

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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2 troops killed fighting ISIS

The Washington Post

Two U.S. servicemembers were killed during operations against Islamic State in eastern Afghanistan, the Pentagon said Thursday.

Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said the deaths occurred overnight in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province, where a small but virulent ISIS cell poses a threat to Afghan and U.S. coalition forces.

An Afghan military official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss current operations, said that there had been a joint U.S.-Afghan operation in a village near Nangarhar's Achin district Wednesday but he was not aware of any casualties. He noted, however, that it had been a long day of

fighting.

Navy Lt. Chris Donlon, a spokesman for U.S. forces in Afghanistan, confirmed that the incident happened close to Achin and near where U.S. aircraft dropped a massive 22,000-pound bomb, called a GBU-43, two weeks ago. The bomb targeted a sprawling ISIS tunnel complex, and although Afghan officials said between 36 and 100 ISIS fighters were killed in the strike, the U.S. military has not announced what exactly the massive bomb accomplished.

The deaths mark the third time this year that a member of the U.S. military has died in combat in Afghanistan. On April 8, Army Staff Sgt. Mark R. De Alencar, 37, of Edgewood, Md., was killed by small-arms fire, also in Nangarhar.

A third servicemember was wounded during this week's incident, which occurred Wednesday evening during a U.S.-Afghan raid on ISIS, the U.S. military command in Afghanistan said in a statement.

"The fight against ISIS-K is important for the world but, sadly, it is not without sacrifice," said Gen. John Nicholson, the commander of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, referring to the ISIS cell in Afghanistan, known as Islamic State-Khorasan Province.

The deaths come just days after Defense Secretary Jim Mattis visited Afghanistan to assess the security situation and advance deliberations about the Trump administration's strategy for the United States' longest war.

Pentagon criticizes Turkish airstrikes

BY TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon on Wednesday criticized Turkish airstrikes in northern Syria and Iraq that the U.S. said put American forces on the ground at risk.

Turkey notified the U.S. it would attack an area north of Raqqa, Syria, "less than an hour" before launching the airstrikes Tuesday, said Air Force Col. John Dorrian, a spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve.

At least five Peshmerga fighters in northern Iraq and "many" Syrian Democratic Forces in northern Syria were killed in Tuesday's airstrikes, Dorrian said, without specifying the number of Syrian forces killed. Both groups have been close partners to U.S. and coalition efforts to fight Islamic State.

Turkey views some of the Syrian Kurdish forces assisting the U.S.-led coalition's campaign against ISIS as terrorists, and in a statement Wednesday the spokesman for Turkey's Foreign Ministry, Huseyin Muftuoglu, defended the strikes. The ministry said coalition and Russian forces were given proper notification and warned "to stay clear" of a roughly 20-mile zone from Turkey's border where it would target "terrorist organization positions, training camps and areas of activity."

"Our resolve to retaliate [against] the terrorist organization's cross border attacks carried out from northern Iraq and northern Syria targeting our border and national security had clearly been expressed," the ministry's statement said.

Trump gives OK to up troops in Iraq, Syria

BY TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has authorized Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis to set troop levels in Iraq and Syria without White House approval, the Pentagon confirmed Thursday.

The switch gives the Pentagon more autonomy to determine how many forces are required in the fight against ISIS.

"The president has delegated authority to the secretary of defense to determine force management levels for Iraq and Syria. No change to current authorized force levels has been made," said Pentagon chief spokeswoman Dana White.

"This does not represent a change in our mission in Iraq and Syria to defeat ISIS," White said, noting that delegating

troop level decisions to the secretary of defense "enables military commanders to be more agile, adaptive and efficient in supporting our partners, and enables decisions that benefit unit readiness, cohesion and lethality."

Under the previous administration, decisions to return forces to Iraq and to deploy forces to Syria were tightly controlled by the White House and announced by President Barack Obama. The number of forces allowed in either country was governed by official force management levels, caps that had little bearing on the actual number of forces in either country. In Iraq, those caps were the result of negotiations with the Iraqi government and addressed Iraqi sensitivities to having large numbers of American

forces return there.

To increase troops when needed without upsetting the force management levels, the Pentagon decided that several categories of forces — including those on temporary duty of 120 days or less, and some categories of special operations forces — did not count against the cap.

For months, when asked how many servicemembers were in either country, the Pentagon would cite the cap and decline to identify how many personnel were there above the cap.

As a result, while Syria's current force management level is 503, there are about 900 serving there.

In Iraq, while 5,262 U.S. troops are authorized, the number of forces there is more than 7,000, a U.S. defense official said on the condition of anonymity.

Trump talks tough, but lawmakers want details

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump and his top national security advisers briefed congressional lawmakers Wednesday on what a senior aide called the “very grave threat” posed by North Korea, but they offered few details about the administration’s strategy to pressure Pyongyang.

Administration officials emphasized in a pair of private briefings — one open to all senators at the White House and one for House members on Capitol Hill — that they were developing a range of new economic, diplomatic and military measures in the wake of a series of provocations from North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un’s regime.

Lawmakers said they came away convinced that the Trump administration recognized the urgency of the mounting tensions on the Korean Peninsula. But several members of Congress said the administration remained vague and unclear about its efforts to confront Pyongyang beyond tougher talk from Trump.

