

STARS AND STRIPES®

Friday, April 13, 2018

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Trump mulls response options on Syria

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Amid escalating global tensions over Syria, President Donald Trump weighed his options for responding — possibly with military strikes — to the Syrian government's suspected chemical weapons attack against civilians. Trump's U.N. ambassador, Nikki Haley, said Friday the president had not yet made a final decision on how and whether to respond.

Trump was expected to consult further with his national security team. Earlier this week, he had tweeted that U.S. missile strikes against Syria could happen "very soon or not so soon at all." On Thursday he met with his National Security Council and spoke by phone with the top leaders of Britain and France, who have indicated they want to punish Syria.

Haley told an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council that should the U.S.

and its allies decide to act in Syria, it will be to defend "a bedrock international norm that benefits all nations" — the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons.

She said Friday that "the United States estimates that (President Bashar) Assad has used chemical weapons in the Syrian war at least 50 times."

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the Middle East is in such "peril" today that it has become a threat to international peace and security — and Syria "represents the most serious threat."

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has said Syria's use of chemical weapons should not be tolerated. And, he adds, although the U.S. has no hard proof, he believes the Syrian government is responsible for Saturday's attack.

But Mattis also has noted the risk of military action and said the U.S. should contin-

ue its policy of not being directly involved in Syria's civil war.

The U.S., France and Britain have been in extensive consultations about launching a military strike as early as the end of this week, U.S. officials have said. A joint military operation, possibly with France rather than the U.S. in the lead, could send a message of international unity about enforcing the prohibitions on chemical weapons.

Trump spoke Thursday with British Prime Minister Theresa May, and the White House said afterward they continued their discussion about the need for a joint response. The White House also confirmed that Trump had spoken with French President Emmanuel Macron.

Macron said Thursday that France has proof the Syrian government launched chlorine gas attacks and said France would not tolerate "regimes that think everything is permitted."

Mattis 'prepared to defend' new transgender plan

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who has faced controversy over a military policy on transgender recruits released recently, said Thursday that he is prepared to defend the new plan.

But Mattis also told the House Armed Services Committee that he will defer to the courts' direction on the matter for now.

The comments are among the latest from a Pentagon official since the White House said last month that it intends to ban, at least partially, transgender people from serving in the military. Pentagon officials mostly have dodged questions on the matter, pointing to several ongoing court cases allowing transgender servicemembers to continue to serve.

"It's a highly charged issue

from some people's perspective and it's under litigation right now," Mattis said during the congressional hearing. "Current policy stays in effect ... as directed by the courts, and I have submitted to the president what I think is the best military advice."

The hearing, which was part of Mattis' wide-ranging testimony before the House committee, was part of an exchange with Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., who rejects the proposal. Speier questioned the proposal's lack of input from medical groups, which refuted its conclusions and said there were no valid medical reasons for the exclusions.

Speier also held up a photograph of Air Force Sgt. Logan Ireland, a transgender servicemember who was named noncommissioned officer of the quarter during a deployment to Afghanistan.

"You rolled out this new policy and now you are basically saying, 'I'm not prepared to defend it,'" Speier said.

Mattis rejected Speier's claim. He said officials looked at enlistment standards and gave a recommendation that troops who do not have gender dysphoria should be allowed to serve.

Under former President Barack Obama's last defense secretary, Ash Carter, the Pentagon opened military service to all transgender people in June 2016, largely based on a study that it commissioned from the think tank Rand Corp. The organization estimated there were between 4,000 and 12,000 transgender troops on active duty and in the reserves.

In Mattis' recommendation, released publicly last month in a 48-page document alongside the White House announcement March 23, the defense

secretary proposed banning any individuals from serving who have histories or diagnoses of gender dysphoria except in certain cases.

"I'm prepared to defend it. But out of respect for the courts, I do not intrude," Mattis told Speier. "It was the best military advice I could derive from civilian overseers and military personnel."

Across the Capitol Hill complex Thursday, Army officials testified before a Senate committee that they had not seen any issues with unit cohesion as a result of open transgender service.

"Nothing has percolated up to my level," Army Secretary Mark Esper testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Stars and Stripes reporter Corey Dickstein contributed to this report.

Recruiting women could address shortfalls

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Recruiting more women into the military could address the dwindling percentage of eligible candidates for service, a congresswoman said Friday.

With military leadership citing data showing the proportion of eligible prospects for service in the younger population has dropped to about 1 in 4, Rep. Niki Tsongas, D-Mass., said women still represent a minority in the U.S. armed forces. She said recruiting woes could be tackled in part by targeting women because more than half of them are eligible to serve.

