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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Nuke-sniffer aircraft arrives on Okinawa

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND CHIYOMI SUMIDA

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A U.S. aircraft that specializes in detecting radioactive debris after the detonation of a nuclear device has arrived on Okinawa amid rising tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

An Air Force WC-135 Constant Phoenix — commonly referred to as a nuke-sniffer

— arrived at Kadena Air Base last Friday evening, said Satoru Kuba, an Okinawan who monitors military aircraft traffic at Kadena.

Photos obtained by Stars and Stripes show the plane sitting on the base's runway.

A spokesperson for the Air Force's 18th Wing at Kadena did not immediately respond to requests for comment, and Japan's Ministry of Defense would not immediately verify the report.

However, a senior Japan Self-Defense Forces official confirmed the aircraft's arrival, according to a report Wednesday by Japan's Nikkei newspaper.

The Pentagon has often deployed one of the Air Force's two WC-135 aircraft to the Asia-Pacific region since North Korea detonated an underground nuclear device in 2006. The plane also flew over Japan in 2011 after the meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power

plant, according to the Washington Post.

The modified C-135B uses external flow-through devices that collect air samples and debris. The samples later go to a lab for analysis.

The Constant Phoenix arrives at a time of growing tensions with North Korea, which has conducted two nuclear tests and test-fired nearly 30 missiles since last year.

Stakes high for US action on North Korea

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Upping the stakes in its slow-burning confrontation with North Korea, the Trump administration deployed an aircraft carrier to the region this week in a show of force that also could expose American weakness. If the North proceeds with a ballistic missile or nuclear test and the U.S. does nothing in response, America's deterrence will appear diminished.

The USS Carl Vinson is steaming to waters off the Korean Peninsula as anticipation mounts that Kim Jong Un will stage another weapons test around the anniversary of the birth of his grandfather, Kim Il Sung, the nation's founder, on Saturday. Another potential date is an April 25 celebration of its armed forces.

Tensions are high on the divided peninsula. The North sees U.S.-South Korea war games as preparations for an invasion. The U.S. and its allies have expressed alarm about Pyongyang's recent ballistic missile launches, including a four-rocket salvo last month it

described as a practice to strike U.S. bases in Japan.

At the Pentagon on Tuesday, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said sending the Vinson was "prudent."

And Army Gen. Vincent Brooks, commander of U.S. forces in South Korea, decided not to come to Washington for congressional hearings this month, his office said Tuesday, suggesting he had to stay for a potentially hazardous situation under his command. U.S. defense officials said that didn't mean military action was imminent.

The Vinson's presence near North Korea points to the larger challenge for the U.S. of deterrence, which has to be backed by the real threat of force. No one has spoken of shooting down a North Korean missile unless it directly threatens the U.S. or its allies in East Asia. And Kim is likely to be undeterred to conduct tests because he has made nuclear weapons development a national priority, seeing them as a guarantee against U.S.-backed regime changes that have toppled authoritarian regimes in Iraq, Libya and elsewhere.

President Donald Trump's

policy toward the North Korean threat is still taking shape. The emphasis has been on pressing China to use its economic leverage to rein in its wayward ally. When Chinese leader Xi Jinping met Trump in Florida last week, the U.S. urged China to block North Korea's access to the international financial system by cracking down on banks and companies that deal with it.

But the Trump administration has been unusually outspoken about retaining pre-emptive military options against North Korea. The president has issued repeated, ambiguous warnings about his willingness to take unilateral actions — a threat that assumed new resonance after he ordered a missile strike against Syria last week over its alleged use of chemical weapons. The order was issued during Xi's visit.

"North Korea is looking for trouble. If China decides to help, that would be great. If not, we will solve the problem without them! U.S.A.," Trump tweeted Tuesday.

President Barack Obama also ordered an aircraft carrier to the Korean Peninsula in a show

of force in November 2010 after North Korea launched a deadly artillery barrage on the South. Then, the fear was a conflagration at the heavily militarized border.

Washington now views the threat as one against the U.S. itself, as North Korea's nuclear and missile programs approach the capacity to reach the U.S. mainland.

That has raised the question of whether the U.S. would be prepared to shoot down a North Korean missile. Doing so would be a test of America's uncertain missile defense capabilities.

The Carl Vinson is accompanied by a destroyer ship with an Aegis combat system to track and intercept missiles.

John Park, director of the Korea Working Group at the Harvard Kennedy School, said if North Korea went ahead with a missile test to mark this weekend's anniversary, there would be questions if the U.S. was in the region but did not try to stop it.

If it uses the Aegis system, a failure would hurt the system's credibility.

US, Russia agree to probe of gas attack

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Striving to salvage ties amid a fierce dispute over Syria, the United States and Russia on Wednesday agreed to work together on an international investigation of a Syrian chemical weapons attack last week that prompted retaliatory American missile strikes. Washington blames Russia's ally, Syrian President Bashar Assad, while Moscow says Syrian rebels are responsible.

After a day of discussions with U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said the former Cold War foes agreed a probe of events in northern Syria on April 4 was necessary.

More than 80 people were killed in what the U.S. has described as a nerve gas attack that Assad's forces undoubtedly carried out. Russia says rebels dispersed whatever chemical agent was found, which the Trump administration calls a disinformation campaign.