“There was a definite degree of resolve that we’ve got a bad situation on our hands and they’re ratcheting up the importance of this,” said one Republican senator, who spoke on condition of anonymity to candidly discuss a private meeting.

“One of the things that I surmised from it was that as much as anything else, perhaps they wanted to prepare everybody for the fact that this could escalate quickly. That’s my own read on it.”

Among the options the administration is considering are additional economic sanctions on the North and attempts to further isolate the Kim regime in the international community. The Pentagon also is developing military options, officials said.

Admiral: N. Korea crisis at worst point I’ve seen

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The senior U.S. Navy officer overseeing military operations in the Pacific said Thursday that the crisis with North Korea is at the worst point he’s ever seen, but he declined to compare the situation to the Cuban missile crisis decades ago.

“It’s real,” Adm. Harry Harris, commander of U.S. Pacific Command, said during testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Harris said he has no doubt that North Korean leader Kim

Jong Un intends to fulfill his pursuit of a nuclear-tipped missile capable of striking the U.S. The admiral acknowledged there’s uncertainty within U.S. intelligence agencies over how far along North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs are. But Harris said it’s not a matter of if but when.

The Trump administration has declared that all options, including a targeted military strike, are on the table to block North Korea from carrying out threats against the U.S. and its allies in the region. But a pre-emptive attack isn’t likely,

U.S. officials have said, and the administration is pursuing a strategy of putting pressure on Pyongyang with assistance from China.

Harris said North Korea’s pursuit of an atomic arsenal and the long-range missiles to deliver nuclear weapons comes at the expense of the North Korean people.

“In confronting the North Korean threat, it is critical that the U.S. be guided by a strong sense of resolve both publicly and privately in order to bring Kim Jong Un to his senses, not his knees,” Harris said.

Harris takes blame for confusion, says Vinson in ‘striking range’ of N. Korea

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

The head of U.S. Pacific Command said Wednesday that the USS Carl Vinson carrier strike group is now in “striking range” of North Korea if called upon, adding that he was responsible for recent confusion over when and how quickly the group would reach the Korean Peninsula.

The aircraft carrier “sits in the Philippine Sea just east of Okinawa in striking range, in power-projection range, of North Korea, if called upon to do that. And then in a few days I expect it will continue to move north,” Adm. Harry Harris told the House Armed Services Committee during testimony.

The guided-missile submarine USS Michigan is also now in port at Busan, South Korea.

“It’ll be there a few days, and then it will leave port and be operating in the area,” Harris said. “This is a show of solidarity with our South Korean allies and a flexible deterrent

show of force to North Korea, should they consider using a force against South Korea.”

On April 9, PACOM announced that Harris had canceled the Carl Vinson’s planned port visit to Australia, ordering it and its accompanying vessels “to sail north and report on station in the Western Pacific Ocean.”

A combination of statements from military officials, the White House and media reports led many to believe the ship was immediately headed toward the Korean Peninsula.

However, a week after it departing Singapore, photos from the Navy’s website showed the Carl Vinson near Indonesia, about 3,500 miles from North Korea.

“With regard to the Carl Vinson, that’s my fault on the confusion, and I’ll take the hit for it,” Harris said.

A U.S. official told a Reuters defense reporter shortly before the release that the carrier and its accompanying ships

were diverted for North Korea, though the initial PACOM announcement didn’t specify the destination.

President Donald Trump then told a reporter the military was sending “an armada” to the Korean Peninsula in light of growing tensions with North Korea.

Carl Vinson’s impending arrival drew blistering remarks from Pyongyang’s propaganda outlets and comments from China’s leadership calling for caution.

In the days after Harris’ initial order, a PACOM spokesman, while issuing a follow-on statement about the Vinson deployment to the Western Pacific, added criticism of North Korea’s regime.

While PACOM officials later said they told those who asked that the strike group was completing exercises with the Australians before moving north. PACOM did not release a follow-up public statement to that effect.

Reagan sailor humbled by honors after he saved woman on flight to Japan

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A sailor was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal and got to meet the vice president after using his medical skills to help save an elderly woman's life on a flight to Japan.

Hospital Corpsman Christopher Marroquin, a dental technician on the Yokosuka-based USS Ronald Reagan, responded to a call for medical personnel during the April 11 flight to Narita International Airport.

Marroquin helped a doctor perform CPR and used an automated external defibrillator to revive the 80-year-old woman, who had stopped breathing and lacked a pulse.

Japanese emergency workers took charge of the woman after the plane landed, and her

exact medical condition was not released.

Marroquin, who received the medal Friday, said his medical training gave him the confidence to render aid.

"It's a weird feeling when you actually know what to do when something is wrong," he said. "I wouldn't have even [left the seat] if it wasn't for my training."

Marroquin also received a challenge coin from Vice President Mike Pence during his April 18 visit to Yokosuka.

Marroquin remains humble about the ordeal.

"I feel other people make a bigger deal out of it than I do ... I honestly thought it was going to be just a good story to tell people and that would be the end of it," he said.

"Next thing you know I'm going up for an award and meeting the vice president."