“The volatile nature of today’s security environment and the complexity of threats our country faces do require the military services to recruit from a talent pool that is as broad, as talented and as diverse as possible,” Tsongas said during a House Armed

Services Committee subpanel hearing on military personnel issues. “There’s much to be done. But we want to have the best service as possible. So we need to recruit fully from all that this country offers.”

The comments, which were part of a wide-ranging hearing for the military personnel subcommittee, also could play into the development of the next National Defense Authorization Act, which directs policy and spending plans for the Defense Department.

Rep. Mike Coffman, R-Colo., chairman of the subcommittee on military personnel, said each branch of service must be innovative to overcome their recruiting challenges. The Army, specifically, has found only about 1 in 4 people between the ages of 17 and 24 is eligible to enroll with the service, and only 1 in 8 has the propensity to enlist.

“With the difficult recruiting-and-retention environment driven by a lessened overall propensity to serve, (a) reduced pool of qualified candidates and a robust economy, the competition for recruits will be difficult and you will all be competing for the same pool,” Coffman said.

The personnel chiefs for each service testifying at Friday’s hearing said they are focusing more efforts on recruiting women, displaying women more prominently in marketing campaigns and reaching out in new places, such as female athletic programs.

“We have gone places that we haven’t gone in the past,” said Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Michael Rocco, deputy commandant for manpower and reserve affairs. And “we have been more aggressive in displaying a diverse Marine Corps.”

Tsongas pointed to a recent

report from Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, or DACOWITS, that found only 29 percent of people ages 18 to 23 are eligible to serve after adjustments are made for disqualifications based on standards for medical, physical health, weight, mental health, drug use, aptitude and other concerns. Of that remaining eligible population, more than half are women, yet women constitute less than 20 percent of today’s active-duty force, Tsongas said.

“In an era where the eligible military recruiting population remains on the decline, it is more important now than ever that we recruit from the entire population, and not overlook the opportunity that half of the eligible nation’s talent pool would provide the services,” she said.

The service personnel chiefs said they are seeing improvements.

Mattis sees DOD contribution to border wall as small

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis on Thursday said any portion of the military’s budget used to cover President Donald Trump’s proposed wall along the U.S.-Mexico border might amount only to fencing structures along nearby bombing ranges.

The military could fund the wall effort for “probably the part, where if I need to ... put a fence along a bombing range that’s right next to the border,” Mattis said. “This is a safety consideration. I don’t care who they are, they are human beings. I don’t want them wandering into a bombing range that was active.”

The comments were made during a wide-ranging discussion before the House Armed Services Committee that included the controversial proposal to have the military pay for Trump’s ambitious plan to build a wall along the southern

border — one of the president’s central campaign promises. Some lawmakers have questioned whether such an effort is legally plausible, while some experts have said the answer lies in an extensive review of appropriations law.

“Build WALL through M!” Trump tweeted last month, followed by media reports confirming with White House sources that “M” stood for military.

Soon after, Trump, frustrated with inaction over his demands for a border wall, issued an April 4 memorandum requesting state governors to deploy National Guard troops to the southern border until the wall is built. All four border states — Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California — have since pledged more than 2,000 troops combined to provide border security assistance in the coming weeks.

Trump’s request was issued under Title 32 of the U.S. Code, which designates a state-led op-

eration that is federally funded. It has been used by prior administrations: More than 6,000 National Guard members were deployed in 2006 under former President George W. Bush, while 1,200 were dispatched under former President Barack Obama in 2010.

Rep. Beto O’Rourke, D-Texas, brought up concerns about the wall and the new deployment Thursday that were echoed in a letter from several House Democrats to Mattis and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen. O’Rourke said recent data rebuke Trump’s claims that the border is becoming increasingly unsafe.

The Department of Homeland Security said in December that arrests for illegal border crossings had reached a 46-year low.

“This is a grave mistake on the part of this country ... given everything else we are talking about, all of our other challenges and threats and priorities around the world,” O’Rourke

said. “I think this is a gross waste of taxpayer resources. I think this is a wasted opportunity in terms of what those servicemembers could be doing.”

Mattis said 800 troops had been deployed so far in the effort, and another 700 could be deployed in the next wave to assist with aerial and observation support. While Mattis said he’s in constant contact with Department of Homeland Security and Customs and Border Enforcement officials, a series of questions still dominate the mission, such as costs and extent of time the troops will be deployed.

“I cannot tell you the cost yet, sir,” Mattis told O’Rourke.

However, Mattis emphasized the troops will not be involved with arrests.

“These forces will not involve themselves with the migrants themselves or have any law enforcement duties,” he said.

In book, Comey likens Trump to mob boss

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former FBI Director James Comey blasts President Donald Trump as unethical and “untethered to truth” in a sharply critical, new book that describes Trump as fixated in the early days of his administration on having the FBI debunk salacious rumors he insisted were untrue but could distress his wife.

