

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

Wednesday, April 5, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Trump: Chemical attack changed views on Syria

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump denounced the chemical attack in Syria as an “affront to humanity” Wednesday, declaring that it crossed “many, many lines” and cannot be tolerated. But he pointedly refused to say what action the U.S. might take in response.

Trump, facing one of his first major global crises, blamed the attack squarely on Syrian President Bashar Assad. Only days earlier Trump’s administration had said Assad’s ouster was no longer a U.S. priority, but he said the attack that killed at least 72 people had shifted his views.

“That attack on children yesterday had a big impact on me. Big impact,” Trump said in the White House Rose Garden. “My attitude towards Syria and Assad has changed very much.”

Still, Trump was adamant that he would not telegraph any potential U.S. military retaliation, even as his U.N. ambassador, Nikki Haley, was promising a strong and perhaps even unilateral American response. Trump said disclosing military action ahead of time was a mistake the Obama administration had repeatedly made.

“I’m not saying I’m doing anything one way or another, but I’m certainly not going to be telling you,” Trump said.

Trump said the attack was “so horrific” and noted that it had killed “innocent people, small children and even beautiful little babies.”

“These heinous actions by the Assad regime cannot be tolerated,” he said.

Haley warned earlier Wednesday that the Trump administration will take action against chemical attacks in Syria that bear “all the hall-

marks” of Assad’s government if the U.N. Security Council fails to act. Haley urged the council at an emergency meeting to immediately approve a resolution drafted by the U.S., Britain and France that condemns and threatens consequences for the use of chemical weapons, especially in Tuesday’s attack that killed dozens of people in rebel-held Idlib province.

“There are times at the United Nations when we are compelled to take collective action,” she said. “When the United Nations consistently fails in its duty to act collectively, there are times in the life of states that we are compelled to take our own action.”

“For the sake of the victims, I hope the rest of the council is finally willing to do the same,” she added.

Haley spoke after Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova announced Moscow’s opposition to the draft resolution. She called it “categorically unacceptable” because “it runs ahead of the investigation results and names the culprit, Damascus.”

“The main task now is to have an objective inquiry into what happened,” Russia’s deputy U.N. ambassador Vladimir Safronkov told the Security Council. “Up to now all falsified reports about this incident have come from the White Helmets or the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights based in London which have been discredited long ago.”

Holding up photos of victims of the attack, Haley accused Russia of blocking action and ignoring the “barbarity” of three previous chemical attacks that investigators blamed on the Syrian government by vetoing a resolution in February that would have imposed sanctions on those responsible.

Service chiefs push for more funding

BY ALEX HORTON

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The service chiefs on Wednesday offered a grim potential of dead soldiers, grounded planes and aging ships if Congress continues to use stop-gap measures to fund military operations.

The four-star chiefs for the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines made their cases during a hearing of the House Armed Services Committee and outlined what they expect will be damaged if Congress fails to pass the 2017 defense budget and instead decides to fund the remaining part of the 2017 fiscal year, which goes to Sept. 30, through a continuing resolution. The stopgap bills, called continuing resolutions, have been used frequently over the last eight years. Continuing resolutions lock in the Pentagon’s budget at last year’s spending level, which bars military services from starting new programs or ending old ones.

The defense budget for fiscal year 2017 has cleared the House but has not been voted on by the Senate, creating uncertainty among top military officials, said Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

The House passed a \$578 billion defense spending bill in March for the fiscal year that started Oct. 1. But the Senate has yet to act on the legislation. Lawmakers also haven’t addressed a \$30 billion supplement to the 2017 budget that President Donald Trump requested last month. The temporary spending bill approved last year runs out April 28.

The service chiefs warned the committee of the impact of

going a full year without a regular budget. Army Gen. Mark Milley said that a continuing resolution for military spending will grind training to a halt by July, leaving individual soldiers and units less prepared.

“The ultimate impact [of budget restrictions] is cumulative and leads to lost battles and dead soldiers on a battlefield,” Milley said, invoking moments in military history, such as the defeat of Allied forces at the Battle of Kasserine Pass during World War II, to paint a vivid picture of the consequences of poor readiness.

Navy Adm. John Richardson raised alarms about his service’s capability to defend against today’s threats while preparing for future conflict. “We have not had sufficient resources to maintain the fleet at current levels of operational tempo, to modernize it to adequately address evolving threats, and to invest in new capabilities to maintain an edge into the future,” Richardson said. “Our competitors are gaining on us, and our advantage is shrinking.”

Richardson said he needs an additional \$2.1 billion beyond what is earmarked for the Navy in the 2017 budget.

Marine Gen. Robert Neller offered a blunt assessment of the challenges the Marine Corps faces in retaining highly trained cyberwarfare troops as private security companies offer big paychecks to lure their skills. He recalled a conversation with a cyber-trained Marine about the six-figure offers floating around the industry.

“How are you going to afford to keep me?” The Marine asked Neller, who suggested hefty bonuses were the answer to retention.

N. Korea fires missile before US-China talks

By KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea—North Korea raised the stakes by firing a medium-range ballistic missile into the sea off its east coast on Wednesday, the eve of a much-anticipated U.S.-China summit.

The missile, which was launched from a port city known for its submarines, flew for nine minutes before splashing into the sea about 40 miles away, U.S. and South Korean officials said.

