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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Officials: US, Iraq talk post-ISIS presence

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi is in talks with the Trump administration to keep American troops in Iraq after the fight against Islamic State in the country is concluded, according to a U.S. official and an official from the Iraqi government.

Both officials underlined that the discussions are ongoing and that nothing is finalized. But the talks point to a consensus by both governments that, in contrast to the U.S. withdrawal in 2011, a longer-term presence of American troops in Iraq is needed to ensure that an insurgency does not bubble up again once the militants are driven out.

“There is a general understanding on both sides that it would be in the long-term interests of each to have that continued presence. So as for agreement, yes, we both understand it would be mutually beneficial. That we agree on,” the U.S. official said.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

The talks involve U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis and Iraqi officials over “what the long-term U.S. presence would look like,” the American official said, adding that discussions were in early stages and “nothing has been finalized.”

U.S. forces in Iraq would be stationed inside existing Iraqi bases in at least five locations in the Mosul area and along Iraq’s border with Syria, the Iraqi government official said. They would continue to be designated as advisers to dodge the need for parliamentary approval for their presence, he said.

He said al-Abadi is looking to install a “modest” Iraqi military presence in Mosul

after the fight against ISIS is concluded along with a small number of U.S. forces. The forces would help control security in the city and oversee the transition to a political administration of Mosul, he said.

The U.S. official emphasized that there were no discussions of creating independent American bases in Iraq, as such a move would require thousands more personnel. He said the troops levels would be “several thousand ... similar to what we have now, maybe a little more.”

Air Force Col. John Dorrian, the Baghdad-based spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve, said Wednesday that there are fewer than 1,000 ISIS fighters left in western Mosul, but that dislodging them from the city will be a long, difficult fight because of the way they are entrenched in the dense, urban area. He also said once the militants are cleared, it will be the Iraqi government providing the bulk of the post-battle stabilization and recovery force for Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city.

“Our support to the government of Iraq is going to remain the same type of relationship that we continued with them throughout the [Mosul] campaign,” Dorrian said. “There will be an advise-and-assist mission for our forces as they advise and assist the security elements that are maintaining control of the city.”

Currently, the Pentagon has close to 7,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, many not publicly acknowledged because they are on temporary duty or under specific personnel rules. The forces include troops training Iraqi forces, coordinating airstrikes and ground operations, and special operations forces operating on the front lines.

The news comes as Iraqi forces are strug-

gling to push ISIS fighters out of a cluster of neighborhoods in western Mosul that mark the last patch of significant urban terrain the group holds in Iraq, nearly three years after the militants overran nearly a third of the country.

Such an agreement would underscore how the fight against ISIS has drawn the U.S. into a deepening role in Iraq.

At the height of the surge of U.S. forces in 2007 to combat sectarian violence that nearly tore Iraq apart, there were about 170,000 American troops in the country. The numbers were wound down eventually to 40,000 before the complete withdrawal in 2011.

The U.S. intervention against ISIS, launched in 2014, originally was cast as an operation that largely would be fought from the skies with a minimal presence on Iraqi soil.

Nevertheless, that presence has grown since, given Iraqi forces’ need for support.

During a visit to Iraq in February, Mattis and Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, described an enduring partnership between the U.S. and Iraq.

“I imagine we’ll be in this fight for a while and we’ll stand by each other,” Mattis said.

Townsend, who was standing by Mattis, declined to say how long the U.S. will stay in Iraq. But, he said, “I don’t anticipate that we’ll be asked to leave by the government of Iraq immediately after Mosul.” He added, “I think that the government of Iraq realizes their very complex fight, and they’re going to need the assistance of the coalition even beyond Mosul.”

Stars and Stripes reporter Tara Copp contributed to this report.

Afghanistan plan could go to Trump next week

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon will send a proposal to the White House as early as next week laying out America’s long-term presence in Afghanistan, senior defense officials said Thursday. The plan likely will include a request for more U.S. troops.

U.S. military officials have said they need more forces to meet the growing

training-and-advising mission in Afghanistan, where local forces are fighting a Taliban insurgency. And there is a new push for NATO members to step up their commitments of troops and other resources to help the country in its struggle for stability.

Theresa Whelan, who is currently working as the Pentagon’s assistant defense secretary for special operations, told sena-

tors the new plan likely will go to the White House next week.

“We are actually actively looking at adjustments to the approach in Afghanistan right now,” Whelan told the Senate Armed Services Committee. “The interest is to move beyond the stalemate and also to recognize that Afghanistan is a very important partner for the United States in a very tricky region.”

Hazing leaves recruit's skin 'liquefied'

The Washington Post

A Marine Corps recruit who was hazed by his drill instructor suffered second- and third-degree chemical burns on his buttocks so severe that he needed skin grafts, according to documents newly released by the service.

The recruit's skin was "liquefied" at the service's storied boot camp at Parris Island, S.C., the documents said. The injuries occurred after he was ordered to perform unauthorized exercises under an upside-down laundry bin on a floor covered in bleach and required to stay in his wet pants for hours. The recruit reluctantly told another drill instructor about his burns that night, but stayed in training for a few more days. His condition deteriorated after he was told that he would not be able to graduate with his peers if he sought medical attention.