In the forthcoming book, Comey compares Trump to a mafia don and calls his leadership of the country “ego driven and about personal loyalty.”

He also reveals new details about his interactions with Trump and his own decision-making in handling the Hillary

Clinton email investigation before the 2016 election. He casts Trump as a mobster-like figure who sought to blur the line between law enforcement and politics and tried to pressure him personally regarding his investigation into Russian election interference.

The book adheres closely to Comey’s public testimony and written statements about his contacts with Trump and his growing concern about Trump’s integrity. It also includes strikingly personal jabs at Trump that appear sure to irritate the president.

The 6-foot-8 Comey describes Trump as shorter than he expected with a “too long” tie and “bright white half-moons”

under his eyes that he suggests came from tanning goggles. He also says he made a conscious effort to check the president’s hand size, saying it was “smaller than mine but did not seem unusually so.”

The book, “A Higher Loyalty,” is to be released next week. The Associated Press purchased a copy this week.

“Donald Trump’s presidency threatens much of what is good in this nation,” Comey writes, calling the administration a “forest fire” that can’t be contained by ethical leaders within the government.

On a more personal level, Comey describes Trump’s repeatedly asking him to consider investigating an allegation in-

volving Trump and Russian prostitutes urinating on a bed in a Moscow hotel, in order to prove it was a lie. Trump has denied the allegation strongly, and Comey says that it appeared the president wanted it investigated to reassure his wife, Melania Trump.

Trump fired Comey in May 2017, setting off a scramble at the Justice Department that led to the appointment of Robert Mueller as special counsel overseeing the Russia investigation. Mueller’s probe has expanded to include whether Trump obstructed justice by firing Comey, which the president denies.

Trump has assailed Comey as a “showboat” and a “liar.”

IG report disputes VA claims on delays

By NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Department of Veterans Affairs documents detail seven canceled procedures caused by supply shortages in February and March at the VA hospital in Washington, contrary to the agency’s claims that the last one was in January.

The documents, newly obtained by Stars and Stripes, outline seven instances in which procedures were delayed or postponed because of supply shortages at the agency’s flagship hospital — four in February and three in March.

In one case last month, a 69-year-old veteran was under anesthesia and a surgeon made an incision for his hip implant before medical workers realized they didn’t have the correct supplies — nails for the implant were mismatched. The procedure eventually was completed, but the mix-up led to the veteran being under sedation 30 minutes longer than expected. The VA launched a patient safety report, and the incident will go under peer review.

The VA Officer of the Inspector General issued early findings in April 2017 of its investigation into the District of Columbia hospital, which serves about 93,000 veterans, revealing widespread problems that put veterans at risk. Inspectors found multiple procedures that were canceled because of a lack of supplies.

In response to questions from Stars and Stripes about whether the problems were fixed, the VA claimed last week that the most recent canceled procedure because of supply shortages occurred in January. In

that instance, the VA blamed delays at the Federal Express sorting station as the reason the hospital didn’t have the necessary supplies.

“The last canceled procedure due to equipment/supply shortages occurred in January 2018,” VA press secretary Curt Cashour said in a written statement.

In response to questions Thursday about the incidents in February and March, the VA claimed there were no procedures delayed or rescheduled because of a lack of supplies. Instead, Cashour argued that six procedures were rescheduled during those two months because of “minor equipment sterilization issues.”

The House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs is aware of cases of canceled procedures at the Washington hospital after January, said Tiffany Haverly, committee spokeswoman.

According to a VA list of canceled procedures at the hospital, three dental procedures were delayed in February because of unavailable supplies. One procedure was postponed for two weeks. Another was pushed back 48 days and the other 51 days.

A colon surgery was canceled in February because of missing supplies and was rescheduled for the following day.

VA reports show that problems with supply shortages at the hospital continued into March. In one case, a 54-year-old veteran arrived at the hospital for a hip replacement. While he was in the waiting room, medical workers discovered their equipment wasn’t sterile. The procedure was rescheduled for the following week.

Cohen tries to stop use of materials seized in FBI raid

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President Donald Trump’s personal attorney, Michael Cohen, is trying to prevent the government from using materials the FBI seized in a search of his office and residence this week.

A federal prosecutor’s office said a hearing has been scheduled before U.S. District Judge Kimba Wood for Friday morning to address a temporary restraining order related to the judicial warrant that authorized the search.

Federal agents raided Cohen’s Manhattan office, home and hotel room Monday, seizing records on a variety of subjects, including payments that were made in 2016 to women who might have damaging information about Trump.