The news conference came after Russian President Vladimir Putin met the top American diplomat for almost two hours to see if they could rescue relations between the world's mightiest military powers. Russia's alleged meddling in the U.S. presidential election also hovered over the first face-to-face encounter between Putin and a Trump administration Cabinet member.

"There is a low level of trust between our two countries," Tillerson said candidly.

He said working groups would be established to improve U.S.-Russian ties and identify problems.

He said the two sides would also discuss disagreements on Syria and how to end the country's six-year civil war.

But such hopes appeared optimistic as the diplomats outlined their sharply diverging views on Syria. Until the chemical attack, the Trump administration had sought to step back from the U.S. position that Assad should leave power. But Tillerson repeated the administration's new belief that "the reign of the Assad family is coming to an end."

Tillerson said Syria's government had committed more than 50 attacks using chlorine or other chemical weapons over the duration of the conflict. And he suggested that possible war crimes charges could be levied against the Syrian leader. Russia has never publicly acknowledged any such attack by Assad's forces and has tried for the past 18 months to help him expand his authority in Syria.

The civil war is separate from the U.S.-led effort against Islamic State in the north of the country.

Steeped in geopolitical intrigue, the meeting between Putin and Tillerson wasn't formally confirmed until the last minute, following days of speculation about

whether the Russian would refuse to grant the former oil executive an audience.

Putin's decision to host Tillerson signaled Moscow's intent to maintain communication with the U.S. even as the countries bash each other publicly in louder and louder tones.

The men know each other well from Tillerson's days as Exxon Mobil CEO. Putin had even honored Tillerson with a friendship award.

Still, Tillerson was greeted frostily in the Russian capital as Lavrov began their meeting Wednesday by demanding to know America's "real intentions."

"We have seen very alarming actions recently with an unlawful attack against Syria," Lavrov said, referring to the 59 Tomahawk missiles Trump launched at a Syrian air base to punish Assad for using chemical weapons. "We consider it of utmost importance to prevent the risks of replay of similar action in the future."

Putin, whom U.S. intelligence agencies say tried to help Trump get elected, insisted that relations with the U.S. had only gone downhill since Trump took office in January.

"The level of trust at the working level, especially at the military level, has not become better but most likely has degraded," Putin said in an interview broadcast Wednesday by state television channel Mir.

Federal agencies are told to plan job cuts

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The White House on Wednesday planned to instruct all federal agencies to submit a plan by June 30 to shrink their civilian workforces, offering the first details on how the Trump administration aims to reduce the size and scope of government.

A governmentwide hiring freeze the president imposed on Jan. 23 will be lifted immediately. But Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney told reporters Tuesday that agency leaders must start "taking immediate actions" to save money and reduce their staffs. Mulvaney also indicated they must come up with a long-term blueprint to

cut the number of federal workers starting in October 2018.

"This does not mean that agencies will be free to hire willy nilly," Mulvaney said of the return to hiring. He called the restructuring — laid out in a 14-page memo — a "smarter plan, a more strategic plan, a more surgical plan" to rein in a bureaucracy President Donald Trump has called too big. By following a budget Trump proposed in March that calls for drastic cuts across most of the government, Mulvaney said some agencies such as the departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs will add staff, while others, like the Environmental Protection Agency, will "end up paring" full-time employees "even greater than

they would have ... during the hiring freeze."

"The executive branch of government has never been rebuilt," Mulvaney said, claiming this effort will be more far-reaching than those of previous administrations.

But lawmakers have a significant say in how much money is provided to federal agencies and many — including Republicans — object to Trump's proposed budget cuts. Many large-scale changes to the government — for example, a consolidation of offices with similar missions — would have to be approved by Congress.

The White House is requiring agencies to improve the effectiveness and accountability of their employees, by reward-

ing high performers and clearing a straighter path to take action against poor ones.

Based on Trump's plan, some agencies would see cuts of more than 20 percent — and the State Department and EPA, 30 percent — which would fundamentally alter their missions. White House officials have said that more should be done to shift operations to private-sector companies.

Democrats oppose the proposed cuts and have pushed back against Trump's calls for reducing the federal workforce. Many Republicans have said there should be major budget cuts but others oppose the across-the-board reductions.

Marines' 1st female mortarman starts training

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The first woman to earn the title Marine Corps mortarman, Pfc. Maria Daume begins training this week with 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, at Camp Pendleton, Calif.

The 19-year-old completed her infantry training last month at Camp Lejeune, N.C., as the Marines' first female to enlist as an infantry recruit and graduate from her entrance training.

There were plenty of doubters — people who questioned whether a woman could hack it in the infantry and others who weren't sure of Daume, she told Voice of America in an interview ahead of her March 23 graduation from the School of Infantry. But Daume remained confident she'd complete the training and be among the first women to serve in the infantry.

"I like to prove people wrong," Daume told VOA. "No matter what your belief is, you can't argue that I didn't do it, because I did."

Daume is no stranger to adversity. She was born in a Siberian prison where she lived the first two years of her life before she was moved to a Moscow orphanage following the death of her mother, according to the Marine Corps. She and

her twin brother remained in the orphanage for two years before a couple from New York adopted them.

Growing up on Long Island, she was bullied for being Russian, for being adopted and for having a mother who'd been imprisoned.