The U.S. Pacific Command said initial assessments indicated it was a KN-15 medium-range missile. But a senior U.S. defense official said later that it was an extended-range Scud missile, which suffered an in-flight failure. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the updated information

was based on U.S. imagery and assessments, according to The Associated Press.

It was North Korea's fourth attempted missile launch this year as the communist state persists with its banned nuclear weapons programs despite international condemnation and punishing economic sanctions.

The test sent a defiant signal ahead of a summit between President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, due to begin Thursday in Florida. South Korea's foreign ministry called it "a threat to the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula and the whole world." Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said it was a "grave provocation."

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson — who previously said all options including military action are on the table for dealing with the North — issued a

brief statement that contained none of the usual condemnation or other diplomatic language.

"North Korea launched yet another intermediate range ballistic missile. The United States has spoken enough about North Korea. We have no further comment," he said in a statement posted on the State Department's website.

Trump is expected to press China to do more to use its influence as Pyongyang's only major ally to curb the smaller state's nuclear ambitions. Beijing has shown increasing impatience with its communist protégé but has pressed for a softer approach amid fears a regime collapse in Pyongyang would have a destabilizing effect.

Analysts said Wednesday's missile test was a show of force aimed at showing North Korea's leadership won't be ignored.

"It's a message to both of

them, and the message is that 'look, we're gonna do what we're gonna do,'" said Michael Madden, an expert on North Korea's leadership. "The United States needs to change its strategic calculation."

U.S. Pacific Command said it had detected and tracked the launch of a single ballistic missile at a land-based facility near the east-coast city of Sinpo.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missile was fired at a high angle, reached an altitude of 117 miles and flew nearly 40 miles.

In addition to the symbolic value, experts pointed out the North also has practical reasons for carrying out the tests. Even though many efforts have failed, Pyongyang has shown increasing progress in its goal to develop a nuclear-tipped missile that could target the U.S. mainland.

Lithuanian assessment: Russia has an advantage

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A Russian buildup of high-readiness combat forces means Moscow could invade the Baltic states in less than 48 hours, potentially overrunning allied troops who would be difficult to reinforce, according to a new Lithuanian threat assessment.

The annual review of threats facing Lithuania and its neighboring states comes as the U.S.-led NATO alliance sets up four multinational battalions to reinforce members in the east. It calls into question whether the force is muscular enough to blunt a Russian offensive.

"In case of Russian military aggression, countries in the region would have a possibility to contain the aggression effectively only if the required sufficient defensive capabilities were already present in the region before the start of the conflict," says Lithuania's 2017 National Security Threat Assessment. "The capabilities

should be sufficient to conduct operations independently from the main allied forces and prior to their deployment."

By virtue of its geographic advantage, Russia dominates the balance of military power in the immediate region around the Baltics, which has long been a source of concern for nations such as Lithuania that were once dominated by the Soviet Union.

"Currently, Russia is capable to conduct combat activities against the Baltic States with 24-48 hrs notice," the Lithuanian report says.

The assessment stopped short of describing what kind of force would be needed to counter Russia in the Baltics, but U.S. security analysts who have war-gamed combat scenarios say several brigades of roughly 5,000 troops each are required. Other military experts disagree, saying in the unlikely event Russia were to invade the Baltics, it would be a tactical mistake to mass forces in an indefensible

location where many could be trapped. NATO's top military commander and head of U.S. European Command, Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti, says there is room for a larger military presence on the Continent.

"We can deal with the challenges we have today with the posture we have, but it's at increased risk," Scaparrotti told lawmakers last week.

Scaparrotti said he wants more ground forces in Europe, including an entire Army division. U.S. Army Europe has already begun looking for places to base more troops, though it remains unclear whether a military buildup in Europe is what the Trump administration has in mind as it looks to improve relations with Moscow.

Tensions have been mounting between Moscow and the West, and NATO's gradual buildup along its eastern flank has been a flashpoint since the crisis in Ukraine erupted three years ago. NATO calls the moves defensive in nature and a response

to what it sees as an increasingly aggressive and unpredictable Russia. Moscow says it has no designs on NATO territory and that the buildup presents a threat to its own territory, particularly the isolated enclave of Kaliningrad.

U.S. military officials have acknowledged the chances of a Russian invasion of NATO territory are unlikely. For NATO, the challenge is to strike the balance of committing sufficient forces to quell the anxieties of allies and send a signal to Moscow without provoking an escalation.

Allies in the Baltics, however, say Russia is already meddling in their affairs through increased espionage, cyberattacks and propaganda campaigns. The pace of information operations is expected to pick up ahead of a major Russian military exercise to be held later this year, which will deploy about 100,000 troops near the borders of the Baltic states, the Lithuanian assessment said.

Marines trail in giving women infantry jobs

BY DIANNA CAHN
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps is trailing the Army in integrating women into combat infantry jobs, opening some roles but erecting barriers to ground combat officer positions, according to advocates.

A year after the Department of Defense repealed its combat exclusion policy, opening 250,000 positions, 30 women have qualified as Army infantry and armor officers and 32 more are in the pipeline. Not one female Marine has completed officer training in infantry, armor or amphibian assault vehicle specialties, the Service Women's Action Network said.

SWAN joined with the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Women's Law Center and Women in International Security to participate in a panel sponsored by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., on Capitol Hill on Wednesday.