FBI and Justice Department officials in Washington and New York have refused to discuss the case publicly or to say what crimes they are investigating, but people familiar with the investigation have told The Associated Press the search warrant used in the raids sought bank records, business records on Cohen’s dealing in the taxi industry, Cohen’s communications with the Trump campaign and information on payments made to a former Playboy model and a porn actress who say they had affairs with Trump.

Those people spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the confidential details.

Live rounds fired at Gaza protest; 1 killed

Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — Thousands of Palestinians staged a mass protest along Gaza's sealed border with Israel on Friday, some burning large Israeli flags and torching tires while soldiers fired tear gas and live bullets from across the border fence.

Gaza health officials said Israeli live fire killed a 28-year-old Palestinian man and wounded at least 163, in the third large-scale protest in as many consecutive Fridays. Such weekly demonstrations are to continue to mid-May, keeping tensions high along the volatile border.

The health officials said that among those hurt Friday was a Gaza journalist who was in serious condition with a bullet wound in the abdomen. Since late March, 28 Palestinians, in-

cluding a journalist, have been killed and hundreds wounded by Israeli army fire in such rallies.

Rights groups have described the Israeli military's open-fire regulations as unlawful, saying they permit soldiers to use potentially lethal force against unarmed protesters. Israel has accused Gaza's Islamic militant Hamas rulers of using the protests as a cover for attacks and says snipers target only the main "instigators."

Israel's military estimated that about 10,000 Palestinians participated in protests Friday, saying it was a lower turnout than in the previous two weeks.

On Friday, most of the demonstrators assembled at five tent camps located several hundred yards from the border fence.

Smaller groups moved closer to the fence, throwing stones, torching tires and burning large Israeli and U.S. flags, as well as posters of Israel's prime minister and defense minister. Large plumes of black smoke from burning tires rose into the sky.

Israeli forces fired tear gas, rubber-coated steel pellets and live rounds. Military spokesman Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus said Palestinians repeatedly tried to damage the border fence, throwing several explosives and fire bombs at it. Footage distributed by the military showed an area of the fence made up of several layers of barbed-wire coils. Protesters stuck a Palestinian flag into the fence and affixed a rope, using it to tug at the coils. One man threw a burning tire into the fence, while another was seen

walking nearby with the help of a crutch.

The marches have been organized by Hamas, but large turnouts on two preceding Fridays were also driven by desperation among the territory's 2 million residents. Gaza has endured a border blockade by Israel and Egypt since Hamas overran the territory in 2007, a year after winning Palestinian parliament elections.

The blockade has driven Gaza deeper into poverty, with unemployment approaching 50 percent and electricity available for less than five hours a day.

The marchers are protesting against the blockade but are also asserting what they say is the "right of return" of Palestinian refugees and their descendants to what is now Israel.

Over 1K militants buried in grave outside Mosul

Associated Press

MOSUL, Iraq — Authorities in Mosul have buried more than 1,000 bodies in a mass grave in a desert valley outside the city, most of them believed to be Islamic State militants, according to a provincial official. More remains are being dug out of the rubble of the district where the fighters made their final stand last year.

Hundreds more bodies are still strewn across or buried in Maydan district nine months after it was flattened in the final battles to retake Mosul, creating one of the grimmest scenes from a brutal war that was compared to the worst urban combat of World War II.

During a recent visit by The Associated Press, pieces of desiccated bodies, often in shreds of fighters' uniforms, were visible scattered in the ruins, which are also laced with unexploded bombs and unused suicide belts. In one place, the crown of a skull stuck out of the dirt, brilliant white with a fringe of leathery scalp and hair. One man lay

crushed under the wreck of a car, his legs sticking up in the air.

Most of the bodies appeared to belong to ISIS fighters killed by airstrikes or shelling, their remains half-buried. But there were also women and small children. The body of a baby girl turned ghoulish brown lay on the balcony of a half-collapsed building, covered by bits of rubble.

The scene is testimony to Iraqi authorities' lack of resources and the overwhelming task they face in just digging out from the destruction wreaked across Mosul in the nine-month offensive by Iraqi forces backed by the U.S.-led coalition that finally defeated ISIS here. Multiple neighborhoods suffered heavy damage.

Clearing of rubble is largely financed by the United Nations' development agency, and repairs are proceeding slowly. In some areas, streets have been cleared but many buildings remain shattered.

Maydan is at a further disadvantage because Iraqi officials

don't appear to see removing bodies of ISIS fighters as a high priority. The provincial council's office told the AP that clearing the area was the job of the civil defense; the civil defense said it was the job of the morgue; the head of the morgue declined to comment.