A Marine official previously disclosed that the drill instructor, former Sgt. Jeffrey VanDyke, was sentenced in 2014 to a year in military prison after being convicted at court-martial of numerous allegations of cruelty and maltreatment, assault and failure to obey a lawful order in the case. But the severity of the recruit's December 2012 injuries, considered among the most egregious suffered by a recruit in years, has

not previously been disclosed.

The case was detailed among thousands of pages of documents released to The Washington Post through the Freedom of Information Act by the Marine Corps and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service. Combined, they show that a hazing scandal that erupted last year at Parris Island following the death of a recruit, Pvt. Raheel Siddiqui, is part of a history that includes dozens of cases of hazing and abuse against recruits in the past five years.

Gen. Robert Neller, commandant of the Marine Corps, has said that hazing and abuse of recruits will not be tolerated. The service has responded to the cases that emerged last year by increasing the number of officers and drill instructors who oversee recruits and re-emphasizing in training the responsibilities that go with supervising Marine recruits, said Capt. Joshua Pena, a Marine spokesman.

Siddiqui, 20, died at Parris Island on March 18, 2016. He fell 40 feet over a railing after facing physical abuse from his drill instructor, Gunnery Sgt. Joseph Felix, according to military documents. Separately, Felix also is accused of putting another Muslim recruit in an industrial-sized clothes dryer and turning it on repeatedly in July 2015. He and another

former drill instructor, Sgt. Michael Eldridge, face charges that include cruelty and maltreatment, being drunk and disorderly, failing to obey a lawful order and making false official statements.

VanDyke, who could not be reached for comment, was accused by numerous recruits and some other drill instructors of abusing recruits. He denied many of the allegations, but acknowledged to investigators that he had been removed from training for three days previously after grabbing a recruit by the throat.

VanDyke regularly struggled with his temper and coped with post-traumatic stress after a 2010 deployment to Afghanistan in which he treated civilians who were wounded, he told investigators. He took responsibility for any harm he caused the burned recruit, although he said he did not remember using bleach.

"I know I need to face the punishment because I have done wrong things," VanDyke told investigators. "Whatever punishment is deemed appropriate, I will accept. I know my career as a Marine is over, which I hate because I love being a Marine and fighting for my country."

The burned recruit did everything he could to continue training, applying burn cream

repeatedly even as he performed exercises and went to the rifle range. Eventually, the pain was too much and he received treatment from doctors on base and nearby hospitals.

The recruit told an NCIS agent that he initially felt sympathetic toward VanDyke but eventually grew angry about what occurred. The incident, he told the agent, was a "black stain" on his career because he got his drill instructor in trouble, according to a report filed by the agent.

At least 20 other hazing investigations involving drill instructors have been detailed by the Marine Corps and released through the Freedom of Information Act in recent weeks.

In one case that has not previously been disclosed, a drill instructor in San Diego faced charges of abusive sexual contact, cruelty and maltreatment and failure to obey a lawful order in an investigation begun in April 2014.

The case stemmed from an incident in which the Marine ordered several dozen recruits who had not been hustling enough for his liking to run back and forth in a shower room and squash together against its walls repeatedly, even though many of them were naked.

Marines to curtail flights at tiny Hawaii airport

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Marine Corps will end hundreds of Osprey and helicopter training flights taking place annually at a tiny Hawaiian airport after residents questioned their legality.

The number of routine flight operations at Upolu Airport on the big island of Hawaii will drop to 25 per year. That is the number projected in an environ-

mental assessment completed in 2012 for beginning operations for two Marine Corps Osprey MV-22 squadrons.

Some residents of the small nearby town of Hawi had become increasingly unhappy about noise from the ramped-up number of Ospreys and H-1 helicopters, as well as what effect they might be having on the environment.

In late March, environmental law organization Earthjus-

tice wrote a letter to the commander of Marine Corps Base Hawaii on Oahu asking about compliance with federal environmental law in regard to extensive use of the airport.

"In the first three months of 2017 alone, the community has logged over 800 Osprey and helicopter operations at Upolu Airport," wrote David Henkin, an Earthjustice attorney.

That equated to air traffic 30 times greater than was es-

timated in the 2012 environmental statement, "already doubling the level of activity at the airport before MV-22 and H-1 aircraft came to Hawaii," he wrote.

The environmental impact statement described the projected use of Upolu Airport as "infrequent" and limited to use in case of emergencies or due to bad weather at Pohakuloa Training Area, in the central part of the island.

Pentagon ends hiring freeze on civilian employees

By TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

The Department of Defense issued guidance Tuesday that officially ends a hiring freeze on civilian federal workers.

A memo signed by Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work authorizes Pentagon leaders to begin filling vacant civilian positions after President Donald Trump issued a government-wide hiring freeze on Jan. 23.

The DOD was allowed to hire some workers after the ban but required waivers to do so.

Waivers will no longer be required for new hires, wrote Work, who added he expects Pentagon leaders to “scrutinize carefully all recruitment and hiring actions.”

Any new workers hired would have to meet guidelines set by the Office of Management and Budget, the memo said.

Before hiring, agencies should consider whether positions meet mission needs or can be reassigned to a lower grade, Work wrote.

The OMB had issued guidance lifting the freeze April 12 but asked government agencies to come up with a “reform plan” for reducing the number of overall employees before hiring new workers.

OMB Director Mick Mulvaney told reporters on April 11 that government agencies would be expected to take short-term and long-term actions to keep a lean workforce.