Russian navy ship sinks after collision in Turkey

Associated Press

MOSCOW — A Russian naval reconnaissance ship sank Thursday after colliding with a freighter off Istanbul, but all crewmembers were rescued, the Defense Ministry said.

Turkey's coastal safety authority said all 78 personnel from the Russian frigate Liman were safe, as were all crew aboard the freighter, the Togo-flagged Youzarsif H. The freighter was carrying livestock.

The Defense Ministry said a hole was punched in the starboard side of the Liman during the collision, which occurred around midday Thursday about 25 miles northwest of the Bosphorus Strait.

The cause of the collision

wasn't immediately clear.

The Liman was part of the Black Sea Fleet.

The Interfax news agency reported that it spent much of the winter in the Mediterranean off the coast of Syria and returned to the Black Sea to monitor NATO exercises in February.

The rescued Russian sailors were all aboard a Turkish rescue vessel and would be picked up by a nearby Russian cargo ship, the Ulus Star, the ministry said, without specifying the number of crewmembers. It said the cargo ship would deliver the sailors to the home base of the Black Sea Fleet, which is on Crimea, the peninsula Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

Military testing water on 400 bases

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Contamination from former or current military installations has ignited a nationwide review of water on or around bases that used a firefighting foam containing toxic chemicals.

The military is now testing nearly 400 bases and has confirmed water contamination at or near more than three dozen, according to an analysis of data by the Philadelphia Inquirer and Daily News. The new numbers offer the best look to date at the potential scope of the problem.

But despite more than \$150 million spent on the effort so far, the process has been slow and seemingly disjointed. The Air Force, for example, has completed sampling at nearly all of its targeted bases; the Navy, barely 10 percent. The Army has not begun.

The branches and the Pentagon say they are coordinating, but have varying responses on how many bases must be tested, and limited information about remediation timelines and cost.

The lack of answers has been so confounding that Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., moved to amend the defense spending bill to compel the Pentagon to release a list of all bases that used the foam.

But with so many sites to evaluate, the cleanup "is not super simple to do," said Mark

Correll, an Air Force official.

While this process plays out, the chemicals in soil or groundwater could continue to leach into drinking water, experts say.

"I am not going to be terribly surprised if, once a month for the next several years or something, we hear of a small community somewhere that was impacted," said Christopher Higgins, a top researcher on this type of contamination and a professor at the Colorado School of Mines. "We're going to be dealing with this for quite some time."

Contamination has been found near 27 military bases in 16 states, according to the Air Force, Navy and Army. The military has also addressed contamination in on-base drinking systems on 15 installations.

The contamination is also cropping up near airports, private plants, and fire stations. Attention has focused on the military because of extreme cases near bases where about 60,000 residents were affected.

The Air Force, Navy, and Army say they have similar plans: First, they will sample bases where the foam, known as aqueous film-forming foam, may have been used, then assess whether remediation is needed. After that, the cleanup would begin.

3 rescued after a helo crashes off Guam

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A pilot and two crewmembers were rescued after a Navy helicopter crashed Thursday in waters off Guam.

The MH-60R Seahawk helicopter, assigned to Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 78, was conducting routine flight operations when it crashed due

to unknown causes, according to a Navy statement Thursday.

Squadron 78 is embarked aboard the guided-missile destroyer USS Dewey, which departed San Diego for the Western Pacific on March 31.

The Navy is investigating the accident and a medical team aboard the Dewey is assessing the crew, though none appeared to be injured, the statement said.

From staff reports

Tax plan high on cuts, low on details

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump proposed dramatic cuts in corporate and personal taxes Wednesday in an overhaul his administration asserts will spur national economic growth and bring jobs and prosperity to America's middle class. But his ambitious plan is alarming lawmakers who worry it will balloon federal deficits.

The plan would reduce investment and estate taxes, helping the wealthy. But administration officials said several other tax breaks that help well-to-do taxpayers would be eliminated and the plan would largely help the middle class.

The White House has yet to spell out how much of a hole the tax cuts could create in the federal budget, maintaining that the resulting economic growth would eliminate the risk of a soaring government deficit — if not actually cause the red ink to diminish.

The outlined changes to the tax code are the most concrete guidance so far on Trump's vision for spurring job growth and fulfilling his promise to help workers who have been left behind by an increasingly

globalized economy.

"He understands that there are a lot of people who work hard and feel like they're not getting ahead," said Gary Cohn, director of the White House National Economic Council. "I would never, ever bet against this president. He will get this done for the American people."

Still, the proposal leaves a series of open questions that could affect its impact on taxpayers and the economy.

The administration wants to reduce the number of tax brackets to three from seven, but it has yet to determine the income levels for people who would be put in each bracket. It also has yet to spell out how the plan would stop wealthier Americans from exploiting a lower corporate tax rate to reduce how much they pay. And the White House has downplayed the threat that the tax cuts could cause the deficit to surge, possibly eroding support for the plan among lawmakers in Trump's own Republican Party.

Cohn said Trump and his administration recognize they have to be "good stewards" of the federal budget. But the plan as it currently stands could cause the federal deficit

to climb, unless it sparks a massive and lasting wave of growth that most economists say is unlikely.