Faris Abdulrazzaq, mayor of Maydan, said the failure to clear the area — not just the bodies but also the huge amount of unexploded ordnance — was preventing residents from returning to rebuild what they can, as others have in other districts.

"Even when you pass by a dead cat, you feel the smell and you try to get rid of it. How do you think hundreds of dead bodies smell?" he said. "I wonder why all these government officials are leaving this problem to fester all this time. This is the first thing they should take care of."

He expressed fears over the health impact of the bodies. The World Health Organization has often noted that even large numbers of bodies left after a

disaster do not pose a major health risk since the victims die of trauma not epidemic, and bacteria involved in decomposition are not dangerous.

But the stench of decay rising from the ruins is oppressive, and temperatures are now starting to rise into the upper 80s Fahrenheit.

Even by the awful standards of Mosul, the devastation is shocking in this part of the Old City, stretching roughly a half-mile along the Tigris River. The piles of dirt, rubble, smashed concrete, metal and vehicle skeletons are so high that it is barely possible in many places to tell where the streets ended and the buildings once began.

Iraqi and U.S.-led coalition forces dropped vast amounts of explosives on this small area to break ISIS fighters' resistance last July in the last weeks of the nine-month-long assault that freed Mosul from the militant group's rule. The fighters held out the longest in Maydan, a neighborhood of tiny, winding alleyways and closely built homes.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Puppy eats pot at park, nearly dies

WA SEATTLE — A Washington woman is warning others after her puppy nearly died after eating marijuana in a public park.

KOMO-TV reported that Hannah Puzas, of Seattle, on Monday took her French bulldog, Jacques, to the Woodland off-leash area near Green Lake.

Puzas said all of sudden the puppy became lethargic and shaky, acting as though he were drunk. Eventually, he started leaking urine.

Puzas rushed him to Emerald City Emergency Clinic, where the veterinarian told her Jacques most likely ate marijuana left in the park.

The veterinarian treated Jacques with fluids and activated charcoal, and he made a rapid recovery.

Dr. Clare Foley, veterinarian at Emerald City, said ingesting marijuana can be fatal for dogs.

Handwritten note lands man VW bus

NY LINDENHURST — A man has the car of his dreams eight years after he slipped a note inside the window of a blue 1971 Volkswagen bus that the then-16-year-old called his “future car.”

Kyle Cropsey, of Lindenhurst, received a call last week from Cris Mead, of Oakland, Calif. Mead’s father, Cornelius, had purchased the van new and named it Matilda.

The son was cleaning it out after his father’s death when he came across Cropsey’s note tucked in the VW’s log book.

Cris Mead told Newsday the family decided to give Cropsey the van on the condition he up-

date them on its restoration and “go on plenty of adventures.”

Cropsey, who is 23 and teaches English, said “it was fate.”

Senate OKs chicken as official poultry

NH CONCORD — A chicken known for its intelligence, resilience and ability to withstand cold winters is a step closer to becoming the official state poultry of New Hampshire.

The state Senate on Thursday passed a bill to designate the New Hampshire Red as the state’s official poultry on the recommendation of fourth-graders from Canaan Elementary School. Supporters say it’s a good choice because the bird’s intelligence and other qualities are representative of New Hampshire residents.

The bill has already passed the House and now goes to Republican Gov. Chris Sununu, who supports it.

Mower, tooth, Vishnu doll seen in beach trash

NJ POINT PLEASANT BEACH — The bizarre trash items plucked from New Jersey’s beaches last year might be enough to cause nausea or heartburn. But don’t worry, a bottle of Pepto-Bismol also was collected.

Among the items listed by a New Jersey environmental group were a lawn mower, a saw blade, an empty medical marijuana container, a strobe light and two fire extinguishers.

Other items included a plastic statue of the Hindu god Vishnu, a cheese grater and a human tooth in a box.

Cindy Zipf, of Clean Ocean Action, said Thursday most of the trash consisted of plastics, which can kill fish and animals that swallow it.

Woman won’t sing anthem due to gun ban

NV RENO — A Nevada woman has declined a spot to sing the national anthem before a Reno Aces baseball game this summer because the team won’t let her bring her gun.

Singer Alishia Wolcott told The Reno Gazette Journal she received her concealed weapons permit earlier this year and planned to bring her 9 mm for protection after being offered a chance to sing the anthem.

Wolcott said she wears the gun or keeps it in a purse because she doesn’t feel safe walking at night in downtown Reno, where the stadium is located.

The team had previously banned weapons but is now requiring everyone to be checked with handheld metal detectors before entering the ballpark.

Reno Aces Baseball Club President Eric Edelstein did not respond to a message seeking comment.

Marijuana among drift material in surf line

CA SANTA BARBARA — A new kind of seaweed has been found along a Southern California beach.