“The government hiring freeze will end with the release of this guidance,” he said. “That doesn’t mean ... the agencies will be free to hire willy-nilly. What we are doing is replacing the across-board hiring freeze that we put in place day one and replacing it with a smarter plan, a more strategic plan, a more surgical plan.”

Tuesday’s memo gives agencies 14 days to submit a report detailing all hiring exemptions conducted during the freeze to be reviewed by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. It also advises agencies to use short-term and temporary employees to fill mission gaps and to avoid using military personnel whenever possible.

The hiring freeze caused some disruption of services for military members and their families. Staff shortages caused cutbacks in child-care services, and long lines and reduced hours at base commissaries and exchanges.

Although some positions were offered exemptions during the freeze, those had to be approved by base commanders, delaying the hiring process.

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Army to offer \$5K bonuses to train allies in war zones

Associated Press

FORT BRAGG, N.C. — The U.S. Army is authorizing \$5,000 bonuses to woo top-performing troops into a new training brigade as the service once famous for shouldering the burden of America’s wars works to meet the growing demand for advisers in places ranging from Iraq and Syria to Afghanistan and Africa.

The plan recognizes the new reality of America at war: U.S. soldiers are more often training and building local security forces rather than doing the fighting for them on foreign soil. It replaces what has been a hodgepodge of programs during the past dozen years with projections for five new, permanent, fully-trained brigades that can be deployed around the world as professional advisers.

“It’s a recognition that this is an enduring requirement for the conventional Army,” Gen. Robert Abrams, head of U.S. Army Forces Command, told The Associated Press in an interview. “Most times we’re falling in on existing institutions that are probably failing, and bringing them up to a certain competency level so they can secure themselves. And we’ve got to be able to do that on a large scale.”

The new program and its signing bonuses also illustrate how the Trump administration has endorsed the Obama administration’s emphasis on working “by, with and through” local forces. That policy emerged from the deadly-and-tumultuous years after the 2003 Iraq invasion, when as many as 160,000 American

troops were on the ground battling insurgents while struggling to transform a ragtag mix of often ethnically opposed Iraqi troops into a functioning fighting force.

U.S. troops left Iraq in 2011. Less than three years later, the Iraqi security forces largely collapsed as Islamic State militants seized control of large swaths of territory. U.S. troops then returned to Iraq, training, advising and enabling the Iraqis to oust ISIS from the country.

The \$5,000 bonus got final authorization on Wednesday and is expected to be available beginning in June. The Army has chosen a colonel to lead the first training brigade and he will travel to a number of military posts in the coming weeks to recruit soldiers for the unit. Joining is strictly voluntary.

Because it’s a new program, Abrams acknowledged some soldiers may be reluctant to shift away from current career paths by taking a chance on something they fear may fail or lose support over time.

“There is natural apprehension in the field: ‘Is this a flash in the pan?’ It’s not a flash in the pan,” Abrams said. “The chief is committed and the Army senior leadership is committed, I’m committed. This is going to be an enduring capability.”

The challenge, he said, is getting midgrade, noncommissioned officers to sign up. That’s where the bonus will help.

Espionage trial for Navy officer set to begin

NORFOLK, Va. — A military trial is set to begin Thursday for a Taiwan-born Navy officer accused of passing military secrets to China or Taiwan.

Lt. Cmdr. Edward C. Lin is accused of failing to report foreign contacts and passing along secret national defense information.

Court documents do not reveal whom Lin is accused of spying for. But officials told The Associated Press last year that the country involved is China or Taiwan, and possibly both.

Civilian defense attorney Larry Younger declined to comment. Lin’s sister, Jenny Lin, wrote to members of Congress last year and said the Navy lacks evidence.

Army helicopter makes emergency landing in NY

CHILI, N.Y. — A Black Hawk helicopter landed on the ninth hole fairway at a New York country club.

Eric Durr, spokesman for the New York National Guard, said the Army UH-60 Black Hawk was on a routine training flight when it was forced to make an emergency landing Monday afternoon at the Chili Country Club.

Durr said the windshield had developed a crack and its anti-icing system started to short out.

The helicopter was later flown back to the National Guard aviation facility at the Rochester airport.

From wire reports

Soldier delivers baby while stuck in traffic

The (Hampton Roads) Virginian-Pilot

NORFOLK, Va. — The traffic on the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel wasn't moving.

The contractions were coming two minutes apart.

Her 19-month-old was in the backseat, and her mother was driving.

But Latishe Andrews was not panicking.

The Army cargo specialist knew what she had to do Monday night: push that baby out. There was no waiting until she got to a hospital.

"I delivered her in my lap," said Andrews, 28, as she cradled her baby girl Tuesday at Bon Secours DePaul Medical Center.

Both Latishe and Marrielle — all 6 pounds, 5½ ounces of her — were doing fine Tuesday afternoon.

Latishe is new to Virginia Beach. She spent the last three years in Germany and moved here a few weeks ago to be stationed at Joint Expeditionary Base Fort Story. Her mother, Evelyn Andrews, traveled from Texas on April 8 to help out.

When her older daughter, Kerrielle, was born, Latishe was in labor for 26 hours, so she expected a similar experience for her second daughter's birth.

When her contractions start-

ed about 8:30 p.m. Monday, she, her mother and Kerrielle started heading to Langley Air Force Base hospital.

They left from Virginia Beach as fast as they could. But they got stuck. A Virginia Department of Transportation spokeswoman said crews had stopped traffic to set up a lane closure for work at the tunnel.