"Bullying was a big thing," Daume said in a Marine Corps profile. She was unavailable for an interview with Stars and Stripes.

She poured her efforts into athletics and mixed martial arts, developing mental toughness alongside physical strength. It helped shape the mentality she will bring with her to her new infantry unit.

"With MMA, it is all about staying calm and not getting angry," Daume said in the Marine profile. "If you get angry you can make stupid mistakes. I know how to get hit and keep cool. With the team sports, you have to work together. When you're a team, you're a family."

Daume became interested in the Marine Corps at 12, the Marine profile stated. She began meeting with recruiters by 14, but it was not until then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter ordered in December 2015 that all military positions, including the traditionally all-male infantry, be opened to women that it became clear to her exactly what she wanted to do.

She shipped off to Parris Island, S.C., in October 2016, one of a handful of women to begin recruit training with an infantry contract. After completing boot camp in January she moved on to Infantry School, where instructors said she not only met the standards but often far exceeded them.

"She was right at the top of the pack," Marine Sgt. Matthew Schneider, a mortar instructor at the school, told VOA.

Mortarman is among the most demanding jobs in the Marine Corps. They provide front-line, rapid-response, indirect fire in support of forward rifle and reconnaissance units. The training is tough. It required feats of strength, such as hoisting an 80-pound Mk 19 automatic grenade launcher above her head and dragging a 215-pound casualty dummy in full combat gear. It also required tests of her knowledge of the infantry, and endurance.

Through the course, Daume told VOA, she believes she earned the respect of the male Marines training alongside her.

"They realized that I was just one of them," she said. "It wasn't Daume, the female. It was just Daume."

Daume is the fourth female Marine infantryman to join an infantry unit. Three female infantry Marines reported to

their unit at Camp Lejeune in January, but they had served in other military jobs.

Her new battalion commander said the unit was "extremely pleased and honored" to have Daume join their team.

"Our staff is ready to assist our new personnel as they transition into the operational forces and ensure their professional success as Marines," Lt. Col. Warren C. Cook, commander of 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, wrote in an email to Stars and Stripes. "Having female infantry Marines at the battalion is a new and historic moment, but these ladies have chosen to serve just as so many Marines have before them. I look forward to leading them in our training work ups and into future deployments serving our nation's call."

In the profile, Daume said she hoped to serve alongside other women in the infantry. It appears that will happen soon. She is expected to be followed in the next few weeks by at least two female infantry Marines who are nearing completion at the School of Infantry, said Capt. Joshua Pena, a spokesman for the Marines' Training and Education Command. Two female second lieutenants will begin infantry training this month, he said. So far, no women have passed the Marine Infantry Officer course.

New leadership on USS Ross days after Syria missile strike

By SCOTT WYLAND
Stars and Stripes

One of the most memorable moments in Cmdr. Russell Caldwell's Navy career came in his final week at the helm of the USS Ross.

Caldwell supervised the ship's cruise missile strike against Syria's Shayrat air base on April 7. The Ross and the USS Porter, both based in Rota, Spain, launched 59 Tomahawks at the base from the Mediterranean Sea.

Caldwell relinquished command of the Ross on Tuesday during a change-of-command ceremony aboard the ship in

Cyprus. Cmdr. Bryan Gallo becomes the vessel's new commanding officer.

Caldwell commanded the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer for only 18 months, but during that time he developed deep respect for the ship and its crew.

"I truly believe the USS Ross is the best ship in the fleet," said Caldwell, who is heading to San Diego to oversee development of surface-warfare manuals.

Gallo takes charge of the Ross after spending 18 months as the ship's executive officer. "I am honored and humbled to be the [commanding officer] of

such an accomplished warship and incredible crew," Gallo said in a statement.

The Ross and Porter were conducting regular patrols when they were ordered to carry out the missile assault from the eastern Mediterranean. President Donald Trump ordered the attack in response to reports that the Syrian regime had unleashed deadly sarin gas on civilians.

Trump phoned Caldwell and Cmdr. Andrea Slough, the Porter's commanding officer, to praise them on how they executed the mission.

Caldwell and Slough said they were honored to hear di-

rectly from Trump that the attack accomplished its purpose, and that it showed how lethal and precise Navy ships can be in attacking land targets.

Caldwell is passing to Gallo the helm of a 20-year-old warship that has spent many months in and around the Mediterranean since 2001, providing maritime support for the war on terrorism.

During a 2015 exercise, the Ross used its anti-ballistic system to shoot down a Terrier Orion missile launched from a range near Scotland. It was the first time a U.S. Navy ship intercepted a ballistic missile in space at a foreign site.

Report: Better study needed to find burn pit-illness connection

By E.B. BOYD
Stars and Stripes

A new federal report says the data from an existing registry of troops' downrange exposure to burn pits cannot be used to establish a link with health problems they are now experiencing, making it difficult to prove they are entitled to special benefits.

Veterans who have been exposed to burn pits in Afghanistan and Iraq have to go through difficult and time-consuming processes to prove that their conditions are service-related. At stake are health care benefits, support for spouses and education benefits for children.

Congress in 2013 mandated the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, which was launched in 2014. It allows veterans to enter information about how much they were exposed to burn pits during their deployments and any subsequent health problems.