Administration officials intend to hash out additional details with members of the House and Senate in the coming weeks for what would be the first massive rewrite of the U.S. tax code since 1986.

As Cohn and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin explained it in an interview, the plan would reduce the number of personal income tax brackets to three from seven: rates of 10 percent, 25 percent and 35 percent. It would double the standard deduction for married couples to \$24,000, while keeping deductions for charitable giving and mortgage interest payments. The administration plans to provide tax relief for families with child care expenses, too, although the specifics have yet to be included.

On the other hand, the proposal would trim other deductions utilized by wealthier Americans. These would include deductions for state and local tax payments, a change that could alienate support from lawmakers in states such as California and New York with higher state taxes.

DOD watchdog to investigate Flynn

The Washington Post

The Pentagon's top watchdog has launched an investigation into money that former national security adviser and retired Army Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn received from foreign groups, members of the House Oversight Committee said Thursday.

The Pentagon office will try to determine whether Flynn "failed to obtain required approval prior to receiving" the payments, according to an April 11 letter from Defense Department Inspector General Glenn Fine to Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, the committee chairman. In the past, the Pentagon has advised retiring officers that because they can be recalled to military service, they may be subject to the Constitution's rarely enforced emoluments clause, which prohibits top officials from receiving payments or favors from foreign governments.

Flynn received \$45,000 to ap-

pear in 2015 with Russian President Vladimir Putin at a gala dinner for RT, a Kremlin-controlled media organization. He also worked as a foreign agent for Turkish interests for a Netherlands-based company, which paid him \$530,000 last fall.

Flynn was fired as national security adviser in February after revelations that he misled Vice President Mike Pence about the nature of his communications with the Russian ambassador to the U.S. Flynn filed paperwork as a foreign agent on March 7.

Flynn's lawyer, Robert Kelner, has argued that the retired general briefed the Defense Intelligence Agency, from which he retired in 2014, before, during and after his 2015 Russia trip. But a letter the DIA sent the House committee said that they have no record of Flynn seeking approval to accept money from a foreign source, potentially countering Kelner's argument.

Progress made on spending package

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers are nearing agreement on sweeping spending legislation to keep the lights on in government after the White House backed off a threat to withhold payments that help lower-income Americans pay their medical bills.

It was the latest concession by the White House, which had earlier dropped a demand for money for President Donald Trump's border wall. Even with Republicans in control of both chambers of Congress and the White House, the Trump administration is learning that Democrats retain significant leverage when their votes are needed on must-pass legislation.

A temporary funding bill expires Friday at midnight, and GOP leaders late Wednesday unveiled another short-term spending bill to prevent a gov-

ernment shutdown this weekend, something Republicans are determined to avoid.

There appears little chance of a shutdown as lawmakers worked to resolve final stumbling blocks on issues like the environment, though a short-term extension of existing funding levels is likely.

At the same time, House Republicans had a breakthrough on their moribund health care legislation as a key group of conservatives, the House Freedom Caucus, announced it would support a revised version of the bill. Freedom Caucus opposition was a key ingredient in the legislation's collapse a month ago.

The changes in the bill would let states escape requirements under the Affordable Care Act that insurers charge healthy and seriously ill customers the same rates and cover a list of specified services.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman due in May gives birth early at zoo

NE OMAHA — A woman whose baby was due in mid-May went into labor early and gave birth at a Nebraska zoo.

Drea Hubbard was born Sunday at the Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium, weighing 5 pounds, 5 ounces. Her mother, Kymica Hubbard, 24, said the birth took about two minutes from when her water broke.

Hubbard was so taken by surprise that she was still standing when Drea's head appeared. Her husband, Justin Hubbard, caught the child and wrapped her in a sweater as other zoo visitors gathered around.

While Kymica Hubbard says she never thought she would have a baby in public, her husband said he "wouldn't trade the experience for the world."

Deputy wrestles gator into submission at park

GA MACON — An alligator has been apprehended at a park in central Georgia after a sheriff's deputy wrestled the creature.

The Telegraph reported that Bibb County Sheriff's deputy Clay Williams and Animal Welfare officer Bruce Rozier were dispatched to round up the 4-foot alligator Monday morning in Macon.

Footage from the deputy's body camera shows Williams straddling the reptile and holding its jaws shut as Rozier tapes its snout. Someone can be heard telling the alligator "you're under arrest."

The alligator writhed in protest and lashed its tail at Williams, but the officers managed to load it into an Animal Welfare vehicle for relocation. The alligator was later released at a swamp.

Lawmakers to debate alcohol in theaters

NY ALBANY — In New York, legislators are again set to debate whether alcoholic beverages should be served in movie theaters after previous attempts at formal legislation fell apart during state budget negotiations.

The Times Union reported that Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo first introduced the law that would allow alcoholic beverages to be sold to patrons of legal age with tickets for films rated PG-13, R or NC-17.

State law currently permits theaters with licensed restaurants attached to them to serve alcoholic beverages, but Joe Masher, chief operating officer of Bow Tie Cinemas, said that applies to fewer than 10 theaters statewide.

Alcohol sales have become popular among some theaters trying to boost attendance.