"By the time we got almost to the tunnel, traffic was halted," Evelyn said.

Now what? she wondered.

"First I was in denial," Latishe said. "I'll make it; I'll make it."

But that wasn't going to happen.

Out of the corner of her eye, Evelyn could see her daughter moving around.

"I looked to the side, and there was a (baby's) head," she said. "All I was thinking was, 'Get to the shoulder.'"

So she pulled off the road and starting honking over and over, trying to get someone's attention.

Margaret Harris, a VDOT worker, came over, and Evelyn told her there was a baby, and they needed help.

Then Evelyn remembered that the umbilical cord needed to be tied, so she used her shoelace.

Soon an ambulance arrived, and Latishe and baby Marrielle were whisked off to DePaul.

Trump limits IRS on churches, politics

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is seeking to further weaken enforcement of an IRS rule barring churches and tax-exempt groups from endorsing political candidates, though his executive order on religious freedom is disappointing some of his supporters.

As he marked the National Day of Prayer at the White House on Thursday, Trump signed the order asking the IRS to use "maximum enforcement discretion" over the rarely enforced regulation, known as Johnson Amendment.

"This financial threat against the faith community is over," Trump said. "No one should be censoring sermons or targeting pastors."

Trump spoke to religious leaders at the Rose Garden, where he also announced he'll visit Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Vatican — including a meeting with Pope Francis — on his first foreign trip.

His executive order also promises "regulatory relief" for groups with religious objections to the preventive services requirement in the Affordable Care Act, according to a White House official. Those requirements include covering birth

control and could apply to religious groups that object to paying for contraception.

The White House has not yet released the full text of the order, but it appears to fall short of what religious conservatives expected from Trump, who won overwhelming support from evangelicals by promising to "protect Christianity" and religious freedom.

Trump hosted members of his evangelical advisory board at the White House Wednesday night and met earlier Thursday with Roman Catholic leaders.

Ralph Reed, a longtime evangelical leader and founder of the Faith & Freedom Coalition, called the executive order's provisions an excellent "first step."

He said he was "thrilled" by the language on the IRS restrictions. "This administratively removes the threat of harassment," Reed said in a phone interview. "That is a really big deal."

But Gregory Baylor, senior counsel for the Alliance Defending Freedom, a conservative Christian legal group, said the summary of the executive order released late Wednesday leaves Trump's campaign promises to people of faith unfulfilled.

'Halo' title among latest to join Video Game Hall of Fame

Associated Press

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — Attention Halo Nation, "Halo: Combat Evolved" is in the World Video Game Hall of Fame.

The science fiction shooter game that enthralled a legion of fans after its 2001 launch with the Xbox system is one of four games to be inducted into the hall Thursday. "Donkey Kong," "Pokemon Red and Green" and "Street Fighter II" round out the young hall's third class of honorees.

All will be on permanent display at The Strong museum in Rochester, N.Y., where the hall of fame was established in 2015 to recognize an industry that the Entertainment Software Association said generated

\$30.4 billion in revenue in the U.S. last year.

"Until 'Halo's' launch, the most successful shooters required a personal computer and the precision offered by a high-quality mouse," said Strong Associate Curator Shannon Symonds. "'Halo' proved a console could be just as effective, if not better, than a PC."

More than half of the Microsoft Xbox consoles initially sold included the launch game and players gave it high marks for its intricate storyline, characters like Master Chief and multiplayer capability. The self-described "Halo Nation" of fans that emerged bought up 6 million copies, along

with sequels, spinoffs, books and action figures.

An international committee of video game scholars and journalists chose the World Video Game Hall of Fame's class of 2017 from among 12 finalists that also included "Final Fantasy VII," "Microsoft Windows Solitaire," "Mortal Kombat," "Myst," "Portal," "Resident Evil," "Tomb Raider" and "Wii Sports."

Inductees were chosen based on their longevity and impact on the video game industry and pop culture. Nominations of arcade, computer, console, hand-held and mobile games came in from more than 100 countries, The Strong said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Ordinance bans growing pot in town's backyards

OR MEDFORD — A new local ordinance in Medford has banned growing marijuana in backyards.

The Mail Tribune reported Monday that voters in November approved the ban after some residents objected to the smell of plants growing in their neighborhoods.

Residents could be fined \$250 per day for growing marijuana in an outdoor garden. They can still grow indoors or in greenhouses, as long as the smell doesn't reach neighbors.

Medford allows retail sales of marijuana and has 13 licensed businesses to buy it from.

Detroit Zoo closed after wild coyote is spotted

MI ROYAL OAK — A wild coyote has decided to go where some other wild things are — the Detroit Zoo.

The Detroit Free Press and WWJ-AM reported the zoo in the suburb of Royal Oak temporarily closed Monday morning after workers discovered a coyote on the grounds. The gates reopened a short time later after officials determined the wild visitor posed no risk to the public — though some zoo animals have been sheltered for their protection.

So far, zoo officials are taking a wait-and-see approach. They've spotted the coyote and for now hope that it will leave on its own.

New trial ordered after attorney seen sleeping

PA PITTSBURGH — A Pittsburgh-area businessman will get a new trial on mortgage fraud charges because his defense attorney was

seen sleeping by the judge, witnesses and federal court jurors who convicted him last year.