KEYT-TV reported marijuana has been washing ashore on Santa Barbara’s West Beach.

The station said a viewer made them aware of social media video showing two men collecting pot buds among drift material in the surf line between Sea Landing and Stearns Wharf on April 7.

The Harbor Patrol first learned of the situation on March 31, when a dredge company called to report seeing what looked like marijuana floating in the water.

Harbor Patrol Supervisor Erik Engberetson said some of the marijuana was picked up and disposed of.

Workers find art in wall of artist’s house

ID BOISE — Workers restoring the Boise house of artist James Castle discovered a trove of art hidden in a wall.

KTVB-TV reported the crews found 11 art pieces that likely have been in the walls of the now-museum and art gallery for decades.

House Manager Rachel Reichert said the collection is valued at more than \$1 million.

Project architect Byron Fowell said it wasn’t immediately clear what was inside the wall as the works were covered in a dark fabric and topped with cobwebs.

Reichert said the discovery will aid in the restoration as one of the works shows part of the home’s interior that the crews have been trying to re-create.

The city is nearing completion on the restoration of the home of the Idaho artist, who died in 1977.

Report of tiger causes social media frenzy

NY NEW YORK — A false report of a tiger in the streets of Manhattan briefly caused a social media frenzy.

WNBC said the New York Police Department got a call at about 8:30 a.m. Thursday about a tiger in Harlem.

Shortly thereafter, police confirmed that there was indeed a wild-animal sighting.

It was a raccoon.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

On a mission to provide credible reporting and daily news to America’s military, wherever they serve.

Mobile apps available: www.stripes.com/apps.

Roundup

Panarin's goal in OT lifts Blue Jackets

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Columbus Blue Jackets went down two goals and three forwards and left with a Game 1 victory.

Artemi Panarin scored a beautiful goal 6:02 into overtime to give the Blue Jackets a 4-3 victory over the Washington Capitals on Thursday night in the first-round playoff series.

Panarin won it after Columbus lost Josh Anderson to a game misconduct, Alexander Wennberg with an apparent head injury and captain Nick Foligno after taking a puck to the face.

None of that seemed to faze a team accustomed to overcoming injuries and digging out of deficits.

"In the playoffs, you find a little bit of extra energy," said Blue Jackets forward Thomas Vanek, who scored from Wennberg's spot on the power play and had an assist. "That tonight was one of those games where we talked to each other, we pumped each other up, we felt good and it never felt like we were going to lose this one."

Maybe the Blue Jackets didn't, but they didn't make it easy on themselves, falling behind 2-0 on power-play goals by Evgeny Kuznetsov, who scored on Anderson's five-minute major penalty for boarding and injuring Washington's Michal Kempny. Not letting the game snowball out of con-

trol allowed Columbus to claw back in it with Wennberg's goal in the second and then Vanek's on the power play early in the third.

Bruins 5, Maple Leafs 1: Brad Marchand, David Backes and David Krejci each scored a power-play goal, and Tuukka Rask stopped 26 shots to lead host Boston over Toronto in Game 1 of their first-round Eastern Conference playoff series.

David Pastrnak also scored for Boston, and Sean Kuraly bunted one out of the air and into the net over goalie Frederik Andersen to make it 4-1 with seven minutes gone in the third period. Krejci bounced it in off Andersen from behind to make it 5-1 after Toronto's Nazem Kadri was thrown out of the game and given a five-minute major for an elbow to Tommy Wingels' head.

Zach Hyman scored Toronto's only goal, and Andersen made 35 saves.

Lightning 5, Devils 2: Eastern Conference top seed Tampa Bay got early goals from four players — none of them named Nikita Kucherov or Steven Stamkos — before holding off visiting New Jersey in Game 1 of the first-round series.

Ondrej Palat, Tyler Johnson and Yanni Gourde scored, helping the Lightning build a 3-0 lead that New Jersey trimmed to one goal before Alex Killorn and Kucherov, who added an empty-netter with 1:12

remaining, finished off the win.

Taylor Hall scored an unassisted goal in the second period, then assisted on Travis Zajac's power-play goal that trimmed the Devils' deficit to 3-2 midway through third against Andrei Vasilevskiy, who had 29 saves for Tampa Bay.

Sharks 3, Ducks 0: Evander Kane scored two goals in his first career playoff game and Martin Jones made 25 saves as visiting San Jose beat Anaheim in their first-round series opener.

Brent Burns also scored and captain Joe Pavelski had two assists during a three-goal second period to help the Sharks easily take early control in the series between California rivals. San Jose and Anaheim have been regular playoff teams for the past 15 years, yet are meeting in the post-season for only the second time.