That the Marine Corps is falling behind is not surprising to these advocates, who long warned that the Corps' stubborn resistance to opening

combat roles to women, its insistence on segregated training and its all-male infantry culture would have to shift before successful integration could take place.

"The Army has done better in this current phase by a long shot," said Gillian Thomas, a senior staff attorney at the ACLU's Women's Rights Project. "Women are not only succeeding but excelling."

Among those who spoke were two female Army National Guard second lieutenants who recently advanced to infantry officer positions. Both said they'd worried less about how well they would perform than how they were perceived and that their leadership had embraced them as ordinary officers. There were growing pains: Not many gender-specific bathrooms and occasions where there were open barracks and they had to find separate sleeping accommodations, and both said they had to work harder than their male peers in training to prove themselves, but they were excited.

"I wanted to be challenged; I

wanted to see what I was capable of," said Wednesday Nelson, of the Colorado National Guard. "You have to really want it."

In 2012, a short time before then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta called for lifting the exclusion, the ACLU filed a lawsuit on behalf of four Army women who wanted to join the infantry. The lawsuit's resolution was superseded by the Pentagon's decision to open those jobs, but the ACLU has kept the suit going to monitor implementation, Thomas said.

Some issues have emerged. While women are faring better in the Army, they are not receiving gender-specific equipment like rucksacks or body armor, which puts them in danger and hinders their performance, she said.

Another big hurdle is the policy embraced by the Army and the Marines known as "Leaders First," in which there has to be a female officer in a unit before a woman is allowed to join. In the Army, there has to be at least one officer for 30 days. In the Marine Corps, the requirement is two female officers in place for 90 days.

That policy, coupled with a Marine infantry officers' course that requires a long, fast hike carrying 150 pounds, creates "an artificial barrier" that has prevented women from passing the officers' course and ultimately from joining infantry units, Thomas said.

Wednesday's panel comes just weeks after a scandal erupted over a Facebook group of 30,000 current and former Marines called Marines United where some members had posted nude photos of female Marines and called for sexual violence.

Capt. Greg Jacob, a former Marine Corps training company commander who instituted the "One Marine One Standard" policy that required women in his company perform to the same standards as men, said his policy not only pushed the women to meet a higher standard, it pushed the men to perform better as well.

"By alleviating the segregation, having men and women training together, hitting standards together — that is the key to integrating women into the Marine Corps," he said. "It works."

Cambodia kicks out Navy's Seabees without explanation

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

Cambodia has canceled a longstanding Navy program that provided humanitarian assistance throughout much of the country, in a sign that U.S. relations with the Southeast Asian nation may be in decline.

The decision to remove the Seabees mobile construction detachment "cancels 20 planned projects, including maternity wards and school bathrooms," the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh said Monday on its Facebook page.

"We are sad to see the Seabees go, but proud of their accomplishments over the last nine years," the statement said. No reason was given for the pullout, said embassy spokes-

man Jay Raman.

A Cambodian Defense Ministry spokesman told Reuters he was "unaware of such a decision."

Seabees have been deploying to Cambodia since 2008 to work closely with the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and local leaders to complete more than \$5 million in community service projects in 11 provinces, the embassy said.

Raman said Seabees were scheduled to build six bathroom facilities for schools and two new maternity wards for \$265,000 this year, and an additional \$550,000 in projects were planned for 2018-19. Those have been canceled.

Before leaving the country, the final Seabee detachment to serve in Cambodia was hon-

ored in a ceremony hosted by Ambassador William Heidt, the statement said.

Cambodia has limited some activities with Washington in recent years, while building ties with Beijing. In January, it dropped annual Angkor Sentinel drills with the U.S., saying its forces were needed for upcoming elections.

U.S. relations with Cambodia had improved in recent decades as historic animosities subsided. The United States bombed Cambodia heavily during the Vietnam War, targeting both the Viet Cong and the communist Khmer Rouge.

However, the State Department has been critical at times of Prime Minister Hun Sen's record on human rights and crackdowns on opposition forc-

es. Sen, who came to power in 1998, is one of the world's longest serving leaders.

Meanwhile, China has been building and funding projects in Cambodia and forgiving debt. On Tuesday, ground was broken on a new \$157 million, Chinese-funded soccer stadium just north of Phnom Penh.

Cambodia has also taken China's side when it comes to territorial disputes within the South China Sea, a move that has irked U.S. allies and partners in the region.

Cambodia, which has no claims in the South China Sea, blocked any mention of an international court ruling against China over the disputes during an Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit last year.

Bannon removed from Security Council

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — White House chief strategist Steve Bannon will no longer be a member of the National Security Council's principals committee, according to three White House officials and federal register filings.

Two senior White House officials said Bannon's departure was in no way a demotion and that he had rarely attended meetings since being placed on the council. They and others interviewed for this story asked for anonymity because they are

not authorized to speak publicly on the issue.

Instead, one of the officials said, Bannon was put on the council early in the administration to guide and keep watch over then-national security adviser Michael Flynn, who was tasked with reshaping the operation. The official said Bannon did that from afar. The second official said that Bannon attended one meeting in the last month.

Bannon was there to "de-operationalize" the NSC from its Obama-era set-up, the official added, and he feels that has

been accomplished with Flynn and his successor, H.R. McMaster, and no longer feels the need to be part of the NSC.