U.S. District Judge Donetta Ambrose ruled Monday that James Nassida was denied a fair trial because Stan Levenson dozed during the October trial. Levenson acknowledged sleeping because he was taking cold medicines that made him drowsy.

Levenson moved for a mistrial, but the judge opted to wait for the jury's verdict first and to let Nassida file an appeal if he was convicted.

After that happened, Nassida's new attorney, James Brink, filed the appeal. The new trial is scheduled to begin in September.

Pair of whales thought to be dead are located

MA FALMOUTH — Scientists on Cape Cod say they located a pair of right whales that had been presumed dead after not being sighted for many years.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said an aerial survey team found a new right whale mother and calf feeding in the Great South Channel off of Massachusetts on Sunday.

The whale is one of two that have been added back to the population by scientists this year. The other whale was also part of a new mom and calf pair and was sighted within the last two weeks.

Campus safety director on leave over lockdown

NY HAMILTON — A Colgate University campus safety director has been placed on leave while officials review a lockdown prompted by a black student carrying a glue gun for an art project.

Colgate President Brian W. Casey posted a statement Tuesday saying the review of the "difficult, painful" situation will include the role of "implicit racial bias" during the reporting and response.

He said a student called campus security around 8 p.m. Monday reporting a "black male" with what appeared to be a gun. The liberal arts school then issued a Twitter alert about a person with a gun. It said a law enforcement search was underway and told students to "find a safe space and remain indoors."

600-year-old white oak will become furniture

NJ BERNARDS — A 600-year-old white oak tree that was believed to be among the oldest of its kind in the nation will become furniture.

The trunk and limbs removed last week from the grounds of Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church in Bernards were delivered Tuesday to Pollaro Custom Furniture in Hillside.

News 12 New Jersey reported the company will transform the wood into altar tables for the church and meeting tables for Bernards town hall.

The tree weighed 116,000 pounds and took two days to take down after it began showing rot and weakness during the last couple of years.

Officials say Gen. George Washington held a picnic near the tree with Marquis de Lafayette.

Another white oak cultivated from the old tree's acorns was recently planted at the church.

Man accused of robbing same bank for 3rd time

NC GREENSBORO — The third time was not the charm for a North Car-

olina man jailed without bond after police say he robbed a bank he'd hit twice before.

A news release from the Greensboro Police Department said Devaughn Damar Jones, 36, was taken into custody Monday after police used video images to identify him as the suspect.

According to the news release, employees at a Bank of America branch told police that a man entered the business, passed a note to a teller and said he had a gun. After receiving an undisclosed amount of cash, he fled in a taxi. Police said Jones was arrested for robbing the same bank in 2010 and 2013.

Stranded teens yell out 'Utah Jazz' until rescue

UT HYRUM — Two teenage boys stuck in the muddy, chilly waters of a northern Utah lake yelled about the Utah Jazz until they received an assist from rescuers trying to locate the boys' voices.

Cache County Sheriff's Lt. Brian Locke said the boys accidentally fell into Hyrum Reservoir on Saturday when the bank collapsed under them while they were fishing. The teens were unable to climb out of the water because the bank was slick and muddy.

Locke said one of the teens was able to use a cellphone to call for help. Rescuers used rough coordinates from the cellphone to get to the area but asked the boys to yell "Utah Jazz!" until the rescuers could zero in on their spot.

The boys were in the water for about an hour but did not need medical attention.

From wire reports

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No clear favorite in Kentucky Derby

Associated Press

Bob Baffert is sitting out the Kentucky Derby, and not by choice.

Having the four-time Derby-winning trainer without at least one horse in the race for just the second time in 11 years indicates what an unpredictable winter it's been leading to the start of the Triple Crown.

Baffert's best horse, Mastery, got hurt after crossing the finish line first in the San Felipe Stakes. None of his other 3-year-olds developed into Derby material.

This year's road to the 143rd Derby derailed other contenders because of injuries, including now-retired Not This Time, Klimt and Syndergaard.

"The amazing thing of getting a horse to the Derby is keeping him injury free," said Doug O'Neill, who trained last year's winner Nyquist.

For the first time in four years, the winner likely won't be from California.

"It's as wide open as we've seen in a long time. You're going to have some big odds on whoever the favorite is," said Dale Romans, who trains Gotham Stakes winner J Boys Echo before Wednesday's draw, after which Classic Empire was made the early 4-1 favorite. "It could be any horse this race. I don't think this really means it's a bad group of horses, I think it's an even group of horses."

Just four of the 20 horses listed at single digits in a wide-open race.

Classic Empire, who will break from the No. 14 post on Saturday, boasts an impressive resume as last year's Breeders' Cup Juvenile winner and champion 2-year-old. He won the Arkansas Derby and finished third in the Holy Bull Stakes, his only two starts this year.

"We couldn't be in a better place right now," trainer Mark Casse said on Wednesday.

His path to Churchill Downs

hasn't been smooth, however. He had a foot abscess and a back issue that prevented him from working out for a while. Twice in recent months, Classic Empire refused to train.

"I've never once counted him out. I know a lot of people have," Casse said. "I feel that ability-wise, he is the most talented horse out there right now."

The favorite has won the Derby in each of the last four years. It's the longest such streak since the 1970s.

Casse also trains State of Honor, the Florida Derby runner-up.

Todd Pletcher has three horses set to run May 6 in the 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile race, with Florida Derby winner Always Dreaming as his leading contender.

