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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Trump mulls more troops for Afghanistan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As the Trump administration weighs sending more troops to Afghanistan, the 16-year war grinds on in bloody stalemate.

ANALYSIS Afghan soldiers are suffering what Pentagon auditors call “shockingly high” battlefield casualties, and prospects are narrowing for a negotiated peace settlement with the Taliban. The insurgents may have failed to capture and hold a major city, but they are controlling or influencing ever more territory.

“The situation is deteriorating,” said Stephen Biddle, a George Washington University professor and close Afghan War observer.

This grim picture forms the backdrop for administration deliberations on a way ahead in Afghanistan, where U.S. troops are supporting beleaguered Afghans against the Taliban insurgency and are stepping up attacks on an extremist group considered an Islamic State affiliate. The three most recent U.S. deaths in Afghanistan were in combat last month against the ISIS affiliate, which also was the target of a much-publicized U.S. airstrike April 13 using the “mother of all bombs.”

President Donald Trump will receive a proposed new approach to the war within

a week, according to Theresa Whelan, a Pentagon policy official. “The interest is to move beyond the stalemate,” she told senators, offering as a preview little more than an echo of the Obama administration’s goal that Afghanistan “reaches its potential.”

Whereas Trump called for significant changes to how the U.S. fights ISIS, he has said far less about the much longer U.S. war in Afghanistan. The basic pillars of President Barack Obama’s strategy — supporting Afghan forces rather than doing the fighting for them and seeking a political settlement with the Taliban — are likely to remain in place, defense officials said.

Testifying on Capitol Hill with Whelan, Gen. Raymond Thomas, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, said the new strategy could include more U.S. troops and changes in what the military calls “rules of engagement,” laying out when force can be used. The U.S. combat role officially ended in December 2014. Thomas’ troops operate separately, targeting al-Qaida and ISIS fighters.

The Pentagon is considering a request for roughly 3,000 more troops, as the U.S. commander in Afghanistan has advocated, mainly for training and advising. The larger question is what they would do and how they’d fit into a broader strategy for stabilizing Afghanistan.

Sen. John McCain, the Senate Armed Services Committee chairman, has warned the administration that it is risking failure. Referring to the stalemate, he told Thomas, “If the present status quo prevails, then there’s no end to it.”

But it’s unclear what Trump can do.

Biddle said the Taliban have little incentive to negotiate a peace deal and “the battlefield trend is against it.”

Anthony Cordesman, a defense analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Afghan forces aren’t capable of securing the country. Unless Trump adopts “a far more decisive approach,” security could collapse “either slowly and painfully over years or as a result of some shattering military defeat or critical political power struggle at the top that divides the security forces and the country,” he said.

Army Gen. John Nicholson, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, wants an infusion of U.S. and allied troops to bolster support for the Afghan army.

But his request took a backseat to a broader administration review of Afghan policy and a push for NATO to contribute more troops. Both of those matters will be discussed at a NATO summit May 25.

The U.S. says it has 8,400 troops in Afghanistan, one-quarter of whom are for the counterterrorism mission.

Investigating photo scandal a daunting task for NCIS

Associated Press

MARINE CORPS BASE QUANTICO, Va. — In a cramped office at the Marines’ Quantico base outside Washington, about 20 investigators sit elbow to elbow, staring into their computers as images of naked men and women flash across the screens.

On the walls are white boards with statistics, crime lists and a montage of social media messages directed to the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

The objective of this disturb-

ing sleuth work: Rooting out the extent of a nude photo-sharing scandal that has rocked the Corps, embarrassed its leaders and spread to other military services. And the sheer scope of the job is daunting.

“If you do that eight to 10 hours a day, five days a week, you get pretty burned out,” NCIS Director Andrew Traver said in an interview. New agents cycled in after the first month, he said, “just because of the burnout factor, especially the ones that are doing the image review.”

This is Task Force Purple

Harbor. What began as a response to military members posting nude photos online has morphed into a growing criminal investigation that now includes 21 felony cases and more than 30 others referred to Marine commanders for possible administrative action. Five Marines have received administrative punishments so far, but no details have been provided.

For the investigators, men and women, it is a broad and grueling process. Agents from all four services and the Coast Guard have scoured close to

200 different websites. They’ve pulled more than 150,000 nude or semi-nude images. They’ve identified 20,000 with a possible military connection. More than half are of men.

The overwhelming majority are selfies or photos subjects posed for and then voluntarily shared, which is not illegal, even under military code. That leaves just a small number of people who could potentially be prosecuted for crimes such as extortion and stealing or hacking into someone’s computer hard drive.

Pentagon IDs SEAL killed in Somalia

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has identified the Navy SEAL who was killed in a military operation in Somalia.

The Defense Department said Senior Chief Special Warfare Operator Kyle Miliken, 38, of Falmouth, Maine, was killed during an operation Thursday against the extremist group al-Shabab. He is the first

American to die in combat in the African country since 1993, when 18 troops died in the “Black Hawk Down” incident.

A Pentagon spokesman said Friday that U.S. special operations troops came under fire while supporting Somalia’s army against the al-Shabab extremist group.

Navy Capt. Jeff Davis said the al-Shabab compound targeted in Thursday’s raid “had been associated with some attacks on

facilities that we use and that our Somali partners use nearby.”