"There was a concern when this administration came in that the National Security Council under the prior admin had grown too large and had taken on operational responsibilities that were not properly its role," the second official said. Bannon was placed on the committee "to help return the NSC to its proper policy coordinating role."

A third White House official not authorized to speak pub-

licly confirmed Wednesday that Bannon is no longer part of the NSC and reiterated that Bannon was not taking an active role in the NSC since the inauguration.

In addition, according to the federal register, the director of national intelligence and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are being restored to the NSC's principal's committee, which was their role in the Obama administration. The director of the CIA has also been added to the principal's committee, an official said.

Hot topics key in elections around the US this week

Associated Press

Elections across the U.S. featured a mayoral race with presidential overtones, a 23-person congressional primary highlighting Democratic Party rifts, a school board challenged for accommodating a transgender student and referendums on leadership and police issues in the Missouri cities of St. Louis and Ferguson.

Here are some of the key local races that were on the ballot Tuesday:

■ **Suburban mayor who backed Trump ahead.** A longtime suburban Chicago mayor was narrowly leading his re-election race after he hosted a fundraiser for Donald Trump in September at a city-owned golf club.

Roger Claar, Bolingbrook's mayor for 31 years, has usually faced little if any opposition, but Jackie Traynere, a union organizer and county board member who was a Bernie Sanders delegate at the Democratic National Convention was giving the 71-year-old mayor the fight of his political career.

With all precincts reporting, Claar held a 62-vote lead, although some ballots remained to be counted.

■ **Nation's first congressional primary of 2017.** The first congressional primary since Trump's November victory somewhat resembles a continuation of last year's Democratic presidential primary between Hillary Clinton and Sanders. Rep. Xavier Becerra stepped down from the California district to become state attorney general, and 23 candidates — including several who

point to the Vermont senator for inspiration — are vying to succeed him.

■ **Murder victim's wife wins St. Louis mayor vote.** St. Louis voters elected a new mayor, Lyda Krewson, whose husband was murdered in front of her and her children more than two decades ago during a random carjacking. She has promised to fight to reduce the city's high crime rate.

She succeeds Francis Slay, who held the office for 16 years. She is the city's first female mayor.

■ **School board members survive fight over transgender policy.** A slate of school board members opposed to a suburban Chicago district's policy allowing a transgender student to use the girls' locker room were defeated.

More than 50 families are suing the Palatine Township High School District 211 in federal court, saying the policy allowing transgender students to use the locker room of the gender they identify with, violates the privacy of other students.

But two incumbent board members and a former member who supported the policy, were elected.

■ **Ferguson voters re-elect mayor.** Voters in Ferguson, where a white police officer fatally shot black 18-year-old Michael Brown in 2014, re-elected James Knowles III as mayor over a councilwoman who was trying to become the St. Louis suburb's first black mayor.

They also approved a proposal to add strict police body camera requirements to the city charter.

Navy grounds T-45 jets over oxygen problems

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy has grounded its T-45 Goshawk trainer jets in response to increased incidents in which pilots' oxygen systems have malfunctioned, the service announced Wednesday.

The move comes after Navy officials traveled to the service's T-45 bases in Kingsville, Texas; Pensacola, Fla.; and Meridian, Miss., to meet with Navy and Marine Corps T-45 instructors who were refusing to conduct training flights because of concerns about oxygen system safety, said Cmdr. Jeannie Groeneveld, a spokeswoman for Naval Air Forces.

"Last Friday, we had roughly 40 percent of our flights canceled in the T-45 training commands in Meridian, Pensacola and Kingsville because of operational risk management concerns voiced by the instructor pilots," she said.

The T-45 is the Navy and Marine Corps' primary trainer jet, and instructors have reported an increase in incidents in which the oxygen breathing system has either malfunctioned or the oxygen that it was delivering to the pilot was contaminated, Groeneveld said.

Fox News, which first reported the issue, said instructors have had to physically pull students from the cockpits of malfunctioning aircraft due to illness generated by the oxygen system.

The grounding, which will remain in place for two days, affects 197 aircraft, Groeneveld said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Dumpster emptied; sleeping man inside

ID BOISE — Officials said a Boise man was taken to a hospital after the dumpster in which he was sleeping was emptied into a garbage truck.

The Idaho Statesman reported that emergency crews were notified that a man was in the truck early Monday morning. The truck had been making its rounds in Boise when it emptied the container holding the man in an alley.

Police and firefighters helped dig the man out from the truck, and paramedics took him to a local hospital.

More information about the man was not immediately available.

Armed robbery suspect leaves scene on ATV

AZ PHOENIX — Phoenix police said they arrested a man after a masked suspect armed with a shotgun fired a shot into the ceiling while robbing a restaurant in far north Phoenix and then drove off on an ATV.

Sgt. Vince Lewis said the investigation into the Sunday night robbery led police to a mobile home, where a person matching the robber's description was detained and later identified as the suspect. The suspect was not identified.

Lewis said none of the more than 30 customers and employees in the restaurant was injured.

Cops: Man with sword killed his ex-girlfriend

FL HERNANDO — Florida authorities allege that a man stabbed his ex-girlfriend with a sword and then ran her over with his truck.

The Citrus County Sheriff's

Office said in a news release that deputies found Brandi Blevins, 42, dead in the front yard of a home Sunday night.