Of course, big numbers are nothing new for the New York-based trainer.

He had five runners in 2013 and 2007. Yet for his 45 career starters, Pletcher has never had a Derby favorite. That didn't change this year, but Always Dreaming, who drew the No. 5 post and is a co-second choice with McCracken at 5-1, had the fastest time among 35 horses going 5 furlongs at Churchill Downs on Friday.

"He's got the right style to be really tough," O'Neill said.

Pletcher's lone victory came in 2010 with Super Saver. He is set to tie mentor D. Wayne Lukas (48) for most career starters.

Blue Grass Stakes winner McCracken will break from the No. 15 hole. The last of five winners from there was Triple Crown champion American Pharoah two years ago.

Irish War Cry is the fourth choice at 6-1 odds and drew the No. 17 post. No horse has ever won from there, but trainer Graham Motion was pleased.

"Being in the auxiliary gate keeps you in the clear, keeps you away from the craziness," he said. "You don't have to stand in the gate that long."

Spurs stifle Rockets

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — In the midst of a resounding and redemptive victory, the Spurs' celebration came to an abrupt stop when Tony Parker was carried off the court with what appeared to be a serious left leg injury.

Kawhi Leonard had 34 points, eight assists and seven rebounds to help San Antonio get through the loss of Parker to beat the Houston Rockets 121-96 on Wednesday night and level the Western Conference semifinals at 1-1.

Parker departed with 8:43 remaining. Spurs officials said the 16-year veteran was to undergo an MRI on Thursday morning, but San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich said following the game that "it's not good."

Teammate Manu Ginobili said Parker was still hurting and unable to put any weight on his left leg after the game.

"It's hard to see him limping and hurting now," Ginobili said. "You kind of know that we're not going to see him anytime soon. So, that's a tough blow. We'll see, we don't know."

Parker's left leg appeared to go limp as he rose to attempt a

short jumper in the paint over Houston's Patrick Beverley with 8:52 remaining. Parker grabbed his left knee immediately upon landing and remained on the court for a few minutes. The 34-year-old attempted to limp off the court, but had to be carried off by teammates. Stadium officials had a wheelchair waiting for Parker after he entered the tunnel that leads to the locker room.

Parker finished with 18 points in 26 minutes.

The injury dampened a complete turnaround for the Spurs, who responded to a 126-99 defeat Monday with a similar domination in Game 2.

"I think we were able to get a feel for them in the first game," Leonard said. "Just trying to contest all shots, limit them to one possession, don't let them rebound the basketball on the offensive end and just get them off the three-point line."

The Spurs limited James Harden to 13 points on 3-for-17 shooting.

"I just missed shots," Harden said. "I missed shots. I didn't convert my layups. We knew they were going to come out with some aggressiveness in Game 2."

Cavs blow out Raptors

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Unstoppable. Untouchable. Undefeated.

Back on the playoff stage, where he's starred so many times before, LeBron James is making things look easy.

James scored 39 points, hopped Kareem Abdul-Jabbar on the career playoff scoring list and pushed the Cleveland Cavaliers to a 125-103 blowout over the Toronto Raptors in Game 2 of their Eastern Conference semifinal series on Wednesday night.

And while he may not win another regular-season MVP, James is again showing that May and June belong to him.

"I'm feeling pretty good," he said, downplaying his breakneck start to this postseason.

"Just blessed I'm able to make a few plays tonight to help us win another game."

Just like a year ago in the conference finals, the Cavs are up 2-0 on the Raptors, who had better figure some things out or this series will be over quickly. Toronto was blown out for the fifth straight time in Cleveland in the playoffs, losing each by an average of 24.2 points.

Game 3 is Friday night at Toronto's Air Canada Centre, where the Raptors will have the crowd on their side.

However, they won't have James, who has won a road game in 27 straight series and appears determined to toss Toronto aside. He finished 10-for-14 from the field, including four three-pointers and 15 free throws.

O's Gausman ejected as Red Sox win

Associated Press

BOSTON — Major League Baseball told the Red Sox and Orioles to stop their festering feud.

Then the umpires backed it up.

Hours after a conference call to tell the Red Sox and Orioles “Enough is enough,” Baltimore starter Kevin Gausman was ejected in the second inning for hitting a batter and Boston went on to win 4-2 Wednesday night.

“Given the situation and the tension between the two clubs and all the stuff that’s gone over the past few weeks, we’re all on high alert,” crew chief Sam Holbrook said in a statement. “There needs to be an end to this stuff, and I felt like an ejection was the right thing to do at that time.”

Orioles center fielder Adam Jones was ejected later, too, after arguing a called strike in the fifth. On Monday night, the All-Star player was the target of racial slurs at Fenway Park, and on Tuesday the

Red Sox fans gave him a loud ovation.

He did not comment after the game.

Gausman was ejected after what appeared to be a curveball hit Xander Bogaerts. Catcher Caleb Joseph slammed his mask on the plate and manager Buck Showalter bolted from the dugout to argue. Gausman looked puzzled, at first, and then hollered. Gausman said it was “pretty bush league” that he was tossed, especially since Red Sox starter Chris Sale was merely warned after throwing a pitch behind Manny Machado the night before.

“He did it on purpose, and everybody knew it,” Gausman said. “For him to get away with it, and I hit a guy with a curveball and they throw me out of the game, that’s pretty ridiculous.”

