didn't win. That's my biggest disappointment."

Tropeano came in having allowed two home runs in his first 75 1/3 innings in the big leagues.

**Mets 5, Reds 2:** Neil Walker hit his ninth home run, tying for the major league lead, Matt Harvey won his second straight start and New York stretched its winning streak to six.

Walker's third-inning homer off Jon Moscot (0-2) extended the Mets' lead to 3-1 and tied the team record for home runs in April.

**White Sox 4, Blue Jays 0:** Dione Navarro hit a go-ahead, two-run triple in the seventh, helping visiting Chicago win its sixth straight.

Jose Quintana (3-1) struck out a season-high 10 in six innings for Chicago, which leads the major leagues with five shutouts and is 10 games above .500 for the first time since Sept. 25, 2012. Quintana allowed five hits and walked three.

**Tigers 9, Athletics 4:** Justin Verlander (3-2) allowed three runs and five hits in 6 1/3 innings, and J.D. and Victor Martinez both homered for host Detroit.

**Orioles 3, Rays 1:** Joey Rickard hit a three-run home run and Chris Tillman (2-1) tied his career high with nine strikeouts, giving up two hits in 6 2/3 scoreless innings to beat host Tampa Bay for the second time this season.

**Red Sox 9, Braves 4:** Dustin Pedroia had a grand slam and a solo homer, and David Ortiz had three doubles to pass Red Sox greats Ted Williams and Jimmie Foxx on the career extra-base hits with 1,119 as host Boston won its fourth straight.

Freddie Freeman homered end the Braves' homerless streak at 15 games, the longest since the 1946 Boston Braves went 16 in a row.

**Rangers 3, Yankees 2:** Elvis Andrus had a tiebreaking RBI triple and host Texas beat New York even after former Rangers shortstop Alex Rodriguez hit his 100th homer in the stadium.

A-Rod's 690th career homer gave him triple digits in the Rangers' ballpark. He hit 86 at home for Texas from 2001-03 and has 14 more in 65 games as a visitor there — first with Seattle before his big deal with the Rangers, and after being traded to the Yankees.

**Pirates 9, Rockies 8 (12):** Jordy Mercer hit a tiebreaking RBI double in the 12th inning, and Pittsburgh continued its mastery of host Colorado with a marathon win.

Kyle Lobstein (2-0) pitched three scoreless innings and Mark Melancon pitched the bottom of the 12th for his fifth save

for Pittsburgh, which has won eight straight in Denver.

Trevor Story and Nolan Arenado each hit their ninth homers, and Mark Reynolds and Gerardo Parra also went deep for the Rockies.

**Cardinals 11, Diamondbacks 4:** Adam Wainwright pitched into the sixth inning for his first win and hit a three-run triple in St. Louis' fifth straight offensive outburst for another win over host Arizona.

St. Louis scored 18 combined runs in two games to close out a sweep over San Diego and had 15 in splitting the first two against Arizona.

**Marlins 2, Dodgers 0:** Justin Nicolino gave up two hits in 7 1/3 innings in his season debut to lead Miami over host Los Angeles for its fourth straight win.

**Astros 7, Mariners 4:** Jose Altuve opened the game with his third leadoff homer of the season, doubled twice and scored three runs to help visiting Houston avoid a sweep.

**Indians 6, Twins 5:** Francisco Lindor drove in three runs and Cleveland spoiled the big league debut of Jose Berrios with a victory over host Minnesota.

**Phillies 3, Nationals 0:** Jeremy Hellickson (2-1) allowed two hits over seven innings and struck out eight, and Jeanmar Gomez pitched a perfect ninth for his sixth save for visiting Philadelphia.

**Giants 13, Padres 9:** Brandon Belt was a homer short of the cycle and drove in five runs, Hunter Pence drove in a pair on three hits and San host Francisco completed a three-game sweep.



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# Curry-less Warriors finish Rockets

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Klay Thompson knew Golden State had to come together, that every player needed to raise his game with Stephen Curry sidelined.

"None of us can do it alone," Thompson insisted hours earlier.

He sure got things started, scoring 27 points with seven three-pointers as the Warriors rolled into the second round of the playoffs without their injured superstar, thoroughly embarrassing the Houston Rockets 114-81 on Wednesday night in Game 5.

"Urgency of the game and we did not want to go back to Houston — it's a long flight," Thompson said of his extra motivation.

Draymond Green added 15 points, nine rebounds and eight assists for the Warriors, who will face the winner of the Clippers-Trail Blazers series. Portland leads 3-2.