Last month, the U.S. said it was sending dozens of regular troops to Somalia in the largest such deployment there in about two decades.

The U.S. in recent years has sent a small number of special operations forces and counterterrorism advisers to Somalia and conducted a number of airstrikes.

Contractor denies prostitution, security risks at base in Iraq

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An embattled U.S. contractor, accused of failing to promptly disclose sex trafficking, alcohol smuggling and security violations on a nearly \$700 million contract to secure an Iraqi air base, is denying many of the charges. An attorney for investigators, who were fired by the company, says the explanations don’t stand up.

Revelations of the allegations, published Wednesday by The Associated Press, were based on documents and interviews with the investigators, whom the company dismissed in March, and multiple other former employees.

The company, Sallyport Global, is responsible for securing the F-16 fighter jets at Balad Air Base that are used by the Iraqi air force in efforts to uproot Islamic State.

The company first called allegations that managers had shut down sex trafficking investigations “absurd” but later acknowledged that senior management had opened a second probe months later.

They say the late push to determine whether employees were involved in prostitution was the initiative of new managers, including a new corporate ethics and compliance officer.

The company contends the

second probe found all the allegations of prostitution on the base were unfounded. But the fired investigators and an attorney representing them, Debra Katz, said their attempts to interview key suspects involved in the first case again were blocked by managers.

The company also denies allegations by the investigators that its lawyers ordered them to keep two sets of files in order to hide some of the investigators’ information from the U.S. government, which was footing the bill for the company’s contract.

But attorney Katz disagreed. “They were explicitly told to keep double books,” she said. “There is no argument of attorney-client privilege that could justify the orders.”

Based in Reston, Va., Sallyport was founded in 2003 to work in Iraq on reconstruction, and since has expanded its operations globally.

Sallyport president and CEO Victor Esposito previously worked at Blackwater Worldwide, a private military company. He then became the chief operating officer of Xe, as Blackwater renamed itself after its employees shot scores of unarmed Iraq civilians in 2007. Jeff Morin, who worked as a Sallyport director until this week, also previously worked for Blackwater.

Green pulls out of Army secretary consideration

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Mark Green, the second candidate for Army secretary nominated by President Donald Trump, withdrew his name from consideration for the job Friday afternoon amid a chorus of opposition to him largely over concerns about his expressed views on gay and transgender people.

“It is with deep regret today I am withdrawing my nomination to be the Secretary of the Army,” Green said in an emailed statement. “I am honored that President Trump nominated me for this position. I appreciate his support and confidence in me, as well as that of Secretary [of Defense Jim] Mattis and many others.”

The White House announced April 7 that it intended to nominate Green, a West Point graduate who served as an Army infantry officer and flight surgeon, for Army secretary. His nomination was never formally sent to the Senate. Green now serves as a Republican state senator in Tennessee and is the CEO of an emergency department staffing company.

Within hours of the White House announcement of Green’s nomination, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender advocacy groups, including the Human Rights Campaign and

the American Military Partner Association, began speaking out against him. They cited past comments Green, a devout Christian, made publicly and legislation that he introduced that they said would allow businesses to discriminate against LGBT people.

Those comments included referring to transgendered people as diseased.

“If you poll the psychiatrists, they’re going to tell you transgender is a disease,” Green told a Chattanooga, Tenn., tea party rally in September.

He also encouraged Tennessee to reject the Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage and spoke out against teaching about Islam in public schools.

In recent days, Green has found his nomination contested by members of Congress, including Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., a member of the Armed Services Committee, which must sign off on service secretary nominees before full Senate votes.

Green on Friday blamed partisan politics for his decision to withdraw his name.

Trump’s first Army secretary nominee, Vincent Viola, another West Point graduate, was forced to withdraw his name for financial concerns. The billionaire businessman said he could not divest himself from his business ties to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

Hunger on the rise in Mosul amid slow advance on ISIS

Associated Press

MOSUL, Iraq — Aliyah Hussein and the 25 family members sheltering with her in Mosul's western Mahatta neighborhood are surviving by picking wild greens growing in a park near their home. Hussein mixes the vegetables with small amounts of rice and tomato paste to make a thin soup that is often her family's only meal.

Her cousin Zuhair Abdul Karim said on a recent day that even with the wild greens, the food ran out.

"I swear to God, we are hungry. (Islamic State) made us hungry. They didn't leave anything for us, they even stole our food," Hussein said. Her home sits just a few hundred yards from the front line in the battle for western Mosul.

As Iraqi forces continue to make slow progress in the fight

against ISIS in the city, clawing back territory house by house and block by block, food supplies are running dangerously low for civilians trapped inside militant-held territory and those inside recently retaken neighborhoods. For families like Hussein's, safety concerns make them unreachable for most humanitarian groups.

Although Hussein technically has been liberated, her neighborhood is still too dangerous for most humanitarian groups to reach. In the past week, she said she received only one box of food consisting of rice, oil and tomato paste, barely enough to feed her entire family even for a single day.

"The humanitarian world needs to realize that there is a huge gap between people who are in the safe zone and people who are actually trapped in

the no man's land between the Iraqi-controlled areas and ... Daesh controlled areas," said Alto Labetubun with Norwegian People Aid, one of the few groups operating in neighborhoods close to the front line. Daesh is the Arabic acronym for ISIS.