Josh Rutledge drove in a pair of runs for Boston after entering the game in the first inning when starting third baseman Marco Hernandez left with a strained left shoulder. Drew Pomeranz (3-1) gave up two runs on five hits, his fourth time in five

starts he’s allowed two or fewer runs.

Craig Kimbrel struck out the side in the ninth, fanning Machado to end it for his 10th save.

Gausman (1-3) took the loss. Reliever Richard Bleier allowed Bogaerts to score on Rutledge’s single in the second.

The call: MLB chief baseball officer Joe Torre held a conference call with the two managers, Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski and Orioles GM Dan Duquette on Wednesday afternoon. Red Sox manager John Farrell said Torre had told the teams to knock it off, but that there were no warnings about hit batters.

“I guess the best way to describe it is: I can confirm that there was a call and it happened for both clubs, to basically address the last two weeks and to say, ‘Enough is enough,’” Farrell said before the game, adding that he hoped that would be the end of it.

Rookie Judge rallies Yanks over Blue Jays

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Surrounded at his locker after another eye-turning performance, Aaron Judge thought for a few seconds when asked if he had ever been this hot at the plate.

“Maybe Tee-ball,” he said, widening his smile.

The 6-foot-7 rookie sensation hit another long drive for his major league-leading 13th home run, singled to start the go-ahead rally and had the first three-hit game of his big league career, helping the New York Yankees rally from a four-run deficit to beat the Toronto Blue Jays 8-6 on Wednesday night.

“Judge has been out of this world,” Yankees third baseman Chase Headley said, with only a bit of hyperbole.

Matt Holliday hit his 300th home run, a three-run shot in the first, and Brett Gardner helped spark his teammates by destroying a blue recycling bin in the dugout with four mighty cuts of his bat after he was called out on strikes by Bill Welke in the sixth.

“They’ll probably fine me 15 or 20 bucks, and we’ll get a new one the next home stand,” Gard-

ner said. “It felt good. It was a plastic trash can, so I was able to handle it pretty well. Better than the cement wall.”

Capping a 4-2 home stand that left the Yankees atop the AL East at 17-9, pinch-hitter Didi Gregorius drove in the go-ahead run in a three-run seventh with a comebacker that could have been an inning-ending double play but instead bounced off the glove of reliever Joe Biagini (0-1) for an infield single.

Steve Pearce’s third homer in two days, a three-run shot, helped Toronto take a 4-0 lead against CC Sabathia after 16 pitches. The Blue Jays led 6-3 before Judge’s two-run homer in the third, a 435-foot drive into the netting above Monument Park.

Selected the AL Rookie of the Month for April, Judge raised his average to .330 and has six homers in his last six games. He also has hit the second-most home runs through 26 games in Yankees history, one behind Alex Rodriguez in 2007.

Astros 10, Rangers 1: Marwin Gonzalez homered for the fourth time in his last three games and Carlos Correa had

four hits, helping host Houston beat Texas.

Nationals 2, Diamondbacks 1: Ryan Zimmerman had two hits and doubled in the go-ahead run, Jacob Turner worked four innings of scoreless relief and host Washington beat Arizona.

Cubs 5, Phillies 4: Pinch hitters Willson Contreras and Matt Szczur had consecutive two-out RBIs in the sixth inning, helping host Chicago edge Philadelphia.

Giants 4, Dodgers 1 (11): Brandon Belt and Gorkys Hernandez each singled in a run in the 11th inning after Jeff Samardzija’s excellent start, helping visiting San Francisco beat Los Angeles.

Mets 16, Braves 5: Jose Reyes tied his career high with five RBIs, host New York pounded out 20 hits and Jacob deGrom managed to hang around long enough to get the win.

Indians 3, Tigers 2: Carlos Carrasco pitched six impressive innings, and the bullpen held on for visiting Cleveland in its victory over Detroit.

Rockies 11, Padres 3: Ian Desmond hit two home runs off Jered Weaver and drove in

three runs to help rookie righthander Antonio Senzatela and Colorado beat sloppy host San Diego.

Mariners 8, Angels 7: Jarrod Dyson’s two-out, two-run double in the eighth inning pulled his team even, Jean Segura followed with a two-run single to take the lead as host Seattle rallied late for a victory.

Reds 7, Pirates 2: Billy Hamilton ended one of the major leagues’ longest home run droughts with a three-run shot, and Devin Mesoraco hit his first in more than two years, powering host Cincinnati over Pittsburgh.

Marlins 10, Rays 6: J.T. Realmuto drove in four runs, Giancarlo Stanton hit a two-run double in his team’s five-run sixth inning, and Miami beat host Tampa Bay.

Royals 6, White Sox 1: Nate Karns pitched six innings of one-hit ball, striking out four in his final frame, and host Kansas City cruised past Chicago.

Twins 7, Athletics 4: Kennys Vargas tied his career high for host Minnesota with five RBIs, including a three-run homer off erratic starter Kendall Graveman.

Penguins leave Capitals on the brink

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Forget about revenge for the brutal cross-check that knocked Pittsburgh Penguins star Sidney Crosby out of the playoffs indefinitely.

Marc-Andre Fleury didn't want any part of it. The Pittsburgh Penguins goaltender came up with a more effective method of retribution against the Washington Capitals.

"The best way to make them pay is winning," Fleury said.