Detectives allege Eric Huffman, 41, had stabbed Blevins with a large sword. The sheriff's office said a witness told them that after the stabbing, Huffman jumped into his truck and drove over the victim before crashing into a tree. He ran but was later captured. It was unclear exactly what killed Blevins.

Huffman is charged with premeditated murder and aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. He's in jail without bail.

Man doing oil change crushed by van, dies

IN ALBANY — Authorities said an Indiana man died after his van fell on him while he was changing the oil for the vehicle at his home.

The Star Press reported that Kyle Wayne Bradburn, 29, was pronounced dead at the scene Sunday in Albany after being pinned under the van for at least five to 10 minutes.

Delaware County Deputy Coroner Clarence Brooks said the van was up on ramps in the front yard when one of the ramps slipped.

Police help rescue 2 ducklings from drain

OR SALEM — To protect and serve and ... rescue ducklings?

The Oregon State Police said Monday on its official Twitter and Facebook accounts that one of its troopers helped pluck two ducklings from a storm drain where they were stranded over the weekend.

Witnesses said a mother duck and her 10 ducklings were crossing the street when two of the babies were swept into the

drain.

City workers removed several storm grates and a manhole cover so the trooper could reach the ducklings with a net.

The other eight ducklings successfully navigated the drain pipe and emerged in a nearby canal.

They were reunited with their mother and siblings and waddled away — apparently unharmed.

12-year-old arrested with sawed-off rifle

CA LODI — A 12-year-old was arrested after police in northern California found a concealed sawed-off rifle in his front waistband.

The Sacramento Bee reported Monday that a Lodi police officer approached two boys who were "acting suspiciously" on Saturday.

The newspaper said that as part of the interaction with the boys, the officer found a .22-caliber rifle with the barrel sawed off and the stock missing.

The boy was arrested on suspicion of committing several firearms-related offenses and resisting arrest. His name was not released.

Uber driver shot while dropping off customer

NC CHARLOTTE — Authorities are investigating after an Uber driver was shot when he was dropping off a customer.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg police told local media outlets the shooting happened about 10 p.m. Saturday at an apartment complex in Ballantyne, a neighborhood in Charlotte.

Police said the driver dropped off a customer and then encountered someone who shot at him several times, hitting him once.

Police said the man was

taken to a hospital with injuries that were not life-threatening.

Authorities said the alleged shooter, Michael Dunlap, who lives in the complex, has been charged with attempted first-degree murder.

Gunman in panda bear ski mask robs store

CO COLORADO SPRINGS — Authorities are searching for a man who entered a Colorado Springs convenience store wearing a panda bear ski mask and robbed the clerk at gunpoint.

KKTV-TV reported that the suspect fled after leaving the 7-Eleven with \$200 Saturday night.

Officer Marvin Forbes was on patrol in the area when he was flagged down by someone who witnessed the robbery.

Forbes and other officers helped secure the area and used police dogs to try to locate the suspect but were unsuccessful.

Police said the suspect may have fired shots in the air as he fled.

Feathers fly during giant pillow fight

CA LOS ANGELES — The feathers were flying in downtown Los Angeles.

Hundreds of people traded soft blows in L.A.'s Pershing Square in a giant pillow fight that dwarfed even the biggest slumber party slugfests.

Children, teens, adults and seniors swung pillows at one another for over an hour Saturday. The annual event is held to celebrate International Pillow Fight Day.

Many wore pajamas; some wore masks and goggles.

By the time it was over the ground was so covered with feathers it looked like it had snowed.

From wire reports

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D. Johnson 'the guy to beat' at Masters

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Turn the calendar to the first full week in April, and Dustin Johnson's three straight victories suddenly seem like dress rehearsals.

Now it's time for golf's biggest star to perform at Augusta National, the sport's greatest theater.

It's not always that simple at the Masters.

Tiger Woods looked unbeatable in 2000 when he either won or was runner-up in 10 out of 11 PGA Tour events going into the Masters. He took a double bogey and a triple bogey in a span of three holes in the opening round and never caught up. A year ago, Jason Day won the Arnold Palmer Invitational and Dell Match Play in successive weeks to reach No. 1 in the world. He never shot better than 71 at the Masters and tied for 10th.

It has been 15 years since the No. 1 player in the world — Woods in 2002 — won the green jacket.

For years known as having the rawest talent and the most athleticism, Johnson now is looked upon as a machine, with scant evidence that he has a pulse.

"A perfect, complete player," Jon Rahm said after losing to Johnson in the finals of Match Play.

"There's just not a flaw," two-time major champion Zach Johnson said.

Jordan Spieth knows Johnson's game as well as anyone. They were partners at the Presidents Cup two years ago, and they regularly play together at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am. He has learned not to look because it can get depressing watching Johnson hit shots that few can. That said, Spieth is savvy enough to realize golf is still about the score on a card, and he won Pebble Beach by four shots.

As for the Masters?

"I think Dustin Johnson is the guy to beat in golf no matter where you are," Spieth said. "Put him anywhere. I think just about anybody would agree with that. If I play my best golf, I believe that I can take down anybody, and you have to believe that. But I think that right now ... he's playing the best golf in the world."

No one can dispute that over the last month.