"Everybody, they think Steph goes down and the entire series changes. But we thought otherwise," Green said.

Without the MVP, Curry's fellow Splash Brother set the tone from the opening tip. Thompson became the first player in NBA history to make at least seven threes in consecutive playoff games, while Shaun Livingston scored 16 points for his third double-digit performance in three games while starting in Curry's place this series.

"We're blessed, we are really lucky. You lose your point guard, you lose the MVP, and to be able to throw Shaun Livingston out there, he's a fantastic basketball

player, a great teammate," coach Steve Kerr said.

Curry, in a brown sport coat on the bench while nursing his sprained right knee, emphatically bobbed his head, clapped and bowed to Thompson during starter introductions. He even worked the officials during a timeout, and gestured with hand signals to celebrate big plays.

James Harden scored 25 of Houston's 37 first-half points on the way to 35 points, but the Rockets had no chance with a one-man show against the deep defending champions.

So much for Jason Terry's guarantee there would be a Game 6 back in Houston.

"The season, from the beginning, wasn't going our way. Just had too many distractions," Harden said. "It's just been like a bumpy road this entire season."

Thompson hit a way-back, Curry-like three from 31 feet at the top of the arc with 5:37 left in the third. He shot 7-for-11 from long range, 10-for-14 overall.

Curry could only grin, cheer and enjoy every second of seeing his team do so well without him.

"He was just joking around and having a lot of fun. It was a game with a lot of joy," Kerr said. "Steph was having a great time."

The NBA's leading scorer is sidelined for at least two weeks with a sprained MCL that happened when he slipped awkwardly on the final play of the first half of Sunday's Game 4 and his legs split apart.

A day after Kerr was voted NBA Coach of the Year, his team took the first step toward a repeat title by following up its

record 73-win season by so confidently handling Houston.

Thompson started things off with a quick three-pointer, igniting the yellow-clad, "Strength in Numbers" sellout crowd at Oracle Arena. Green also hit from long range and Houston called a quick timeout.

Harden scored 14 early points on 6 of 7 shooting, but the rest of the Rockets were 0-for-16 before Patrick Beverley's follow shot with 11:26 left in the second quarter following Michael Beasley's shanked alley-oop dunk try.

From the moment Curry went down, the Warriors took their game up a notch with a spectacular second half in Game 4, finishing the 121-94 victory with a playoff-record 21 three-pointers and 38 assists on 46 field goals.

Terry guaranteed a Game 5 win, telling the Houston Chronicle, "That's going to be a long flight for them to come back to Houston." Amused, Golden State just shrugged it off.

Dwight Howard capped his awful series with eight points on 3-for-13 shooting and 21 rebounds, remaining on the floor long after the rest of the starters were finished.

"He wanted to stay, he wanted to finish," interim Rockets coach J.B. Bickerstaff said. "He didn't want to quit. He didn't want to lay down and bail out of the fight. ... That's the image he wanted to leave people with."

**Trail Blazers 108, Clippers 98:** CJ McCollum scored 27 points, Damian Lillard added 16 of his 22 in the fourth quarter when Portland pulled away, and

the Trail Blazers capitalized on the absence of injured Chris Paul and Blake Griffin to beat host Los Angeles in Game 5 of their first-round series.

The Blazers are up 3-2 and could close it out Friday in Portland. If Game 7 is needed, it would be Saturday back at Staples Center.

Maurice Harkless added 19 points and 10 rebounds, and Mason Plumlee had 10 points and 15 boards for Portland. The Blazers made six 3-pointers in the fourth, with Lillard hitting five of his six as they outscored the Clippers 37-27.

J.J. Redick led the Clippers with 19 points. Jamal Crawford, the Sixth Man of the Year, added 17 points starting in Paul's place. Jeff Green also had 17 off the bench and DeAndre Jordan had 16 points and 17 rebounds.

**Hornets 90, Heat 88:** Courtney Lee's three-pointer with 25.2 seconds left put Charlotte ahead to stay, and the Hornets beat host Miami in Game 5 of their Eastern Conference first-round series.

The Hornets have won three straight games in the series, and will take a 3-2 lead into a potential Game 6 clincher on Friday night.

Marvin Williams led the Hornets with 17 points, while Al Jefferson and Kemba Walker each had 14 for Charlotte — which got its first road playoff win in 14 years. Jeremy Lin added 11.