That's something the defending Stanley Cup champions keep doing no matter who is — and who isn't — in the lineup.

Fleury stopped 36 shots, rookie Jake Guentzel took advantage of a fortunate bounce for his playoff-leading eighth goal and Pittsburgh pushed Washington to the brink of elimination with a 3-2 victory in Game 4 on Wednesday night.

Game 5 is Saturday night in Washington.

Rivals can outplay and outshoot the Penguins all they want — outscoring them is another matter entirely.

Patric Hornqvist provided the Penguins with an early boost and Justin Schultz's power-play goal just past the game's midway point was enough for Fleury to do the

rest.

Rendered a backup most of the season behind Matt Murray, Fleury is now Pittsburgh's most vital player, one who seems to thrive in the face of Washington's incessant pressure.

"He's elevated his game at an important time," Penguins coach Mike Sullivan said. "He's a competitive guy. He's a Stanley Cup-winning goaltender and I think he's showing it."

Consider the Capitals believers. Washington has pumped 142 shots at Fleury through four games, nearly 50 more shots than the Penguins have managed the other way (93). And yet all those opportunities have translated into just one victory.

"We had good chances and we didn't bury them," Washington coach Barry Trotz said. "Our backs are against the wall."

Again. One more win by Pittsburgh and the Penguins will send the Presidents' Trophy winners home for the ninth time in 10 playoff meetings.

The Capitals insist it's not mental, though at times they were their own worst enemy. Guentzel's goal came when a crossing pass deflected off Washington defenseman Dmitry Orlov and by Braden Holtby.

Washington also took seven penalties, including a high-sticking call against T.J. Oshie with less than two minutes left in regulation.

Oshie called it an "amateur play," one symbolic of a night in which the Capitals failed to take advantage of a Penguins team missing Crosby, defenseman Kris Letang and forward Conor Sheary.

Alexander Ovechkin managed just two shots and Washington's power play went 0-for-4.

"I would say our top players didn't play as well as they need to be to be top players," Trotz said. "They need to step up right now."

Capitals center Jay Beagle believed things could get "nasty" as the series moved forward after Matt Niskanen's shot to Crosby's head early in Washington's Game 3 victory.

Pittsburgh's Phil Kessel countered that Beagle's assertion that Niskanen's shot was "clean" made Beagle "an idiot." Beagle jokingly suggested the two work out their differences over a video game.

Getzlaf helps Ducks top Oilers in overtime

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Ryan Getzlaf was a one-man wrecking crew at a big moment for the Anaheim Ducks.

Getzlaf scored twice and assisted on two goals, including Jakob Silfverberg's game-winner 45 seconds into overtime, and the Ducks topped the Edmonton Oilers 4-3 in Game 4 of their second-round playoff series on Wednesday night.

"If he keeps doing this, we're going to have fun time here," Silfverberg said.

"He's one of the best players in the league and when he plays like he did tonight with that aggressiveness and physicality, he kind of pushes the whole team to move forward with him."

Rickard Rakell also scored for Anaheim, which has won two in a row after dropping the first two games of the series at home. John Gibson made 29 saves.

Drake Caggiula, Connor Mc-

David and Milan Lucic scored for Edmonton, and Cam Talbot had 35 stops.

"It's a 2-2 series now," Caggiula said. "We have to make sure we play a full 60 minutes going forward here. We were in this situation last series too, and it worked out just fine."

Anaheim had a 3-2 lead before Caggiula snapped a rebound over Gibson's head at 18:18 of the third. It was the rookie's first career playoff point.

Game 5 is Friday night, back in Southern California.

"We haven't accomplished anything yet," Getzlaf said. "All we did was get our home ice back. We've got to take this one, breathe, breathe, the next day and a half here and get ready for Game 5."

Edmonton led 2-0 after the opening period on goals from Lucic and McDavid.

Getzlaf sparked Anaheim's rally, scoring 97 seconds into

the second and producing a go-ahead goal at 14:25. With his 35th and 36th playoff goals, Getzlaf surpassed Teemu Selanne as the franchise's career leader.

"When he's your centerpiece and he's doing what he's doing and accomplishing what he's doing, you'd have to scratch your head and really dig deep into the archives of when he's played better," Ducks coach Randy Carlyle said.

"He's been an energized player since our five-day break. Whatever he had on that five-day break, we're going to find out and give him more of it."

"I feel good right now, I'll put it that way," Getzlaf said. "It's a fun time of year. I love playing right now."

Patrick Eaves was scratched Wednesday due to a lower-body injury suffered in Game 3, so Corey Perry was reunited with Getzlaf on Anaheim's top line with Rakell.

Edmonton unsuccessfully challenged for goaltender interference on Getzlaf's goal at 1:37. The Oilers contended Perry bumped Talbot as he was beaten on a wrist shot.

"I disagree with the call or I wouldn't have challenged it," Oilers coach Todd McLellan said. "I thought he interfered with blocker and hands and he (Talbot) couldn't make the save. They didn't see it that way. They gained a little momentum at that point."

The Ducks tied it at 2 when Getzlaf threaded a goalmouth pass over to Rakell, who batted it past Talbot's glove. Getzlaf then pounced on a rebound that Oilers forward Ryan Nugent-Hopkins failed to clear, giving Anaheim a 3-2 lead heading into the third.

Gibson held off the Oilers over the first 10 minutes of the game when they outshot the Ducks 8-3.