It was intended to assist veterans in tracking their health issues and to help the Department of Veterans Affairs get information out to affected troops. Congress also hoped scientists would be able to use the registry data to gain insights into how exposure to burn pits might

have resulted in cancers and respiratory, cardiovascular and gastrointestinal problems.

Robust scientific conclusions could prompt the VA to institute policies that streamline the process for benefits.

Four years later, the congressionally mandated report, produced by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, says the way data are collected in registries isn't scientific, making it "fundamentally unsuitable" for drawing authoritative conclusions.

"A more rigorous and appropriate study design is needed," said the report, which found that registries relying on voluntary participation and self-reported information are subject to data biases.

The absence of scientifically proven associations makes it difficult for veterans to claim benefits related to illnesses they believe stem from the burn pits, especially if those problems appear long after a deployment. "The veteran will not see those things if he can't link his disease process to those exposures," said Kerry Baker, a former VA legislative and policy director who now serves as a veteran advocate at Chisholm, Chisholm,

and Kilpatrick, a Rhode Island law firm focused on veteran benefits.

The burn pits were used at bases in Afghanistan and Iraq to dispose of everything from general trash to paints and chemicals, automotive parts, rubber, plastics and human waste. Accelerants like jet fuel and kerosene were often used to start the fires, which sent thick black clouds across installations. According to the report, at least 250 such pits were set up in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Veterans began complaining of health problems in the mid-2000s. In 2009, the military restricted the use of burn pits.

As veterans fell ill or died, advocacy groups started demanding action. In 2011, Rep. Todd Akin, R-Mo., and Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., introduced bills that would become the registry law, which allows anyone who deployed after 9/11 to participate. The VA says more than 105,000 people have enrolled.

Both the new report and the 2011 Institute of Medicine assessment recommended the government should conduct a public-health-style epidemiological study to identify the effects of burn pits.

Marine charged with lying in misconduct case to plead guilty

The Washington Post

Marine Maj. Mark Thompson, the former U.S. Naval Academy instructor charged with lying in a sexual misconduct case, is set to plead guilty this week, military court records show.

Thompson was slated to stand trial this week, but instead a plea hearing is scheduled for Thursday morning at the Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., according to the military's online court docket.

Thompson, who faces charges of making a false official statement and of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, had long sought to clear his name by proving that he was unfairly convicted of sexual misconduct with two female midshipmen at a 2013 court-martial. He brought his allegations to *The Washington Post*.

The military launched a new investigation into Thompson and filed additional charges after *The Post* uncovered evidence that he was dishonest when he testified before an administrative board deciding whether he should be kicked out of the Marines.

After the new charges were filed, Marine prosecutors said Thompson should be locked up for nearly three years, fined \$200,000 and removed from the service for what they described as a pattern of deception. He is accused of lying to military authorities, encouraging a friend to lie on his behalf at his earlier court-martial, and lying to *Washington Post* reporter John Woodrow Cox about his accusers.

The details of Thompson's plea agreement, which must be accepted by a military judge, are expected to be spelled out at length during Thursday's hearing.

GOP narrowly pulls out a Kansas victory

Associated Press

WICHITA, Kan. — Republicans pulled out a victory in Kansas in the first of four U.S. House special elections to replace GOP congressmen named to top jobs in President Donald Trump's administration, but the next contest for a seat in Georgia could be tougher to hold.

The margin of victory Tuesday for Kansas Republican Ron Estes in the 4th District special election slid to only 7 percentage points from a 31-point margin in November, when incumbent Mike Pompeo was

running before he was appointed Trump's CIA director.

In a further warning sign for Republicans, Estes narrowly lost the district's most populous county around the city of Wichita to his Democratic opponent, James Thompson, a political newcomer. Trump won that county by 18 points.

"Republicans nationally should be very worried," said Bob Beatty, a Washburn University political scientist. "It's remarkable that Thompson got this close."

Both parties will now turn their attention to Georgia and

the extremely competitive April 18 contest to replace Tom Price, who resigned to serve as Trump's Health and Human Services secretary.

Democratic hopes rest with Jon Ossoff, 30, a former congressional staffer-turned-investigative filmmaker.

All 18 candidates from both parties will appear on one primary ballot. Republicans are aiming to keep Ossoff below the majority required to win outright, forcing a two-person runoff — basically a Republican vs. Democrat general election — on June 20.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man in 'Hold My Beer' T-shirt arrested for DUI

CT HARTFORD — Connecticut police said a man wearing a T-shirt that read "Hold My Beer" was arrested for driving under the influence after he crashed into a graveyard.

The Hartford Courant reported that state police said Woodstock resident Harrison Wootton, 25, crashed his car into a graveyard's low stone wall in Putnam early Monday.

A mug shot shows Wootton wearing a black shirt with "Hold My Beer and Watch This" printed on the front.

Police said Wootton was charged with driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, failing to drive in the proper lane and misuse of plates.

Sheriff in video warns heroin dealers to 'Run!'

FL TAVARES — A Florida sheriff is sending a stern warning to heroin dealers: "We're coming for you. Run!"

In a video posted to the agency's Facebook page last Friday, Lake County Sheriff Peyton Grinnell told dealers his undercover agents have already bought heroin from them, adding that officials are "simply waiting for the arrest warrants to be finalized."