Some 300,000 to 500,000 people remain beyond anyone's reach, trapped in ISIS-held Mosul neighborhoods, according to the United Nations. For those civilians, siege-like conditions have prevented food supplies from reaching them for more than six months.

Most of those civilians are estimated to be in Mosul's old city, where the final battles of the operation are expected to play out. If the fighting there lasts many more weeks, the U.N. warns the consequences for civilians will be "catastrophic."

Syria sees relative calm in safe zones

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Relative calm prevailed Saturday in wide parts of war-ravaged Syria despite sporadic violations and clashes after a deal to set up "de-escalation zones" in mostly opposition-held areas went into effect, opposition activists and government media outlets said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties after the plan hammered out by Russia, Turkey and Iran — the latest attempt to bring calm to the country — kicked in at midnight Friday.

The establishment of safe zones is the latest international attempt to reduce violence amid a six-year civil war that has left more than 400,000 dead, and is the first to envisage armed foreign monitors on the ground in Syria. The U.S. is not party to the agreement and the Syrian rivals have not signed on to the deal.

Details of the plan must still be worked out over the next several weeks. There were limited reports of bombing in northern Homs and Hama, and the southern province of Daraa, areas expected to be part of the "de-escalation zones," activists said. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

It is not clear how the ceasefire or "de-escalation zones" will be enforced in areas still to be determined in maps to emerge a month from now.

Russian officials said it will be at least another month until the details are worked out and the safe areas established.

Syria's government has said that although it will abide by the agreement, it would continue fighting "terrorism" wherever it exists, parlance for most armed rebel groups fighting government troops.

The armed opposition delegation to the talks in the Kazakh capital of Astana said in a statement released early Saturday that the truce should include all Syria and not just specific areas.

ISIS steers jihadis to US gun shows

The Washington Post

In August 2016, a former Islamic State recruit caused a stir when he described how the terror organization sought to exploit America's lax gun laws.

"They say the Americans are dumb — they have open gun policies" the recruit told The New York Times from a German prison. "They say we can radicalize them easily, and if they have no prior record, they can buy guns, so we don't need to have a contact man who has to provide guns for them."

It appeared to be the first time anyone from ISIS had spoken openly about the organization's views on U.S. gun control.

Now, ISIS has spelled out its position in writing.

In the most recent issue of Rumiyah, its glossy, multilingual propaganda magazine, ISIS encouraged recruits in the U.S. to take advantage of laws that allow people to buy fire-

arms without having to present identification nor to submit to background checks.

Recruits should seek out gun shows and online sales in particular, said the write-up in the magazine, which was released Thursday.

"The acquisition of firearms can be very simple depending on one's geographical location," the piece read. "In most U.S. states, anything from a single-shot shotgun all the way up to a semi-automatic AR-15 rifle can be purchased at showrooms or through online sales — by way of private dealers — with no background checks, and without requiring either an ID or a gun license."

Gun control advocates argue in favor of closing a "gun show loophole" and "online sales loophole" — what they believe are gaps in federal law that allow people to buy firearms from unlicensed dealers with-

out identification or background checks. Legislation supporting such a move has been shot down in Congress year after year.

Another solution, some gun control advocates say, is to bar people on terrorist watch lists from buying weapons.

The National Rifle Association, gun rights activists and some civil rights lawyers contend that terrorism watch lists are too flawed to justify a ban and would violate people's civil rights. The NRA also argues against legislation designed to close "loopholes," saying federal law applies wherever a firearm sale takes place.

Under federal law, licensed firearm dealers must run background checks on gun buyers. Private, unlicensed sellers are not subject to the same requirements. As long as the unlicensed seller and the buyer reside in the same state, no record-keeping is required.

Trump says he might not obey law's provisions on Gitmo, pot

McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump told Congress Friday that he might release detainees held at the Guantanamo Bay prison for suspected terrorists, despite legislation that prohibits transfers of prisoners.

He also said he would not feel bound by a restriction in a new spending law that prohibits spending money to enforce federal marijuana laws in states where the drug is legal for medical purposes.

Trump noted that the spending bill Congress passed this week contained restrictions on transfers of Guantanamo detainees to the U.S. and other countries, but provided no exceptions, even when a court orders a detainee's release.

"I will treat these, and simi-

lar provisions, consistently with my constitutional authority as commander in chief," Trump said in a statement.

He made a similar observation about the limit on enforcing federal marijuana laws. "I will treat this provision consistently with my constitutional responsibility to take care that the laws be faithfully executed," he said.

Marijuana is illegal under federal law, but 28 states permit its use as medicine.

Trump's language on Guantanamo was similar to a more expansive signing statement that President Barack Obama issued in November 2015 in response to congressional restrictions on Guantanamo transfers.

Then, Obama wrote, "Under certain circumstances, the pro-

visions in this bill concerning detainee transfers would violate constitutional separation of powers principles. ... In the event that restrictions on the transfer of detainees ... operate in a manner that violates these constitutional principles, my administration will implement them in a manner that avoids the constitutional conflict."