Johnson reached No. 1 in the world with a five-shot victory at Riviera, where he probably would have shattered the oldest 72-hole scoring record on the PGA Tour if he had known or cared what it was, rather than playing it safe and coasting home over the back nine. He won a World Golf Championship in Mexico City (stroke play) and another one on the edge of Hill Country in Texas (match play).

It has been just over 40 years since a player came to the Mas-

ters having won three straight tournaments.

And to think that just a year ago, the talk was about a modern version of the "Big Three" with Day, Rory McIlroy and Spieth.

Johnson wasn't even part of that conversation. When the 81st Masters begins Thursday, the 32-year-old American will not have experienced anything but trophy presentations for nearly two months.

Johnson talks about the improvement he has made in his wedges, though the biggest difference was going to a controlled fade off the tee, instead of a draw that could sometimes get away from him.

"We were trying to get him to hit it for five or six years," swing coach Butch Harmon said. "He just had to buy into it. He controls it so much better, and it hasn't cost him any distance. It's way too early to compare Dustin to Tiger, but it reminds me of Tiger in 2000."

For all his power, Johnson never could figure out Augusta National until two years ago when he tied for sixth. He was nine shots behind Spieth, but it was his first top 10 at the Masters. Last year, his hopes in the final round were ruined by a pair of double bogeys. He tied for fourth, four shots behind.

"The more you play it, the most you understand it and know where to hit," Johnson said.

Don't get the idea the rest of the field is about to roll over for Johnson. Jack Nicklaus marvels at the depth of the top of the golf, which is greater than he has ever seen. Right behind Johnson in the world ranking is McIlroy, who has his own score to settle with Augusta National.

McIlroy had a four-shot lead going into the final round in 2011 and shot 80. Now, the Masters is all that's keeping him from becoming the sixth player to complete the career Grand Slam. This is his third try, and he has never had a better chance than that first one.

"I think about what could have been and if that hadn't have went wrong, I wouldn't have to answer the questions that I have to answer at this time of the year, every year, until I win one," McIlroy said.

Spieth has his own bad memories, even though he still has a green jacket.

He had a five-shot lead last year going to the back nine in his bid to become the first player to go wire-to-wire in successive years. Instead, he dropped six shots in three holes, including his infamous quadruple bogey with two balls in Rae's Creek at No. 12, and finished three shots behind Danny Willett.

Spieth has played the Masters three times and has one victory and two runner-up finishes.

Spieth returns to terrible memories of Augusta

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — The drive home from Augusta National was quiet, a rarity when Jordan Spieth is in the car.

He was wearing a blue shirt, not a green jacket.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Only three hours earlier on Sunday at the Masters, he was coming off four straight birdies and stood on the 10th tee with a five-shot lead. No one who had won a major was remotely close to Spieth.

Three holes later, his head was spinning. A shot in the bunker (No. 10). A shot in the trees (No. 11). Two in the water (No. 12).

And just like that, Spieth was three shots behind and never caught up. He was in Butler Cabin, just like everyone expected, only he was there to help Danny Willett into a green jacket.

What could anyone say?

"Everybody waited," Spieth said. "It was just quiet while we drove home. I wasn't doing too well at the start because it was so recent. It was like: 'Why couldn't I have just done this or done that? Why did this have to happen?' I was trying to figure out why. That was my whole thing that night. Why didn't it work when I was in the same position the year before?"

A year later, he still doesn't have the an-

swers, and it already is weighing on him.

Two weeks before he was due to arrive at Augusta, Spieth said he couldn't wait for this particular Masters to be over. There is no escaping the questions about what happened last year. He didn't have answers during that drive home. He doesn't have them now.

"Whether I can grab the jacket back or I miss the cut or I finish 30th, it will be nice having this Masters go by," he said. "The Masters lives on for a year. It brings a non-golf audience into golf. And it will be nice once this year's finished from my point of view, to be brutally honest with you."

Can Rahm win Masters on his first try?

Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Rap music might be the last thing you'd associate with Augusta National. Jon Rahm is proving there's a first time for everything.

The 22-year-old Spaniard oozes talent, which explains why he hit town as the most heralded Masters rookie since Rory McIlroy in 2009, and perhaps even Tiger Woods in 1997. Almost as impressive is how well Rahm handles interviews in English after only five years on this side of the Atlantic. He credits long hours listening to rappers Eminem and Kendrick Lamar.

"It was more, not necessarily to learn new words, but to be able to pronounce certain words and be able to talk faster, talk without pausing," Rahm

said Monday. "Otherwise, right now I would probably still be in the first part of the interview trying to explain how I felt. ... It really helped me to keep up with some conversations."

Those language skills will come in handy this week, since Rahm is the subject of one of the more intriguing questions heading into the Masters. Namely, can golf's latest "next Nicklaus" pull together enough of the puzzle pieces to solve Augusta National in his first go-round?

More than a few of his elders, frankly, wouldn't be the least bit surprised.

Despite playing just 17 times on the PGA Tour since turning pro last summer, Rahm has posted a win, two second-place finishes and nine top 10s, and has climbed to No. 12 in the

world. Two weekends ago, he took top-ranked Dustin Johnson to the final hole of match play before losing 1-up at the World Golf Championships.

The loss stung, especially his uncharacteristically shaky start on the front nine of the final day. But he learned a lesson that could prove invaluable if Rahm finds himself contending in a pressure cooker like the Masters.