Flanked by four agents wearing black hoods and masks, the sheriff told dealers to "enjoy looking over your shoulder and constantly wondering if today is the day we will come for you."

Grinnell said a number of citizens have contacted him recently about the number of heroin overdoses in Lake County, which is west of Orlando in central Florida.

He urged more citizens to call in anonymously. Then he taunted the dealers: "Enjoy trying to sleep tonight."

Man, 93, dies trying to rescue dog from ice

VT CHITTENDEN — State police said an elderly man died while trying to rescue his dog from an icy Vermont pond.

Police said that early Saturday afternoon, William R. Graf, 93, was walking with his Jack Russell terrier near Leferts Pond in Chittenden when the dog ran onto the ice and became stuck in the water.

State police Detective David Pfindel said Graf was lying prone on the ice trying to reach his dog between 50 and 75 feet from shore when his head, torso and shoulders fell into the water. The dog also died.

Samaritan robbed while helping jump-start car

LA NEW ORLEANS — New Orleans police said a man who was apparently acting as a good Samaritan was robbed at gunpoint after he responded to someone who asked for help jump-starting a vehicle.

The Times-Picayune reported that the victim was flagged down in the Algiers neighborhood by someone who was asking for help jump-starting their car.

Police said that after the victim stopped to help, the person requesting the jump pulled out a handgun and forced the victim to turn over his belongings.

The victim complied with the person's demands. Police said the thief then fled in an older model Chevrolet Cavalier.

Man scams Vietnam vet out of \$575, is arrested

MS VIDALIA — A Natchez man was arrested after Vidalia police say he scammed a Vietnam veteran out of almost \$600.

News outlets reported that Eddie W. Jones, 50, was arrested Friday on a charge of theft of assets of an aged person.

Lt. Clint Robinson said that in February, Jones approached a Vietnam veteran, 69, about painting the victim's home.

Robinson said that after Jones completed 30 minutes of work, he told the victim that if he didn't receive \$575, he was going to lose his home. The veteran told Jones he'd give him the sum as long as he worked it off.

Authorities said they asked Jones to return the money, but after two months they issued a warrant for his arrest.

Toddler eats meth in home; parents charged

PA PINE GROVE — State police said a toddler was hospitalized after eating methamphetamine at her home, and her parents are facing child endangerment charges.

The Associated Press isn't identifying the Schuylkill County couple because online court records weren't yet available.

Troopers said the couple, a 26-year-old man and his 24-year-old girlfriend, are responsible for the incident Sunday morning in Wayne Township. That's where police say the 22-month-old girl had to be flown to Lehigh Valley Hospital, near Allentown.

Her name and condition haven't been released.

Police said the girl got into a bag of the drug and ate some at

about 9:30 a.m.

Report: Speeding tickets based on fake limit sign

OH WHITEHOUSE — An Ohio village is examining the practice of its police officers ticketing drivers for speeding based on a fake speeding sign that sets a limit below the actual posted limit for a village street.

The police chief in Whitehouse, near Toledo, has acknowledged the 35 mph sign doesn't match the 50 mph limit set by state law.

The sign was placed to slow drivers down, and Chief Mark McDonough said police only cite drivers who drive over 50 mph.

But a review of traffic tickets by The Blade newspaper found 10 drivers ticketed in the past three years for going over the fake limit but who were below the actual limit of 50 mph.

Coin toss will determine next leader of tiny town

IL COLP — The next village president in a southern Illinois community will be decided by a coin toss.

The Southern Illinoian said Tammy O'Daniell-Howell and Bryan Riekema each received 11 votes last Tuesday in Colp.

Williamson County Clerk Amanda Barnes said the tie will be broken on April 20. Illinois law calls for a coin flip.

O'Daniell-Howell is a lifelong resident of Colp and the current village clerk, a job she's held since 2009. Riekema describes his occupation as "geek."

Only 29 of the 250 registered voters in Colp participated in the April 4 election.

From wire reports

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Rookie leads Toronto back to playoffs

Associated Press

TORONTO — It took all of 14 minutes 18 seconds for Auston Matthews to set his first record this season.

On a mid-October night in Ottawa, Matthews became the first player picked first overall at the NHL Draft to score two goals in his first period. He finished as the only player in the league's 100-year history to score four times in a debut.

The 19-year-old plays his first playoff game for the Toronto Maple Leafs in Washington later this week. But he has already had a historic rookie season by any measure.

"You knew he had the talent," Chicago Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews said, "But sometimes it's just a matter of time before it translates to the NHL and obviously he's wasted no time. So you kind of wonder, if that's how he comes out of the gate what's he going to be like in a couple years from now?"

Matthews set franchise rook-

ie records by scoring 40 goals and collecting 69 points, eclipsing marks by Wendel Clark and Peter Ilnacak that had stood for decades.

He's the first rookie since Alex Ovechkin to score 40 goals, one of only 19 in league history and one of only six teenagers. He's only the fourth to hit the mark before his 20th birthday and is now the highest-scoring American rookie in league history. Only Sidney Crosby scored more goals in the NHL (44) this season.

Matthews topped even Crosby, and everyone else, with 32 even-strength goals. That tied him for the sixth-highest total ever for a rookie, matching Eric Lindros, Mario Lemieux and Mike Gartner. He's one of nine rookies to ever score that many and the first since 1993.