In adopting the language, Trump appeared to be using the same rationale that Obama did in 2014 with the transfer of five Taliban prisoners from Guantanamo to Qatar in exchange for the release of Bowe Bergdahl, a U.S. soldier who had been taken prisoner in Afghanistan. A Government Accountability Office examination of that exchange concluded that Obama broke the law by not notifying Congress before the trade.

Trump team query seen as Russia warning sign

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In late November, a member of Donald Trump's transition team approached national security officials in the Obama White House with a curious request: Could the incoming team get a copy of the classified CIA profile on Sergey Kislyak, Russia's ambassador to the U.S.?

Marshall Billingslea, a former Pentagon and NATO official, wanted the information for his boss, Michael Flynn, who had been tapped by Trump to serve as White House national security adviser. Billingslea knew Flynn would be speaking to Kislyak, according to two former Obama administration officials, and seemed concerned Flynn did not fully understand he was dealing with a man rumored to have ties to Russian intelligence agencies.

To the Obama White House, Billingslea's concerns were startling: a member of Trump's own team suggesting the incoming Trump administration might be in over its head in dealing with an adversary.

The request now stands out as a warning signal for Obama officials who soon would see Flynn's contacts with the Russian spiral into a controversy that would cost him his job and would lead to a series of shocking accusations hurled by Trump against his predecessor's administration.

This account of the closing days of the Obama administration is based on interviews with 11 current and former U.S. officials, including seven with key roles in the Obama administration.

The Obama White House's role in the Russia controversy will come under fresh scrutiny Monday. Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and former deputy Attorney General Sally Yates are slated to testify before lawmakers on the Senate Judiciary Committee, one of three committees investigating Trump's associates' links to Moscow.

Officer charged in shooting of Texas teen

Associated Press

DALLAS — A white Texas police officer who fired into a car of teenagers leaving a party, killing a black 15-year-old passenger, faces a murder charge, authorities say.

Roy Oliver turned himself in Friday night, just hours after the Dallas County Sheriff's Office issued a warrant for his arrest in the April 29 death of Jordan Edwards, 15. Oliver, who was fired Tuesday from the police force in Balch Springs, was released after posting bail at the Parker County Jail in Weatherford. Oliver's bond had been set at \$300,000.

Edwards and his two brothers and two other teenagers were leaving an unruly house party in Balch Springs, a suburb of Dallas, when Oliver opened fire on their car with a rifle. The bullets shattered the front passenger-side window and struck Edwards. It took a few moments for Edwards' 16-year-old brother, who was driving, and other

passengers to notice he was slumped over in his seat.

Police had said the teenagers' car was backing up toward officers "in an aggressive manner," but later said body camera video showed the vehicle actually driving away from the officers.

Edwards' family issued a statement saying Oliver's arrest on the murder charge "has brought a bit of a reprieve in a time of intense mourning."

"Although we realize that there remain significant obstacles ahead on the road to justice, this action brings hope that the justice system will bend against the overwhelming weight of our frustration," the statement released by the family's attorney said.

Records show that Oliver was briefly suspended in 2013 following a complaint about his conduct while serving as a witness in a drunken-driving case.

Personnel records from the Balch Springs Police Department obtained by The Associ-

ated Press show Oliver was suspended for 16 hours in December 2013 after the Dallas County District Attorney's Office filed the complaint. Oliver also was ordered to take training courses in anger management and courtroom demeanor and testimony.

The personnel records also included periodic evaluations that noted at least one instance when Oliver was reprimanded for being "disrespectful to a civilian on a call."

The complaint from the prosecutor's office said the office had a hard time getting Oliver to attend the trial, he was angry he had to be there, he used vulgar language that caused an assistant district attorney to send a female intern out of the room, and he used profanity during his testimony.

Oliver joined the Balch Springs department in 2011 after being an officer with the Dalworthington Gardens Police Department for almost a year.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

2 caught trying to steal statistics exam

KY LEXINGTON — Call it a statistical error: Police say two University of Kentucky students crawled through an air duct to steal a statistics exam from their professor's office but were caught because he was working late.

The Lexington Herald-Leader reported university police cited Henry Lynch II and Troy Kiphuth, both 21, for third-degree burglary and referred the case to Fayette County Circuit Court.

University spokesman Jay Blanton told the newspaper the instructor left his office about midnight Tuesday to get something to eat. When he returned, two men ran from the office. One of them later returned and confessed.

Police said Lynch told officers he tried to steal the exam earlier in the night but couldn't find it. He also confessed to stealing an exam from the office earlier in the semester.

Glitch causes overdrafts for health consumers

FL ORLANDO — A spokeswoman said an unknown number of Florida Blue health insurance customers were charged multiple times for their May premiums.

The overdrafts caused some clients to have their bank accounts frozen.

Attorney Kristin Longberry told the Orlando Sentinel she paid her monthly premium of \$2,000 on April 28. But while reviewing her bank account on May 1, she discovered the health insurance company had billed her 71 times, withdrawing \$142,000.

Longberry said her account was frozen and she needed to

pay her office rent on Monday.

Florida Blue said in a statement the issue happened over the weekend, through a vendor. The company pledged to refund the money and reimburse customers for bank fees.

Multiple medical firsts for New York triplets

NY STONY BROOK — A set of New York triplets has made medical history by being born as the first triplets with a rare skull malformation, and to be the first to receive corrective surgery.