"I couldn't control my body, honestly. I don't know, it was like my body was independent from my mind. I was trying to focus and do my routine, but things just weren't happening," he recalled.

Rahm made a charge on the back nine, "and if I had been a little luckier on 17 and 18, maybe I would have had a chance to score in the match or

go into a playoff.

"But the damage was already done," he added a moment later. "I tried my hardest. But I learned that, you know, if I'm having a good day, I can face the No. 1 player in the world."

He arrived at Arizona State with little hype and less English, but mastered the skill to move the golf ball both ways and left as the team's unquestioned leader and the No. 1-ranked amateur in the country. After he filled out to 6-foot-2 and a solid 220 pounds, his confidence grew as he learned to harness his raw power. Once you've watched Rahm play, the last word you'd use to describe him is "cocky."

"If I didn't think I could win it, I wouldn't be here," Rahm said.

Carrasco returns to help Indians hold off Rangers

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Carlos Carrasco is over the broken bone in his hand that forced him to miss the playoffs with the AL champion Cleveland Indians.

Carrasco struck out seven and pitched into the sixth inning in his first start since taking a liner off his right hand last September, and the Indians held on for a 4-3 victory over the Texas Rangers on Tuesday night.

"It's something in the past, I got it last year, so this year is a new year," Carrasco said. "Feel pretty good for myself, with my body, with my arm. Everything's fine."

Carrasco (1-0), who had some elbow discomfort this spring, allowed two runs in 5 2/3 innings. Andrew Miller pitched a perfect eighth inning and Cody Allen got another save by striking out the side for the second night in a row against the two-time defending AL West champions.

After consecutive doubles by Nomar Mazara and Mike Napoli to start a 25-pitch ninth in-

ning, Allen struck out Rowned Odor, pinch-hitter Jurickson Profar and Joey Gallo. In the opener, Allen struck out the side around a triple by Elvis Andrus.

"Cody threw the ball really well, just maybe too many strikes," Indians manager Terry Francona said "But you could tell what kind of stuff he had because after those first two hits ... there was no wiggle room, and he didn't need it."

Carlos Santana started the game with his sixth career leadoff homer, and then followed Austin Jackson's two-out RBI single with one of his own in the second for a 3-0 lead against Martin Perez (0-1).

That was it for the Indians against Perez, who allowed five hits and walked four in six innings.

"It was encouraging to see him settle down. Obviously we're getting to a point where it's time to put that together throughout an entire game," manager Jeff Banister said.

Michael Brantley added a two-out RBI single for the Indians in the seventh, when Texas

used three relievers.

Texas closed to 3-2 in the second when Gallo hit a two-run homer deep into the second deck of seats in right field. The young slugger, playing third base with Adrian Beltre on the disabled list, is 3-for-32 with two homers and 23 strikeouts since the start of last season.

Gallo's homer accounted for the only runs against Carrasco, who yielded four hits and walked one while throwing 78 pitches.

"After he gave up that home run that might still be going, he settled down, he threw strikes," Francona said. "He threw some really good off-speed, made some big pitches."

Cubs 2, Cardinals 1: Albert Almora Jr. robbed Matt Adams of a home run and Javier Baez made a terrific sliding stop on Kolten Wong's game-ending grounder, sending Jake Arrieta and visiting Chicago to their first win of the season.

Giants 8, Diamondbacks 4: Gorkys Hernandez drove in four runs as visiting San Francisco bounced back from blowing a save in its season-opening

loss.

Padres 4, Dodgers 0: Clayton Richard pitched eight impressive innings while Yangervis Solarte homered as visiting San Diego turned four double plays and won.

Angels 7, Athletics 6: Danny Espinosa hit a three-run homer in the ninth inning to rally visiting Los Angeles to the win.

Yankees 5, Rays 0: CC Sabathia was sharp in his first start while Ronald Torreyes and Chase Headley both homered as visiting New York earned its first victory this season.

Astros 2, Mariners 1: Brian McCann and Marwin Gonzalez homered to back a solid start by Lance McCullers and help host Houston to the win.

Rockies 6, Brewers 5: Greg Holland earned his second save in two days with visiting Colorado, and Gerardo Parra hit a three-run double.

Tigers 6, White Sox 3: Justin Verlander struck out 10 to match the most in franchise history on opening day since Mickey Lolich in 1970 as visiting Detroit backed him with three home runs.

Thompson's 41 points propel Warriors

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Klay Thompson scored 41 points for his 10th career 40-point game, Stephen Curry had 19 points and nine assists, and the play-off-ready Golden State Warriors ran their winning streak to 12 by beating the Minnesota Timberwolves 121-107 on Tuesday night.

In his highest-scoring performance since getting 60 on Dec. 5, Thompson hit seven of 14 three-pointers — giving him at least four threes in a career-best six consecutive games.

Thompson credits the much-improved weather this spring to finding his shooting touch. And he's dead serious.

"I'd probably say the weather's gotten better. This sun-

shine's been so good to me, been able to get outside," said Thompson, who saw his share of precipitation growing up in Portland, Ore. "It just puts me in a great mood to come to the gym every day, get my work in, go home, enjoy the outdoors. The Bay Area is beautiful."

Andrew Wiggins scored 24 points for Minnesota, which couldn't keep up with Golden State.