Police officer comes to rescue of lost goats

ME BELFAST — Police in Maine have picked up some adorable intruders after two miniature goats escaped from their home and wandered the streets.

A Belfast police officer responded Sunday morning to find the pygmy goats in a woman's garage. They had been snacking on cat food. Officer Daniel Fitzpatrick used a cat leash to lead them into his squad car.

The trio drove around looking for the goats' owner as Fitzpatrick fed them carrots and celery.

The daughter of the goats' owner saw Fitzpatrick's Facebook post and picked up the pair, named Louis and Mowgli — but not before Fitzpatrick snapped a selfie with the duo.

Student dies after being hit in hammer throw

IL WHEATON — A college student died after being struck during a hammer-throw event at a track meet in suburban Chicago.

Wheaton College officials said student Ethan Roser, 19, of Cincinnati was volunteering at a track and field competition at the school Saturday when he was accidentally struck by a hammer.

The hammer used in such competitions is a metal ball attached to a steel wire. The athlete holds a grip at the other end of the wire and spins several times before releasing it. The hammer weighs as much as 16 pounds.

The college said Roser was taken to Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove, where he was pronounced dead. A coroner has listed head trauma as the preliminary cause of death.

Father of missing boy is released from jail

CA LOS ANGELES — A missing 5-year-old boy's father has been released from jail in an unexpected twist that only deepens the mystery behind the boy's disappearance.

Investigators on Tuesday decided against presenting the case to prosecutors and moving forward with charges against Aramazd Andressian Sr., who had been found unconscious Saturday at a South Pasadena park with his son, Aramazd Andressian Jr., nowhere to be found.

Andressian Sr., who is in a custody fight with the boy's mother, was vague and evasive in his answers to detectives' questions. He was arrested Saturday on suspicion of child en-

dangerment and abduction and was being held on \$10 million bail before his release.

Authorities would say only that the investigation was continuing, and would not say whether the father remains a suspect.

Ordinance would allow chickens in city limits

SD LEAD — It may soon be legal for residents in a western South Dakota city to keep chickens.

A proposed ordinance could come before the Lead City Commission early May.

The proposal has a \$100 registration fee for residents who want to keep chickens. Residents would not be allowed to keep roosters and would be limited to six hens, with secure and well-ventilated coops needing to be at least 15 feet from neighboring properties.

The proposal may face opposition from residents concerned about chicken noise and disease.

Deputies rescue cow stuck in muddy ditch

FL WAHNETA — Sometimes a law enforcement officer's duty involves rescuing a cat from a tree. In one Florida county, it also can involve rescuing a cow.

Polk County Sheriff's Office deputies on Monday rescued a cow that was stuck belly deep in a muddy ditch.

The sheriff's office said on Facebook that deputies used a front-end loader from the cow's owner to pull the animal out so she could stand on dry ground.

From wire reports

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Boston knocks off Chicago in Game 5

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Celtics and Bulls found another thing to argue about after Game 5 of their spirited first-round playoff series:

Was Avery Bradley more impressive on offense, or on defense?

“Everyone knows he’s a good defender. Tonight, he got his offensive game going,” Chicago’s Dwyane Wade said after Bradley scored 24 points to lead Boston to a 108-97 victory and a 3-2 lead in the best-of-seven series.

“You expect him to do what he does defensively, but we gave up 24 points to him tonight. He hurt us offensively tonight more than anything.”

Isaiah Thomas also scored 24 for the Celtics, the top seed in the East. After the road team won each of the first four games, the Celtics won at home in Game 5 to earn a chance to eliminate the Bulls on Friday night in Chicago. A Bulls victory would force the series back to Boston for a decisive Game 7 on Sunday.

Al Horford had 21 points, nine assists and seven rebounds for the Celtics. Bradley’s 24 points were a career playoff high, but after watching him hold Bulls star Jimmy Butler to 14 points — and just one foul shot — Celtics coach Brad Stevens

praised Bradley’s defense.

“Jimmy Butler’s a hard guy to guard. Dwyane Wade’s a hard guy to guard. You’re not going to stop those guys, but you just try to make it as hard as possible,” Stevens said. “Avery ... has done a really good job.”

Butler, who shot 23 free throws in Game 4 and made 19, was 0-for-1 on Wednesday.

“I was trying to eliminate letting Jimmy Butler get to the free throw line. That was my goal this game, and I feel like I did it,” Bradley said.

Wade had 26 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists. But Wade and Robin Lopez were called for technical fouls 32 seconds apart with just under five minutes left, helping the Celtics to a 20-5 run that turned an 84-84 game into a 15-point Boston lead.

The Bulls cut it to nine before Horford got loose for a dunk, Wade missed a three-pointer and then Horford fed Jae Crowder for a layup that made it 108-95 with 99 seconds to play.

Despite the technical fouls, there was little of the tension that characterized Game 4, when Butler and Marcus Smart got in each other’s face on the court and continued the criticism in their postgame

comments.

The Celtics started slowly on their home court, making just one of their first nine shots to fall behind 12-4. Boston missed its first eight three-point attempts before making three in a row at the end of the first quarter.