Already 6-3 and 216 pounds, Matthews did it with power, speed and electric skill.

"He scores goals different ways and I think that's probably a big reason why he's been

so consistent is he's got a great shot, but he can also score from in close and goes to the net hard, too," Crosby said.

Matthews finished with 19 wrist-shot goals, 10 snap-shot markers, six via tip and another five on the backhand. Matthews set a new Leafs rookie record in firing 279 shots. The only rookies in NHL history with more? Teemu Selanne with 387, Ovechkin with 425, Wayne Gretzky with 284 and Dale Hawerchuk with 339.

Matthews led the NHL in scoring 14 game-opening goals, equaling Dave Andreychuk's franchise record.

Born in California, but raised in Arizona, Matthews learned the game in chilly rinks across the desert where ice time and proper competition wasn't always easy to find. There was no junior hockey league domination like Crosby or Connor McDavid.

What was so impressive to Crosby was how mature Matthews seemed already. There

were nights of futility, certainly, including against Crosby and Henrik Zetterberg, and he got hammered in the faceoff circle (46.8 percent), but generally Matthews held his own while leading all Leafs forwards in garnering almost 18 minutes of ice time per night.

"I think that the biggest thing that stands out is probably just how complete he is," Crosby said.

It could earn him the Leafs' first Calder trophy in 51 years, making him Toronto's first rookie of the year since Brit Selby in 1966.

"Obviously (Matthews) is a special talent," Toronto coach Mike Babcock said. "More importantly, Matthews is a special person. That's going to allow him to be a good leader because he does it right every day. In the end, that'll allow him to drive a franchise and it'll allow him to win. I think he's a real good player and a real good man and has a chance to be a special player."

Subban ready to deliver on real reason for acquisition

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The adjustment period is over for P.K. Subban along with the regular season, and now expectations for the All-Star defenseman could not be higher.

The Nashville Predators swapped their captain and own All-Star defenseman Shea Weber to Montreal last June, believing that Subban could provide both a boost to the offense and help a franchise that has never gotten out of the second round finally win its first Stanley Cup.

Well, the playoffs start Thursday night with the eighth-seeded Predators in Chicago against the top-seeded Blackhawks.

The former Norris Trophy winner, who had to get used to living in the United States for the first time in his life, understands that for all the fun of learning about Music City and

his new teammates that the postseason is the biggest reason why he is here.

"Me coming into this team was about helping us win a Stanley Cup and being a part of that," Subban said. "And now we have our opportunity, so I'm really excited about everything."

So are the Predators and their fans. This franchise has reached the postseason 10 of the past 13 years, advancing to the second round three times.

They came closest to the Western Conference final a year ago by pushing San Jose to seven games.

With Subban, the Predators are scoring more goals (238) than a year ago (224), a two-spot jump to 11th in the league. Subban ranked 22nd among defensemen with 40 points in 66 games. Weber finished with 42 points over 78 games.

The Predators' biggest im-

provement came after Subban returned from an upper-body injury that kept him out 16 games. After the All-Star break, the Predators were the NHL's seventh-best scoring team with 102 goals.

Subban wasn't the only injury Nashville dealt with in its defensive group. Roman Josi missed 10, while Ryan Ellis was out 11. Playing with new defensive partners also slowed the process.

"He's been a great addition," Josi said of Subban. "I mean we know he's a big-time player, so we're looking forward to him to be a big player for us in the playoffs."

That's where Subban is expected to make the biggest impact. He has 38 points in 55 playoff games — 10 more than Weber in 59 postseason games — and was nearly a point a game player for Montreal in 2014, scoring 14 points in 17

playoff games.

Nashville captain Mike Fisher said the Predators are excited to see that part of Subban.

"He brings a lot of enthusiasm and offensive ability to our team, and he's had a great year," Fisher said Monday. "I think he's poised for an even better playoff."

Nashville doesn't see Subban only as an offensive threat. Coach Peter Laviolette has been impressed by Subban's defensive skills, too, so much that the Predators regularly pit Subban and Mattias Ekholm against an opponent's heaviest players.

"He's delivered for us from an offensive standpoint, and our defensemen scoring is still in a good place and he's a big part of it," Laviolette said. "I think he and Eky have done a great job defensively handling the other team's biggest customers."

Hawks lock up No. 5 seed in the East

Associated Press

ATLANTA — After a maddening, up-and-down season, the Atlanta Hawks seem to be getting hot at just the right time.

Playoff time.

Dwight Howard had 19 points and 12 rebounds as the resurgent Hawks won their fourth straight game, routing the listless Charlotte Hornets 103-76 on Tuesday night to wrap up the No. 5 seed in the Eastern Conference.

The Hawks will face the Washington Wizards in the opening round of the postseason.

“We think we can beat anybody that’s coming our way,” guard Dennis Schroder said.

“We’ve still got to get better, but we’re heading in the right direction for sure.”

A week ago, Atlanta’s playoff hopes were in jeopardy after a dismal stretch that included two losses to Brooklyn, the worst team in the NBA.

Then, in a sudden turnaround that epitomized the team’s inconsistent play all season, the Hawks knocked off East-leading Boston and recorded two straight stunning victories over the defending NBA champion Cleveland Cavaliers, including Sunday’s comeback from a 26-point deficit.