Pacers 108, Raptors 90: Paul George scored 18 of his 35 points in the third quarter, helping host Indiana stop a four-game losing streak that dropped it out of a tie for the No. 5 seed in the Eastern Conference to the very real possibility of missing the postseason.

Thunder 110, Bucks 79: Russell Westbrook matched

Oscar Robertson's season record with his 41st triple-double, leading host Oklahoma City to the victory.

Jazz 106, Trail Blazers 87: Gordon Hayward scored 30 points and Rudy Gobert added 20 points and 11 rebounds for host Utah in the victory.

Spurs 95, Grizzlies 89 (OT): Kawhi Leonard had 32 points and 12 rebounds, and host San Antonio topped Memphis in a matchup of likely first-round playoff opponents.

Wizards 118, Hornets 111: John Wall scored 14 of his 23 points in the third quarter, helping host Washington hurt Charlotte's playoff chances.

Cavaliers 122, Magic 102: LeBron James notched his second straight triple-double, Kevin Love scored 28 points

and host Cleveland warmed up for a big game in Boston by dropping 18 three-pointers on Orlando.

Nuggets 134, Pelicans 131: Danilo Gallinari scored 28 points, and visiting Denver eliminated New Orleans from playoff contention.

Kings 98, Mavericks 87: Ben McLemore scored 21 of his 22 points in the second half, leading host Sacramento to the victory.

Knicks 100, Bulls 91: Carmelo Anthony scored 23 points, and host New York snapped Chicago's four-game win streak.

Nets 141, 76ers 118: Brook Lopez and Jeremy Lin each scored 16 points to lead visiting Brooklyn to a rare rout.

Rask, Bruins shut out Lightning, clinch playoff berth

Associated Press

BOSTON—David Pastrnak's wide postgame grin had much less to do with the two goals he scored than the two points he helped Boston pick up with a 4-0 win over Tampa Bay.

The victory Tuesday night was all the Bruins needed to clinch their first playoff berth since 2014.

"It's a new feeling. I'm enjoying it a lot," said Pastrnak, who was still a few months out from being drafted the last time the Bruins played a postseason game. "I think every single guy in this room did his job today and that's why we got the win."

Drew Stafford and Zdeno Chara also scored for the Bruins, who extended their season-high winning streak to six games. More importantly, by winning in regulation, Boston guaranteed a return to the postseason after missing out the last two years.

"It's kind of a nice feeling to be in postseason again," Chara said. "This team battled through some ups and downs throughout the year and it was one of those years where we re-

ally had to come together."

Boston fans wary of another collapse in the final weeks celebrated by cheering throughout the final two minutes. After the final horn, the Bruins skated from the bench and swarmed goalie Tuukka Rask following his career-best eighth shutout of the season.

"It feels great. The city deserves it. The organization deserves it and we feel like we deserve it, too," said Rask, who stopped 28 shots. "Everybody can breathe a little bit easier now, but we still have two games left before the real games start."

The Bruins haven't lost since Tampa Bay's 6-3 victory in Boston on March 23.

The loss didn't knock the Lightning out of playoff contention, but Tampa Bay fell dangerously close with just three games remaining.

Penguins 4, Blue Jackets 1: Patric Hornqvist scored his 20th goal of the season while Matt Murray finished with 38 saves as host Pittsburgh sped past slumping Columbus.

Capitals 4, Maple Leafs 1: Lars Eller and Kevin Shatten-

kirk gave his team a two-goal lead halfway through the game as visiting Washington ended Toronto's four-game winning streak.

Senators 2, Red Wings 0: Erik Karlsson and Tom Pyatt scored while Craig Anderson made 24 saves for his fifth shutout of the season as host Ottawa defeated Detroit to stop a five-game losing streak.

Islanders 2, Predators 1 (OT): Thomas Hickey scored 1:25 into overtime as visiting New York beat Nashville to preserve its thin playoff hopes for at least another game.

Devils 1, Flyers 0 (OT): John Moore scored 59 seconds into overtime as host New Jersey snapped a six-game skid by beating Philadelphia.

Wild 5, Hurricanes 3: Nino Niederreiter had two goals and an assist to help host Minnesota beat Carolina and clinch second place in the Central Division and home-ice advantage in the first round of the playoffs.

Jets 5, Blues 2: Patrik Laine scored twice and Mark Scheifele had a goal and an assist as visiting Winnipeg beat St. Louis for its season-high fifth

straight victory.

Stars 3, Coyotes 2 (OT): Julius Honka scored his first NHL goal 3:45 into overtime to lift host Dallas over Arizona.

Sharks 3, Canucks 1: Kevin Labanc and Joel Ward scored in the first 30 seconds for the quickest two goals in franchise history as visiting San Jose completed a sweep of the five-game series against Vancouver.

Kings 6, Oilers 4: Trevor Lewis and Tanner Pearson scored about 8½ minutes apart in the third period while Jonathan Quick made 23 saves as host Los Angeles snapped Edmonton's five-game winning streak.

Ducks 3, Flames 1: Patrick Eaves scored his eighth goal in nine games and John Gibson made 26 saves as host Anaheim moved closer to a fifth straight Pacific Division title.

Avalanche 4, Blackhawks 3 (OT): Erik Johnson went coast-to-coast to score at 1:57 of overtime as host Colorado rallied from a three-goal deficit to beat Chicago.