Newsday reported the three 6-month-old boys — Hunter, Jackson and Kaden — underwent successful surgeries at Stony Brook University Hospital on Long Island when they were 2 months old. On Monday, doctors and first-time parents Michael and Amy Howard of Center Moriches talked about the surgeries during a news conference.

Doctors said that the babies were born with craniosynostosis, a skull plate fusion which distorts the skull early and could stunt future brain development.

The likelihood of all three triplets being born with the same malformation is approximately 1 in 160 trillion.

Town seeks state cash after big frat party

NY SCHODACK — After New York State Park Police broke up a rowdy fraternity party in a state park, officials in the upstate town are calling for the state to repay the costs of local police enforcement.

The Times-Union of Albany reported last Saturday's party was organized by a University at Albany frat, drawing about 1,000 people to Schodack Is-

land State Park, on the Hudson River just south of Albany.

Officials say park police shut down the party because of illegal drug use and underage drinking and called in town police for help.

Schodack town officials want the state to reimburse the town for the expense of calling its officers in to help with the park situation. They estimated the town spent more than \$2,500.

The Rensselaer County Legislature is expected to contact the state regarding the incident.

Twin sisters deliver baby boys on same day

NJ BRICK TOWNSHIP — Twin sisters in New Jersey delivered babies on the same day.

The Asbury Park Press reported 32-year-old fraternal twins Danielle Grant and Kim Abraham gave birth to baby boys on April 28. The sisters decided to have labor induced after their identical due dates of April 22 passed.

Grant and Abraham delivered their sons, Roman and Aaron, a little less than four hours apart.

The Toms River natives said their pregnancies were coincidences. Picking an induction date was the only thing that was consciously chosen.

The sisters plan to hold joint birthday parties for their sons and dress them in matching outfits.

Police: 2nd transit train robbery suspect held

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Authorities say a second suspect has been arrested after last month's attack on a San Francisco Bay Area train that was swarmed by dozens of teens who robbed and beat

passengers.

The Bay Area Regional Transit agency announced the arrest Monday. Officials identified the suspect as a male minor and did not release a name or age.

BART said in a statement that Oakland police arrested the teen last Friday during a foiled robbery and realized he was wanted in the train attack.

Police said 40 to 60 teens jumped the fare gate at the Coliseum Station the night of April 22 and swarmed through at least two train cars, grabbing bags and phones and then fleeing before police arrived.

BART says it has identified other suspects and expects more arrests.

Ohio Amish try to make buggies better seen

OH CONGRESS — Members of an especially conservative Amish group in northeast Ohio are adding more reflective features to their black, horse-drawn buggies to increase visibility after some serious crashes.

The Akron Beacon Journal reported 300 Swartzentruber Amish families live in Ashland, Medina and Wayne counties. Buggy crashes in that region killed three people and hurt 17 between January and March.

Less conservative Amish mark slow-moving buggies with colored triangles and reflectors. But group member Harvey Stutzman said Swartzentruber Amish resisted those measures, considering them too flashy.

They had used only gray reflective tape and kerosene lanterns hung on buggies. Now they're adding white rectangles outlined in reflective tape on the back. They'll also have plastic pipe covered in reflective tape stick out slightly from the wheels.

From wire reports

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Ducks rally, beat Oilers in double-OT

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Corey Perry and Ryan Getzlaf have been preparing for these moments for their entire adult lives. Nearly 14 years after the Anaheim Ducks drafted them together, they've built a mental connection that remains indelible through any playoff pressure or defensive determination.

So when Getzlaf found the puck and a sliver of space on the boards in the second overtime of a crucial playoff game Friday night, Perry's feet moved before his thoughts.

"Right to the net," Perry said. "He had eyes up, and he had time, and I was yelling for that puck the whole way."

After the unprecedented comeback required just to get back into Game 5, the Ducks finished it off with one more moment of hard-earned grace from their dynamic duo.

Perry scored 6:57 into the second OT after the Ducks rallied from a three-goal deficit in the final minutes of regulation, completing a spectacular 4-3 victory over the Edmonton

Oilers and seizing a 3-2 lead in their second-round playoff series.

Anaheim became the first team in Stanley Cup playoff history to force overtime or win a playoff game after trailing by three goals with less than four minutes left in regulation, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

While the Oilers cried foul over a no-call of goalie interference on Rickard Rakell's tying score with 15 seconds left in regulation, the Ducks celebrated their third straight win — and the first home victory for either team in the series.

Perry, who finished with a goal and two assists, collected that pass from Getzlaf and waited out a sprawling Cam Talbot, who made 60 saves.

"That's will," said Getzlaf, who has scored 15 points in a spectacular postseason. "We willed it through, and did whatever we had to do. We scratched and clawed at the end and found a way to get ourselves back in that game and give ourselves an opportunity."

Getzlaf got the first goal of the comeback with 3:16 left in

regulation, and Cam Fowler scored 35 seconds later before Rakell put the tying goal through a crowd of prone players to cap a stunning sequence — all with goalie John Gibson pulled for an extra attacker.