Dwyane Wade scored 25 for Miami, while Luol Deng scored 15, Joe Johnson added 13 and Hassan Whiteside finished with 11 points and 12 rebounds.

## Predators eliminate Ducks in Game 7

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — The Nashville Predators' celebration of a landmark moment in franchise history consisted of a few minutes of excitement in the Honda Center dressing room with a 14-year-old Nelly song blaring in the background.

By outlasting the Anaheim Ducks in a 2-1 victory on Wednesday night, the Predators won a playoff round for only the third time. Facing Game 7 pressure for the first time, they bent and scrambled, but never broke.

Their reward was the chance to go right back to work Friday on their Stanley Cup quest.

"I think that's all you can ask for, is another chance to start Game 1 in San Jose and work from there," Predators forward James Neal said. "No guy wanted to be done playing hockey. We had a belief in this room that we could win this series, and we did."

The Predators will visit the Shark Tank for Game 1 of the second round, getting another high-scoring California power. San Jose routed the Los Angeles Kings in five games.

Yet the Predators found a road resilience they'll want to replicate at the Shark Tank. After Colin Wilson and Paul Gaustad scored in the first period, Pekka Rinne made it stand up with ample help from his defense.

Rinne made 36 saves for the wild-card

Predators, who rallied from a 3-2 series deficit and ousted the Pacific Division champion Ducks with a workmanlike road victory.

With a few big saves by Rinne and just enough fortunate bounces, Nashville earned just the third playoff series win in team history — the first since 2012, and the second over Anaheim.

"It means a lot, and it shows a lot of character," Rinne said. "As a group, we can learn from this series. It's a really good team we played against, and there's a lot of good things we can take from this series. Moving forward, I think we're a better team already."

The Ducks had numerous late chances to tie it while largely dominating the final two periods, outshooting Nashville 28-10. But a redirected shot clanked off Rinne's post in the third, and nothing went in during a frantic final minute, leaving the Ducks with a mountain of frustration and the Predators with a cathartic escape.

The Predators handled the pressure splendidly. Only six players had even appeared in a seventh game with other teams, but they were already looking forward to their return to Nashville next week.

"It's nice to get to the second round," Wilson said. "I think our fans have been waiting for it, and we want to keep moving on."

## Three-goal first lifts Islanders past Lightning

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — The New York Islanders know they've yet to see the best of the Tampa Bay Lightning and Vezina Trophy finalist Ben Bishop.

Shane Prince scored twice during a three-goal first period and John Tavares had a goal and an assist Wednesday night to help the Islanders beat one of the NHL's top goalies 5-3 in Game 1 of the second-round Stanley Cup playoff series.

The defending Eastern Conference champions pulled Bishop midway through the second period after the Islanders scored four goals on their first 13 shots, one of them on a knuckler that fluttered through the 6-foot-7 goaltender's legs.

"He'd probably like to have one back, but at the end of the day he's going to bounce back. He's a great goaltender. It's a long series," New York coach Jack Capuano said.

"It's just one game. But whatever guy's in there, we've just got to continue to do what we need to do and get pucks and bodies to the net. Some of our shots had eyes. Again, you need some puck luck in this game if you're going to win, and we had that tonight."

Taking up where he left off in helping the Islanders advance beyond the first round for the first time in 23 years, Tavares assisted on Travis Hamonic's goal that erased an early deficit and later scored his sixth postseason goal on a blistering shot from the left circle to give New York

a 4-1 lead midway through the second.

The Islanders needed overtime to get three of four victories against the Florida Panthers in the opening round. This one was never seriously in doubt after New York wiped out the 1-0 lead Tampa Bay took on Ondrej Palat's goal just over three minutes into the game.

"I think our group's got a great mindset. A lot of confidence, obviously," Tavares said. "We're all very familiar with one another and just want to keep rolling."

Tampa Bay pulled to 4-3 on third-period goals by Nikita Kucherov and Valteri Filppula before Cal Clutterbuck's empty-netter sealed the victory in the final minute.

"This is not how we wanted to start, but at the same time we've been in this situation before and we'll bounce back from this," Lightning defenseman Victor Hedman said.

"In the third we played a lot better and had opportunities to tie it up, but we put ourselves in a big hole. We almost got there, but being down three goals is tough."

Thomas Greiss, who won one game in overtime and two in double overtime against Florida, finished with 33 saves for the Islanders. They were outshot 28-10 over the last two periods.

Game 2 is Saturday at Amalie Arena.