TIP-INS

Bulls: Before winning the first two games of the series, Chicago had won only one playoff game in Boston ever — Game 1 of the 2009 first round. ... Butler brought the ball down with 6.2 seconds left in the third quarter and hit a three-pointer at the buzzer to give the Bulls an 81-79 lead. ... The Bulls had 16 turnovers that led to 23 Boston points. The Celtics only had six turnovers, leading to four Bulls points.

Celtics: There were at least nine members of the Super Bowl champion New England Patriots in the crowd, and a handful of players from the Boston Bruins as well. ... Thomas missed his first four shots and didn’t make a basket until a second-chance three-pointer with 42 seconds left in the first half. ... Gerald Green made his third start, but he played less than 13 minutes and finished with two points after scoring 18 with seven rebounds in Game 4.

Beal, Wall lead Wizards past Hawks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — John Wall figured the credit went to the down-the-stretch defense displayed by his Washington Wizards.

Neither Dennis Schroder nor coach Mike Budenholzer found any flaws with the way their Atlanta Hawks handled things late.

Either way, the odd manner in which Atlanta seemed to allow the final half-minute or so to slip away while trailing — not fouling Washington to try to extend things; passing around the ball, instead of shooting it, as the clock headed toward zero — left the Wizards on the verge of closing out the teams’ Eastern Conference first-round playoff series.

Back at home, and back in charge, Bradley Beal scored 27 points, and Wall added 20

points and 14 assists, leading Washington to a 103-99 victory in Game 5 on Wednesday night for a 3-2 series lead.

“I thought they were going to play the foul game — or at least try to trap. But they let us run the clock down,” Wall said, noting that he felt as if he and his teammates finished “with the best scrambling defense we had.”

Schroder led the Hawks with 29 points, making a career high-tying five threes, and 11 assists. But after his basket from beyond the arc pulled Atlanta within 101-99 with 70 seconds left, Wall responded with a 21-foot pull-up jumper. Neither team would score the rest of the way.

“It was right there,” Schroder said. “We’ve just got to be better in crunch time.”

A miss followed from Paul Millsap, who had 21 points and

11 rebounds, but after Wall’s jumper was off the mark, the Hawks never managed to put the ball in the basket — including sort of fiddling around as if they didn’t realize they were trailing by four.

“We tried to get a clean look,” Tim Hardaway Jr. said, “but they just did a good job of ... making it tough on us.”

Budenholzer’s take?

“I’m not, off the top of my head, frustrated with what we got offensively,” he said.

The host has won every game in this series so far.

Washington can reach the conference semifinals by winning Game 6 at Atlanta on Friday night.

“It’s got to be us,” Budenholzer said, “that’s the aggressor.”

As it is, the series has been filled with physical play, referee whistles and smack talk, including a “Crybaby” accusa-

tion and a comparison to MMA fighting.

Dwight Howard — who finally came to the fore in Game 4 with 16 points and 15 rebounds — didn’t play much in the second half, picking up his fourth foul with 2½ minutes left in the third quarter and his fifth off the ball with 8½ minutes to go.

Washington’s Markieff Morris picked up No. 4 after 2½ minutes of the third quarter and didn’t return until there were less than 6 minutes remaining in the fourth. About 2½ minutes after going back in, Morris drew his fifth foul — plus a technical for arguing, eliciting derisive chants about the officiating from spectators.

“It’s been the hardest it’s ever been,” Morris said, “for me to stay out of foul trouble.”

Fiddler's goal lifts Predators over Blues

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — One nifty little flip by Vernon Fiddler provided a big lift for the Nashville Predators on a rough night.

Fiddler scored with 5:05 left and P.K. Subban had a goal and two assists, powering Nashville to a 4-3 victory over the St. Louis Blues in Game 1 of their second-round playoff series on Wednesday.

The Predators lost Kevin Fiala to an ugly leg injury in the second period and blew a 3-1 lead before Fiddler poked a loose puck by Jake Allen in the third.

"They had a little push there," Fiddler said. "We got 3-2 and then 3-3 and the building's rocking. You have to give our guys credit. We just regrouped and went back at them and found a way to get the two points."

It was the fifth goal in 43 career playoff games for the 36-year-old Fiddler, who did not play in the Predators' first-round series sweep against the Blackhawks.

"He's a veteran guy so he's been in these situations before and he stepped up and got us a big goal," Subban said. "That was the toughest game of the season for us and they fought so hard and had so many chances, but we found a way to get it done."

Colin Wilson and Filip Forsberg also scored for Nashville, and Pekka Rinne made 27 saves.

Game 2 is Friday night.

"I thought we got tested tonight in different ways and really responded well to all of it," Predators coach Peter Laviolette said.

Colton Parayko, Jaden Schwartz and Vladimir Sobotka scored for St. Louis. Allen finished with 28 stops, but lamented the one he didn't make. He tried to poke check the puck away from Fiddler and instead it ended up getting past him.

"Guys fought back great," Allen said. "A little mistake by me cost us."

The Predators jumped in front when Wilson redirected

a slap shot from Subban past Allen for a power-play goal at 11:24 of the first. It was Wilson's first playoff game this year after he missed the first round because of a lower-body injury.