This one was never in doubt. Charlotte played its regular-season finale already eliminated from the playoffs and without its best player, Kemba

Walker.

Atlanta raced out to a 63-44 lead by halftime, shooting 71 percent (24-for-34) over the first two quarters.

All 13 players scored for the Hawks, who were able to rest their starters in the second half. Paul Millsap and Ersan Ilyasova added 10 points apiece.

Nuggets 109, Mavericks 91: Gary Harris scored 20 points and visiting Denver beat Dallas with the Mavericks honoring retiring Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo as a ceremonial player.

Thunder 100, Timberwolves 98: Victor Oladipo scored 20 points and hit a jumper with 6.3 seconds to play to lift Russell Westbrook-less Oklahoma City over host Minnesota.

With Westbrook resting for the first time this season, Oladipo also had nine rebounds and six assists.

Lakers 108, Pelicans 96: Metta World Peace scored a team-leading 18 points during what might have been his final home game for the Lakers, and Los Angeles extended its late-season winning streak to five games with a victory over New Orleans.

Kings 129, Suns 104: Buddy Hield scored a career-high 30 points and Ty Lawson had his first career triple-double, getting 22 points, 12 assists and 11 rebounds as host Sacramento beat Phoenix.

Penguins aiming to break NHL repeat title hex

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Marc-Andre Fleury’s sprawling save on Detroit’s Nicklas Lidstrom in the final moments of Game 7 of the 2009 Stanley Cup Finals was supposed to mark the end of one potential dynasty and the beginning of another.

Yet it took the Penguins and star Sidney Crosby seven years to provide a bookend moment to that giddy night at Joe Louis Arena, the breakthrough coming in San Jose, Calif., last June when they closed out the Sharks in six games to capture the franchise’s fourth title.

Ten months after that joyous flight back home and the victory parade jammed with half a million fans, Crosby and company are back for more.

There were 16 teams alive for the Stanley Cup when the 2017 playoffs began on Wednesday night. Only one, however, enters as the defending champion. Only one can become the first club since the Red Wings in 1997 and 1998 to capture consecutive Cups.

“I think there’s a lot of reasons (it hasn’t happened),” said Crosby, the Conn Smythe winner as playoff MVP last season. “You need so many things to go right. There are so many things you have to overcome. That’s why it’s not easy to do in back to back years.”

It’s more likely that things tend to fall apart. Twice since 1998 the reigning Cup

champs didn’t even make the playoffs the following season (Carolina in 2007 and the Los Angeles Kings in 2015). Seven times the champs went home after the first round. Only three managed to make it all the way back to the final the next year.

“We have to find a way to change that trend,” Crosby said.

While the Penguins, Los Angeles and Chicago have created a monopoly on hockey’s most prized possession (winning seven of the last eight Cups), finding the right mix of talent, grit and puck luck to do it in consecutive years is a formula no one has figured out since Steve Yzerman and the Red Wings did it nearly 20 years ago.

Yzerman, a Hall of Fame player and currently the general manager of the Tampa Bay Lightning, can’t quite put a finger on why it hasn’t happened since the Red Wings swept Washington in 1998.

“I think [the salary cap] plays a part of it,” Yzerman said. “The timing of contracts coming up and things.”

It wasn’t that way back in Yzerman’s prime, when teams could spare no expense to keep their core group together. It’s how Montreal in the 1970s and the New York Islanders and the Edmonton Oilers in the 1980s were able to turn Cup-sipping celebrations into annual rites of spring.

Now general managers need creative math, an ability to find the right spare parts to fill in the gaps and a steady hand at the helm.

Pittsburgh appeared to be in good shape in 2010, easing by Ottawa in six games in the opening round and taking a 3-2 lead over Montreal in the conference semifinals. Then Canadians goaltender Jaroslav Halak got hot, forward Mike Cammalleri did too and Montreal rallied to win in seven games.

If former Red Wings forward Kirk Maltby is being honest, even he’s a little surprised the ’98 team remains the last to recapture the magic.

“I can’t really answer the why because I guess the why really is, it’s extremely difficult to win it one time, let alone back to back,” Maltby said. “If you can’t stay healthy, especially your big guys, or if you don’t have depth (it hurts you).”

Yzerman is bullish on the Penguins, who put together the league’s second-best record despite a mishmash of injuries along the blue line and Evgeni Malkin’s extended absence late in the season. Pittsburgh persevered behind Crosby’s NHL-high 44 goals and most of the familiar faces are back in time for the playoffs, Malkin included.

“It’s a tough battle in the East but I think they’re a fantastic team,” Yzerman said. “If they can get their guys healthy, I think Sidney is playing the best hockey of his entire career. They can win but it’s tough.”

Cespedes' 3 homers lead Mets to rout

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Yoenis Cespedes slowly circled the bases after each of his three homers, enjoying the results on a sweet night that began with an impressive power stroke in batting practice.

Cespedes became the first Mets player to hit three homers in a game twice and New York went deep seven times to back Matt Harvey in a 14-4 win over the Philadelphia Phillies on Tuesday night.

Cespedes' home run trots each took almost 30 seconds. The slugger only connected once in the first seven games.

"Any player that hits three homers would have fun," he said through an interpreter. "I think I was seeing the ball well."