On his 24th birthday, Rakell slipped a puck under a crowd that included a horizontal Ryan Kesler making some contact with Talbot. Video review found no goalie interference because Kesler had been shoved into Talbot by Darnell Nurse, and the Ducks celebrated madly.

"I don't even know what goalie interference is anymore, to be perfectly honest," Edmonton forward Milan Lucic said. "It's an absolute joke that especially two really good referees can't make the right call at the right time."

Leon Draisaitl, Connor McDavid and Drake Caggiula scored during a dominant second period, but the Oilers coughed up a big late lead despite solid play by Talbot.

Talbot acknowledged his own frustration over the no-call, but said: "At the same time, we had a 3-nothing lead with 3½ minutes to go. We had every op-

portunity to win that game. ... They get a lucky bounce there, and it just started to unravel from there. We did a good job battling back in overtime, got a few good chances, but weren't on top of things."

Gibson made 35 saves, helping the Ducks move one win away from their second trip to the Western Conference finals in three seasons.

After a disastrous start to the series in Anaheim, the Ducks returned home with confidence and two gritty road wins, including an overtime victory in Game 4.

Edmonton appeared to be ready to run away with Game 5 in the second period. After Draisaitl's opener, McDavid capitalized on a two-man advantage by adroitly batting a puck out of midair for the fifth goal in his first Stanley Cup playoff run. Caggiula put the Oilers up 3-0 with a score off a 4-on-1 rush midway through the period.

But Edmonton couldn't hang on in regulation after the Ducks pulled Gibson and one of the most improbable rallies in NHL playoff history.

Jaskin's goal allows Blues to stave off elimination

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — The St. Louis Blues needed a spark. Dmitrij Jaskin gave it to them.

Jaskin scored in his first playoff game this season, Jaden Schwartz got the game-winner and the Blues topped the Nashville Predators 2-1 on Friday night to stay alive in their second-round series.

Jaskin found out moments before the game he was in the lineup in place of Alexander Steen, who was sidelined by a lower-body injury. Jaskin had just one goal in 51 games this season.

"Steener, even though he didn't play, he supported us," he said. "He actually called that I'm going to score."

Schwartz scored 25 seconds

into the third, knocking in a rebound from right in front for a 2-1 St. Louis lead. Schwartz has a team-high four postseason goals, including three game-winners.

"You'd like to score earlier, but you don't really think about that," he said. "You just go play and obviously when it's a tie game or a close game, you want to step up for your team."

Jake Allen made 21 saves for the Blues, who had dropped two in a row.

James Neal scored for the Predators, and Pekka Rinne made 30 saves.

"Both of those goals came out of leaving a guy in front of me," Rinne said. "Both times, two rebounds, two goals."

Jaskin put the Blues in front

at 5:43 of the second period, banging home a rebound off an Alex Pietrangelo shot. It was Jaskin's second career playoff goal.

"We felt confident that he would go in and play a really good game," Blues coach Mike Yeo said. "I thought he was a force along the walls on both ends and a difference maker."

Jaskin had a career-high eight shots on goal. He also tied for the team lead with four hits and had two takeaways and two blocked shots in 15:46 of playing time.

"We had to do it tonight and we did it and everybody's happy," Jaskin said. "We're going to enjoy it now for a few minutes and forget it and go get another one."

Neal tied it with Nashville enjoying a two-man advantage with 6:10 left in the second. The power play was set up when Pietrangelo and Patrik Berglund both took minors with 7:19 left.

"The game was out of sync a little bit, we found ourselves in the box," Predators coach Peter Laviolette said. "They scored first, we were chasing the game at that point as well."

The Blues managed just one shot on goal, a 45-footer by Pietrangelo, during more than four straight minutes of power-play time between the first and second periods, including 1:50 of a 5-on-3 opportunity.

Mike Fisher had three blocks for the Predators — all on Vladimir Tarasenko — during the Blues' two-man advantage.

Spurs' Aldridge steps up in Game 3 win

Associated Press

HOUSTON — LaMarcus Aldridge had been criticized through two games of the Western Conference semifinals for not doing enough for the San Antonio Spurs.

On Friday night, with the Spurs now without Tony Parker, he shook off his slow start to this series with a huge game that propelled his team to a 103-92 victory over the Houston Rockets and a 2-1 lead.

Aldridge and Kawhi Leonard scored 26 points apiece in San Antonio's first postseason game without Parker since 2001, which ended an NBA record of 221 straight playoff appearances for the Frenchman. The 34-year-old was injured in the fourth quarter of Game 2.

"You can't replace Tony

Parker. He's a Hall of Famer one day, but I think guys just came out with a sense of urgency and just played hard," Aldridge said.

Aldridge had managed just 19 points combined in the first two games, but stepped up in the wake of Parker's season-ending leg injury, scoring nine points in the fourth quarter to help the Spurs pull away.

"I do what the team needs," Aldridge said. "Tonight this was needed and I did it. So I'm always going to try to be aggressive out there and try to make things happen."

Game 4 is Sunday night in Houston.

James Harden led the Rockets with 43 points after scoring just 13 in Game 2. But he had only five assists and com-

plained about the officiating all night.

"We had several opportunities," Harden said. "As a unit we couldn't get it going consistently."