Predators 5, Avalanche 2: Filip Forsberg scored twice in the third period and host Nashville rallied to beat Colorado in Game 1 of the first-round Western Conference series.

The Predators were ready for a big party, having won their first Presidents' Trophy and looking for the Stanley Cup lost in six games to Pittsburgh last June.

Pekka Rinne made 25 saves, including a handful on Colorado's Hart Trophy candidate Nathan MacKinnon.

Lue: Cavs to use 10-man rotation in playoffs

Associated Press

INDEPENDENCE, Ohio — With the playoffs just days away, Cleveland Cavaliers coach Tyronn Lue typically would have his lineup rotations set by now.

Nothing has been typical about this season for the Cavs.

Lue said Thursday that he plans to use a 10-player rotation for Cleveland's opening-round series against the Indiana Pacers, but that things could change depending on injuries, matchups and performances.

"I will play 10," Lue said after the Cavaliers watched film on the Pacers, who went 3-1 against Cleveland this season. "We'll just see how it looks and if one guy is not great this round, then it might be nine."

Lue and his staff have been juggling lineups and using different combinations on the floor for months, forced to adjust and re-adjust, first because of injuries and then by trades that transformed the team.

Lue refused to name his full starting

lineup for Sunday's Game 1. He revealed previously that four of them will be LeBron James, Kevin Love, Jeff Green and George Hill. The other spot could go to veteran shooter Kyle Korver, who has been slowed by a foot injury and whose status remains uncertain.

"He's getting better," Lue said of Korver, who also missed time recently following his brother's death. "I'm not sure if he's 100 percent yet, but he's getting better and that's all you can ask for."

If Korver isn't ready, Rodney Hood, one of four players acquired at the trade deadline, will likely start. He's been slowed by a sore left Achilles, but Lue said Hood's "ready to go."

As for Cleveland's reserves, Jordan Clarkson, J.R. Smith and Jose Calderon are in the rotational mix, with forwards Tristan Thompson and Larry Nance Jr. being used depending on whom Indiana has on the floor.

One of the holdovers from Cleveland's

past three Finals teams, Thompson played extended minutes in the second half of Wednesday's loss to New York while Nance rested, a sign that Lue might be leaning toward him playing more.

Thompson was excused from Thursday's practice because of the birth of his daughter.

Lue trusts all his players. He's had no choice following a turbulent regular season in which he didn't always know who would be available until moments before tipoff. But Lue has depth and intends to use it.

Hill, who has plenty of playoff experience with San Antonio, Indiana and Utah, said Cleveland's versatility may give the Cavs an advantage.

"I've been on a team that played a 10-man rotation in the playoffs, but I haven't been on a team this deep, so I think we'll have a lot of great guys that we can throw out there on the court with big lineups, small lineups," he said. "I think we can play any type of style."

Ohtani's three-run triple lifts Angels

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Shohei Ohtani had to get a new bat for his triple that broke open the game.

Ohtani tripled with the bases loaded in a five-run seventh inning to help the streaking Los Angeles Angels beat the Kansas City Royals 7-1 on Thursday night for their fifth straight victory.

Ohtani gave one of his bats to a 6-year-old boy, Leo Guastello, who boldly asked for it before the game when the two-way rookie star from Japan was signing autographs.

"He looked really sad when he was asking me," Ohtani said through a translator. "He really wanted that bat, so I gave it to him. Hopefully he can swing the bat and become a good player someday, but I can't be doing this all the time or I'll run out of bats."

Mike Trout homered for the Angels, and Ian Kinsler went deep on his first swing in his return to the lineup. Nick Tro-

peano (1-0) pitched shutout ball into the seventh for his first major league win since 2016.

Kole Calhoun had a two-run single in the seventh for Los Angeles, which has won eight of nine.

With two strikes, Ohtani drove a 97 mph fastball from Brandon Maurer to right-center for his first major league triple, scoring Calhoun, Andrelton Simmons and Luis Valbuena.

"The outfielders were playing in, so I knew once it got past them," Ohtani said. "I wasn't sitting only on a changeup. He made that pitch really good previously, so I had that in my head. He has a really good, firm fastball, so I was ready for that, too."

The Royals had walked Ohtani intentionally in the sixth with first base open and Simmons on second.

Ohtani is tied with Trout for the Angels' lead with 11 RBIs — in 26 at-bats. Trout went 3-for-4 with his fifth home run and has 55 at-bats.

Kinsler led off the game with

a home run for the 47th time in his career, driving a 1-0 pitch from Ian Kennedy (1-1) out to left. Kinsler missed the previous 11 games with an adductor strain.