Mets manager Terry Col-

lins called Cespedes a "special player" and said he wasn't surprised by his performance.

"Did you see him in BP? He was hitting them out like a driving range," Collins said.

Harvey (2-0) left with tightness in his left hamstring after allowing two runs and five hits and striking out six in 5²/₃ innings. He said it was just a cramp and expects to make his next start.

"It's nothing serious," Harvey said.

Phillies starter Clay Buchholz (0-1) also exited because of an injury, a strained right forearm. He gave up six runs and eight hits in 2¹/₃ innings. Phillies manager Pete Mackanin said Buchholz would have an MRI on Wednesday.

Lucas Duda hit two homers and Asdrubal Cabrera and Tra-

vis d'Arnaud also went deep for New York, which has 46 homers in its last 21 games at Citizens Bank Park.

"They were excited to come here. They like to hit here," Collins said.

Cespedes fell down on a wild swing on the first pitch he saw, then hit a three-run homer to straightaway center field off Buchholz in the first inning. He connected to deep left in the fourth off Adam Morgan and drove another one way out to left in the fifth against Morgan.

Cespedes hit three homers once before, at Colorado on Aug. 21, 2015. He hit a double and grounder in his last two at-bats.

The Mets entered with a .192 team batting average and eight homers in seven games. Every

starter except Harvey had a hit, and they finished with 20. They had 14 extra-base hits, second-most in this ballpark to their 15 on Aug. 24, 2015.

"Another embarrassing game against the Mets," Mackanin said.

Duda blasted one 448 feet over the towering, ivy-covered brick wall in center off Morgan. Cabrera, Duda and Cespedes each had four hits. Cabrera fell a triple shy of the cycle.

Maikel Franco hit his first homer for the Phillies in the second.

Harvey tweaked his leg covering first base on a grounder. He missed the 2014 season after undergoing Tommy John surgery and made only 17 starts last year before surgery to relieve symptoms from thoracic outlet syndrome.

Brantley lifts Indians over White Sox in home opener

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Michael Brantley pumped his fist, danced around second base and waited for the traditional soaking.

The water was as sweet as any champagne.

Brantley, forced to the outside during Cleveland's magical ride in 2016 because of injuries, doubled home Francisco Lindor with two outs in the 10th inning as the Indians celebrated their AL championship and then beat the Chicago White Sox 2-1 on Tuesday in their home opener.

Brantley could only watch and cheer for his teammates last October after undergoing two surgeries on his right shoulder. But he's healthy now, and after playing in just 11 games last season, Brantley made the most of his first home game since May 10 with his game-winning hit.

"I don't know if you can write it up any better," he said.

Lindor walked with two outs off Tommy Kahnle (0-1) be-

fore Brantley sliced a 3-2 pitch down the left-field line. Lindor was running on the pitch and scored easily before bolting toward second to join his teammates in celebrating along with Brantley, who has overcome major obstacles in the past year.

"It was awesome," said Lindor, who homered in the first. "I was so happy for him. As soon as I touched home plate, I looked around and everyone was clapping for him, his family in the stands, it was pretty cool, special."

It was the dramatic ending the Indians didn't get in their last home game, a 10-inning loss to the Chicago Cubs in Game 7 of the World Series. Cleveland led the majors with 11 walk-off wins last season.

Bryan Shaw (1-0), who took the loss when the Cubs won their first title in 108 years, got the win.

Marlins 8, Braves 4: A gray cat went scrambling for cover in the Marlins Park outfield midway through Miami's home opener, and no wonder, given

the barrage off Marcell Ozuna's bat.

Angels 6, Rangers 5 (10): Carlos Perez's squeeze bunt in the 10th inning capped another comeback for host Los Angeles, which scored three times in the ninth.

Red Sox 8, Orioles 1: Drew Pomeranz struck out six in his season debut, Dustin Pedroia drove in four runs and host Boston beat Baltimore.

Tigers 2, Twins 1: Matthew Boyd allowed one hit in six outstanding innings and James McCann homered in the fifth to lift host Detroit over Minnesota.

Nationals 8, Cardinals 3: Daniel Murphy homered, doubled twice and tied career highs with five RBIs and four hits and host Washington defeated St. Louis.

Matt Wieters and Jayson Werth also hit solo shots to help Washington earn a second home series victory.

Rockies 3, Padres 2: Nolan Arenado hit a go-ahead homer in the seventh, Antonio Senzate-la threw seven sharp innings

for his first major league win and host Colorado beat San Diego.

Diamondbacks 4, Giants 3: Robbie Ray pitched shutout ball into the seventh inning despite some control issues, Jake Lamb hit a bases-loaded triple and Arizona beat host San Francisco.

Astros 7, Mariners 5: George Springer hit his fourth leadoff home run of the season, Evan Gattis had a bases-loaded pinch-hit double and Houston beat host Seattle.

Reds 6, Pirates 2: Scooter Gennett homered for the second straight night and finished with three hits, helping Cincinnati overcome the early departure of injured starter Rookie Davis to beat host Pittsburgh for its sixth win in seven games.

Brewers 4, Blue Jays 3: Keon Broxton and Domingo Santana hit solo home runs, Wily Peralta pitched six innings for his second victory in two starts and Milwaukee handed slumping Toronto its sixth straight home opening loss.