It was still 1-0 when Fiala was hit by Blues defenseman Robert Bortuzzo and went hard into the boards behind the St. Louis net at 1:46 of the second. He left the ice on a stretcher and was taken to a hospital for further evaluation.

After the delay for Fiala's injury and the arrival of a second ambulance at the arena, Subban drove a shot by Allen from the right circle for his first of the playoffs at 2:22. Ryan Johansen picked up the assist after the Blues were unable to clear the puck from the defensive zone.

"I don't think anybody could have thought or planned for an incident like that with Kevin," said Laviolette, who did not provide an update on Fiala after the game. "Yet, our guys you could hear them on the bench

when it happened and making sure their next shift was going to be a good one for Kevin."

St. Louis pulled within one when Parayko slipped a shot through Rinne's legs with 11:56 remaining in the second.

Subban then set up another power-play goal for the Predators. The defenseman's shot from the left circle bounced away from Allen, and then ricocheted off Forsberg's skate and into the net for a 3-1 lead at 12:11.

The Blues rallied in the third. Schwartz scored his third of the playoffs, off a pass from Paul Stastny, at 6:48, and Sobotka tied it with a wrist shot from the right circle with 10:38 remaining.

"We dug ourselves a hole in the second period and I liked the push back and the fact we came out the way we did (in the third period)," Blues coach Mike Yeo said. "There are some things we can learn from that but the reality is the second period was not good enough and ultimately it cost us the game."

Oilers blow 2-goal lead, still hold off Ducks in Game 1

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — For the first 45 minutes of their second-round series opener, the Edmonton Oilers showed they can match the Anaheim Ducks in a tight-checking, low-scoring grind of a playoff hockey game.

When things got wild and frantic in the final minutes, the upstart Oilers showed they can hang with the best in the West in that sort of game, too.

Defenseman Adam Larsson scored his second goal of the third period with 4:40 to play, and the Oilers blew a two-goal lead before beating the Ducks 5-3 on Wednesday night.

Mark Letestu scored two power-play goals and Cam Talbot made 33 saves as Edmonton seized home-ice advantage from the Ducks with a four-goal final period. Two of those goals came from Larsson, the stay-

at-home blueliner who scored only four goals in the Oilers' first 85 games this season.

"It's really nice to see him get rewarded and get a couple of goals," Letestu said of Larsson, acquired by Edmonton in the trade of former No. 1 draft pick Taylor Hall to New Jersey. "That's not normally what he does for us."

Leon Draisaitl had two third-period assists and an empty-net goal for the Oilers, who don't appear to be feeling an ounce of intimidation in their first playoff appearance since 2006. Connor McDavid's club followed its ousting of the defending conference champion San Jose Sharks by sending the five-time division champion Ducks to their first loss of the playoffs.

"At times, our maturity has been underestimated," Letes-

tu said. "This group has been through a lot this year, and it's starting to show."

Game 2 is Friday night in Anaheim.

The most shocking development in the opener was the star turn by Larsson, who improbably poured in two goals in 7½ minutes. After skating freely into the slot and converting a pass from Draisaitl with 11:57 left, he added the winner seven minutes later when he skated behind the net and cleverly threw it in front. The puck banked off Anaheim defenseman Josh Manson's skate and pinballed underneath John Gibson, who stopped 27 shots.

"You can see on the bench, we didn't panic" after Anaheim tied it, Larsson said. "We kept it going. We learned a lot during the last series, and we carried it over to this series."

Jakob Silfverberg scored the

tying goal with 9:13 to play, but the Ducks lost in regulation for the first time in 19 games since March 10.

Patrick Eaves and Ryan Getzlaf also scored for Anaheim, which had won eight straight games. The Ducks didn't give up a third-period goal during their entire first-round sweep of Calgary before getting shredded by the Oilers.

"It's a good test," said Getzlaf, who has seven points in five playoff games. "We've dealt with it properly in the last little while here, and we expect nothing less out of our group. We're going to come to work tomorrow and be ready for the next one."

A sold-out Honda Center could barely keep up when a tense 1-1 game morphed into a free-for-all as each team scored two goals apiece in a 4:24 span midway through the third.

Ngoepe first African to play in MLB

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Gift Ngoepe might not have had the weight of the world on his shoulders but he felt like a continent was counting on him.

Ngoepe, the first African to reach the major leagues, singled in his first plate appearance and Josh Harrison led off the bottom of the first with a home run Wednesday night to lead the Pittsburgh Pirates to a 6-5 victory over the Chicago Cubs.

Ngoepe was recalled from Triple-A Indianapolis and entered the game in the fourth inning as part of a double switch and finished 1-for-2 with a walk. The 27-year-old South African, who signed with the Pirates in 2008 as an amateur free agent, led off the fourth with a hit off winless Cubs ace Jon Lester.

“To accomplish this only for me but for

my country and my continent is something so special,” Ngoepe said. “There are 1.62 billion people on our continent. To be the first person out of 1.62 billion to do this is amazing.”

It was so special that Ngoepe nearly broke into tears when he trotted from the dugout to take his position at second base.

“I told myself not to cry because I’m in the big leagues and I’m a big guy now,” Ngoepe said with a smile. “(Catcher Francisco) Cervelli hugged me and I could feel my heart beat through my chest.”