Coach Gregg Popovich started rookie Dejounte Murray in San Antonio's first game since Parker's quadriceps injury, instead of moving Patty Mills into the starting lineup. Mills had 15 points in 30 minutes and Murray scored just two points in 15 minutes.

"We started off pretty slow, but I think we did good," said Leonard, who had 10 rebounds and seven assists. "We got a win, but definitely still have to make some adjustments."

The Spurs led by six when Aldridge scored all of their points in a 7-2 run to make it

85-74 with about five minutes left.

"Aldridge sooner or later is going to go off because he's an All-Star," Houston coach Mike D'Antoni said. "Nothing they did should have bothered us. We just didn't play well."

Tip-ins

Spurs: Parker had surgery on Friday to repair the ruptured quadriceps tendon in his left leg. The team said a timeline for his return will be determined later. ... Gasol had 12 points and nine rebounds. ... Green had 11 points.

Rockets: Trevor Ariza made five three-pointers in the first half, but none after that. ... Houston lost for the first time at home this postseason after winning its first three games.

James, Cavs take 3-0 series lead over Raptors

Associated Press

TORONTO — Last year, LeBron James and the Cavaliers had their postseason winning streak end in Canada.

This time, Cleveland came across the border and kept right on rolling.

James scored 35 points, Kevin Love had 16 points and 13 rebounds, and the Cavaliers pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat the Toronto Raptors 115-94 on Friday night and take a 3-0 lead in their second-round playoff series.

"We knew we were coming to a hostile environment, we knew they were going to give us everything they had, no matter who was in the lineup," James said. "We just had to weather the storm."

DeMar DeRozan scored 37 points and Jonas Valanciunas had 19 for the Raptors, who were without three-time All-Star Kyle Lowry. They trailed by only two after three quarters before the Cavaliers quickly blew open the game.

Game 4 is Sunday in Toronto.

"We don't need to be thinking about a sweep or getting rest, we need to be thinking about what we need to do to execute defensively and offensively coming into Sunday," James said.

With his team on the brink of elimination, Raptors coach Dwane Casey looked at Game 4 a little differently.

"Sunday's game is about pride," Casey

said. "You don't want to get swept, especially in your home building."

That won't be easy against the Cavaliers, the first team since the Minneapolis Lakers in 1949 and 1950 to win their first seven playoff games in consecutive seasons.

Cleveland won 10 straight to begin the playoffs last year, a streak that ended when Toronto beat the Cavs in Games 3 and 4 of the Eastern Conference finals.

"We came in here (last year) and weren't prepared," Kyrie Irving said. "This year we understood what mindset we had to come in, especially in a rowdy arena like this."

Irving scored 16 points and Kyle Korver had 14 for the Cavaliers, who have posted three straight double-digit wins over Toronto. James had eight rebounds and seven assists.

"We were not giving up but they were better than us," Valanciunas said.

Norman Powell scored 13 points and Serge Ibaka had 12 for the Raptors, who shot a dismal 2-for-18 from three-point range.

"Something we've done is knock down threes all year," Casey said. "For whatever reason it's escaping us right now."

DeRozan said his team's long-range struggles were made even more "deflating" because Cleveland connected 13 times on 23 attempts from beyond the

arc.

"It's tough to win a game when you only make two three-pointers," DeRozan said.

Lowry sprained his left ankle in the third quarter of Game 2 and did not practice Thursday. He worked out a few hours before Friday's game and was on the court during warmups but hobbled back to the locker room before the anthems.

"He was limping badly," Casey said. "He just couldn't go. He wanted to. The doctors and trainers and medical people were just telling him he shouldn't try to go because he was in so much pain." Cory Joseph started for Toronto.

Even without Lowry, the Raptors trailed 79-77 to begin the fourth, but Cleveland pulled away as Toronto missed 10 of its first 11 field goal attempts to begin the final quarter.

"Nothing could fall for us, especially at the start of that fourth quarter," said DeRozan, who had just one point in the final quarter.

With Toronto struggling, James hit four free throws on either side of a three-pointer to put the Cavs up 97-80 with 6:20 left.

"That stretch right at the beginning of the fourth quarter is what got us," Casey said.

The Raptors missed their first 12 shots from three-point range before Powell connected with 3:09 left in the third.

Gardner's last-strike HR lifts Yankees

Associated Press

CHICAGO — With the Yankees down to their final strike, Brett Gardner let his emotions out once his go-ahead home run landed on a patio in right field.

He pumped his left arm as he rounded the bases and gave Jacoby Ellsbury a leaping high-five after crossing home plate.

Gardner lined a slider from Hector Rondon for a three-run, ninth-inning drive that lifted New York over the World Series champion Chicago Cubs 3-2 in a dramatic series opener Friday.

"I was fired up, man," Gardner said. "I'm usually pretty even keeled, but I was excited. We were kind of slow all game, and they're winning 2-0 up to last strike in the ninth inning. It feels good to come through in a situation like that."

Home runs by Kris Bryant in the first and Kyle Schwarber in the sixth off Michael Pineda

gave the Cubs that 2-0 lead on a 45-degree afternoon with the wind blowing in.

Chase Headley singled with one out in the ninth off Rondon (0-1), pitching after Wade Davis appeared in the previous three games. Ellsbury, in his first appearance since injuring an elbow Monday, pinch hit with two outs and walked.