A year after winning 19 games in helping the Cubs win their first World Series title since 1908, Lester (0-1) is still looking for his first victory after five starts. The left-hander was tagged for six runs — five earned — and 10 hits in 5²/₃ innings.

“It’s probably the best I threw the ball all

year,” Lester said. “That’s baseball.”

Wade LeBlanc (1-0), who pitched 1¹/₃ scoreless innings in relief of rookie Tyler Glasnow, got the win.

The fifth leadoff home run of Harrison’s career keyed a two-run first that included an RBI double by Cervelli. Andrew McCutchen and Phil Gosselin hit run-scoring doubles in a three-run third that pushed the Pirates’ lead to 5-1.

After the Cubs got within two runs, Josh Bell gave the Pirates a 6-3 lead with a solo home run in the sixth inning off Lester. The rookie first baseman has reached base in 11 straight games.

Anthony Rizzo’s two-run homer deep into the right-field stands in the eighth inning off Daniel Hudson drew the Cubs within 6-5. Tony Watson then got the last four outs for his seventh save in as many chances.

Judge hits HR on birthday in Fenway debut

Associated Press

BOSTON — Aaron Judge came running across Fenway Park’s right-field grass, making his 6-foot-7 frame look like a linebacker going for a tackle as he tumbled into the right-field stands to make a catch.

It was a highlight that he’ll be able to show at future birthday parties.

Judge celebrated his 25th birthday with a two-run homer and the spectacular catch, and Luis Severino pitched seven innings of three-hit, shutout ball to carry the surging New York Yankees to a 3-1 victory over the Boston Red Sox on Wednesday night in the longtime rivals’ first meeting this season.

“I really didn’t feel too much,” Judge said of landing on an empty seat. “My adrenaline was pumping. I was trying to make a play.”

Asked if he’d ever tumbled over before to make a catch, Judge smiled and said: “I have before but never at Fenway Park. That was a first.”

In the third, the right fielder made his running grab of a foul ball that carried him, flipping over head first, beyond a short wall into the seats. He came up showing the ball with his bare hand and it was originally

ruled “no catch” by first base umpire Mark Carlson, but was overturned after a challenge.

“It’s his birthday, so it didn’t seem to ruin the day,” New York manager Joe Girardi said.

He had homered into the Yankees’ bullpen an inning earlier.

According to Elias Sports Bureau, Judge became the first Yankee to homer on his birthday at Fenway Park since Roger Maris did it on Sept. 10, 1966. Hall of Famer Yogi Berra is the only other to do it, on May 12, 1947.

“One pitch where Judge pulls his hands inside a fastball and hits it out of the ballpark,” Red Sox manager John Farrell said.

Mariners 8, Tigers 0: James Paxton struck out nine in seven outstanding innings, and Nelson Cruz and Guillermo Heredia homered to lift visiting Seattle.

Brewers 9, Reds 4: Eric Thames scored twice before leaving with an injury and Orlando Arcia homered and had three RBIs to help host Milwaukee beat Cincinnati for a three-game sweep.

Thames, who leads the majors with 11 homers, appeared to be favoring his left ham-

string as he stretched before the Reds batted in the eighth. He left the game but said afterward he was fine and will be back in the lineup Friday night against Atlanta.

White Sox 5, Royals 2: Avisail Garcia and Leury Garcia homered to back run-starved starter Jose Quintana, and host Chicago defeated Kansas City to complete a three-game sweep.

Indians 7, Astros 6: Michael Brantley drove in three runs as host Cleveland topped Houston.

Nationals 11, Rockies 4: Trea Turner nearly hit for the cycle for a second straight night, finishing a triple shy, and Bryce Harper had four more hits to raise his batting average to .432 as Washington routed host Colorado.

Phillies 7, Marlins 4: Maikel Franco hit his second grand slam of the month, helping host Philadelphia beat Miami for its fifth straight win.

Braves 8, Mets 2: Julio Teheran stifled opposing batters into the seventh inning, Robert Gsellman staggered through a five-run first and Atlanta handed host New York its fifth straight loss.

Orioles 5, Rays 4 (11): Seth

Smith drew a bases-loaded walk from Danny Farquhar to force in the winning run with two outs in the 11th inning, and host Baltimore rallied to beat Tampa Bay.

Rangers 14, Twins 3: Joey Gallo scored the tiebreaking run on a painful trip around the bases, Ryan Rua hit a grand slam and Texas avoided a series sweep by breaking it open late against visiting Minnesota.

Giants 4, Dodgers 3 (10): Hunter Pence hit a game-winning sacrifice fly with the bases loaded in the 10th inning and host San Francisco rallied.

Padres 8, Diamondbacks 5: Ryan Schimpf hit a go-ahead, three-run homer with one out in the top of the ninth inning to rally San Diego past host Arizona.

Angels 8, Athletics 5: Matt Shoemaker pitched Los Angeles past visiting Oakland for his first win since having brain surgery after being struck in the head by a line drive last September.

Shoemaker (1-1) went five innings in his fifth start of the year. Bud Norris pitched a scoreless ninth for his third save.