Gardner fouled off a pair of 1-2 fastballs, took a ball and on his seventh pitch of the at-bat hit his fifth home run of the season, all in the last six games.

"He was drooling coming around the bases," Headley said. "When he got in the dug-out, he was drooling."

The Cubs threw 29 pitches to Gardner in his five plate appearances. The homer came on a low, inside offering when Cubs catcher Willson Contreras was set up on the outer part of the plate.

"It was the right pitch, but it wasn't in the right spot," Con-

treras said.

Aroldis Chapman, who received his World Series ring from the Cubs before the game, had to pitch out of trouble in the bottom half. Addison Russell reached second when Headley allowed his leadoff grounder to bounce past him and down the left-field line for an error.

Chapman froze Jason Heyward with a breaking ball for a called third strike, retired Willson Contreras on a grounder to Headley, then struck out Javier Baez on a 100 mph fastball for his seventh save in as many chances.

"Errors are part of the game," Chapman said through a translator. "It's not the first or last time it'll happen. It's going to keep happening. My job is to focus and make sure that runner on second doesn't score."

Jonathan Holder (1-0) pitched a one-hit eighth for his first major league victory, helping combine on a four-hitter.

New York, 1-for-9 with runners in scoring position before Gardner's homer, has won twice when trailing after eight innings, one shy of its total in 2016. At 18-9, the Yankees maintained their AL East lead.

Starlin Castro, traded from the Cubs to the Yankees in December 2015, received a warm ovation from fans and had two hits in his return to Wrigley Field. Castro was thrown out at the plate by Heyward to end the sixth on Headley's fly to right. Contreras hung onto the ball even though he got shaken up when Castro's right shoulder hit his face.

Cubs starter Kyle Hendricks gave up six hits in 5¹/₃ scoreless innings, lowering his ERA from 4.18 to 3.51. He was in position to win before Gardner's hit.

"We've gotten off to a pretty good start here," Yankees manager Joe Girardi said, "but there's a long ways to go."

Mauer's walk-off home run propels Twins past Red Sox

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Joe Mauer pumped his fist as he rounded the bases, a rare show of emotion from one of baseball's most understated veterans.

Hard to blame him when he finally lived out the dream every ball player has growing up. A dream that took 14 years to come to reality.

Mauer hit his first career walk-off homer, a solo shot with two outs in the bottom of the ninth that lifted the Minnesota Twins to a 4-3 victory over the Boston Red Sox on Friday night.

"It was pretty fun," Mauer said. "Only took me 14 years to do it."

Once one of baseball's best hitters, Mauer has been on a steady decline as a hitter since concussion and leg issues started to take their toll in 2013. Few were expecting him to end the game with one swing of the bat when he stepped to the plate

with a .233 average and one homer this season.

Mets 8, Marlins 7: T.J. Rivera homered early and hit a two-run double to tie the score in a five-run seventh inning that rallied host New York past Miami.

Dodgers 8, Padres 2: Rookie Cody Bellinger homered twice and drove in four runs, and Kenta Maeda and five relievers combined on a four-hitter to lead visiting Los Angeles over San Diego.

Nationals 4, Phillies 2: Stephen Strasburg hit his second major league home run and pitched 5²/₃ scoreless innings, leading Washington over host Philadelphia.

Diamondbacks 6, Rockies 3: Paul Goldschmidt homered twice and drove in five runs, helping Zack Greinke and visiting Arizona beat Colorado.

Reds 13, Giants 3: Matt Cain was rocked for nine runs, matching the most he has allowed in the major leagues, and

Jose Peraza drove in a career-high four runs in the first four innings to lead Cincinnati over visiting San Francisco.

Pirates 4, Brewers 0: Josh Bell drove a ball into the Allegheny River on a bounce for his fifth homer, Wade LeBlanc pitched three strong innings after a lengthy rain delay and host Pittsburgh beat Milwaukee.

Rangers 3, Mariners 1 (13): Rougned Odor hit a two-run home run in the 13th inning and Texas got six innings of shutout relief pitching to beat host Seattle.

Astros 7, Angels 6 (10): Carlos Correa singled home Jose Altuve in the 10th inning and visiting Houston blew a four-run lead in the ninth before rallying for a victory over Los Angeles.

Orioles 4, White Sox 2: Gabriel Ynoa pitched six sharp innings after starter Wade Miley was forced out of the game by the impact of two line drives, and Baltimore got a home run

from Chris Davis in a victory over visiting Chicago.

Cardinals 10, Braves 0: Tommy Pham doubled and hit a two-run homer after his recall from the minors, Matt Carpenter also hit a two-run homer and St. Louis overcame injuries to two starting outfielders to beat host Atlanta.

Tigers 7, Athletics 2: Michael Fulmer pitched eight innings of two-run ball after his start was pushed back a day due to rain, Jim Adduci hit a bases-loaded triple and visiting Detroit beat Oakland.

Royals 3, Indians 1: Jason Hammel allowed three hits over six innings for his first win with host Kansas City and Eric Hosmer sent a two-run homer splashing into the fountains behind the fence in right-center field.

Blue Jays 8, Rays 4: Kendrys Morales had two late homers and drove in five runs, helping Toronto rally from a three-run deficit to beat host Tampa Bay.