"Looking at video, they score a ton of runs," Kennedy said. "They're a veteran lineup. They're aggressive, but they're selective in certain situations, too. You have to make your pitches. They have plenty of guys in the lineup that can hurt you with base hits, with power. Ohtani is their eighth hitter and he's pretty good."

Tropeano, making his first big league appearance since July 18, 2016, limited the Royals to six hits over 6 2/3 scoreless innings. He had elbow surgery in August 2016 and missed last season.

Tropeano threw 88 pitches, struck out six and walked two.

"A year and a half watching all your buddies play and all I wanted to do was compete," Tropeano said. "I just wanted to leave it all out on the field."

Kennedy was removed after

six innings and 100 pitches. He allowed seven hits but just the one run on Kinsler's homer.

The Royals, who have lost eight of 11, have scored a total of 32 runs this season — and 10 of those came in Monday's victory over Seattle.

Lucas Duda singled home Mike Moustakas, who doubled, with two outs in the eighth for Kansas City.

Lineup changes

Royals DH Whit Merrifield hit fifth for the second time in his career. He batted second in the first 10 games of the season. "Whit has been a good table-setter, now let's see if we can take him from a table-setter to a table-cleaner-upper," manager Ned Yost said. Jorge Soler replaced Merrifield in the 2-hole and struck out four times. Merrifield went 0 for 4 and stranded three runners. ... Angels INF Zack Cozart, who had started the first 13 games, 12 at second base, was given the night off.

MLB roundup

Red Sox's Porcello returns to old form against Yanks

Associated Press

BOSTON — Rick Porcello looks a lot more like the pitcher who won the 2016 AL Cy Young Award than the one who lost 17 games last year.

That is one welcome development for the Boston Red Sox.

Porcello pitched seven scoreless innings, Mookie Betts drove in two runs and the Red Sox beat the New York Yankees 6-3 on Thursday night.

Porcello stayed in after a 45-minute rain delay and was working on a no-hitter before Aaron Judge's leadoff double in the seventh. He struck out six and walked none in his third straight win to begin the year.

"It seemed like he threw everything where he wanted to throw it," Boston first baseman Mitch Moreland said. "It's fun

playing behind a guy when he's going like that. Rick's great. He was on display tonight."

The 29-year-old Porcello downplayed the significance of the delay between the fifth and sixth innings.

"I felt great," he said. "Honestly, it wasn't a big deal at all. I went back out there for the sixth and felt fine."

One night after the benches cleared twice and the longtime rivals brawled during New York's 10-7 win, there were no such incidents in the finale of the three-game set. Boston slugger Hanley Ramirez departed with a bruised wrist after he was hit by a pitch in the first, but everyone stayed in their respective dugouts.

In the bottom of the second inning, Andrew Benintendi

hit a grounder right at second baseman Tyler Wade, whose throw to home got past Gary Sanchez and allowed Sandy Leon to score. Moreland followed with a single to score Brock Holt and put the Red Sox up 4-0 before Yankees starter Sonny Gray finally got out of the inning.

Cardinals 13, Reds 4: Jose Martinez drove in six runs and Yadier Molina homered in his return from a one-game suspension, powering visiting St. Louis to a victory that left Cincinnati mired in its worst start since 1955.

Twins 4, White Sox 0: Joe Mauer reached 2,000 career hits, Jose Berrios struck out 11 in seven innings and host Minnesota earned its third straight win.

Pirates 6, Cubs 1: Gregory Polanco homered twice to help back a third straight solid start by Trevor Williams, and visiting Pittsburgh pulled away from Chicago.

Rockies 5, Nationals 1: DJ LeMahieu hit two home runs and drove in a career-high four runs, powering visiting Colorado past Washington.

Indians 9, Tigers 3: Francisco Lindor hit a leadoff homer and drove in three runs, helping host Cleveland to its 11th consecutive victory against the Tigers.

Giants 7, Padres 0: Chris Stratton and Derek Law combined on a one-hitter, and Hunter Pence's broken-bat, two-run bloop single highlighted a three-run first inning for visiting San Francisco.

Vegas takes Wilson No. 1 in WNBA draft

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A’ja Wilson is thrilled for the chance to head to Las Vegas.

The South Carolina star was the No. 1 pick in the WNBA draft by the Aces on Thursday night.

“It’s such a great feeling, just an amazing way to cap off my collegiate career,” Wilson said. “My heart was pounding before she announced the pick.”

The 6-foot-5 star admitted she has only been there once, but already knows the Nevada city slogan.

“What happens in Sin City stays in Sin City,” Wilson said laughing.

The Aces, who moved to Las Vegas from San Antonio this past winter, had the first pick for the second straight season.

Ohio State’s Kelsey Mitchell went second to the Indiana Fever. Indiana also took Victoria Vivians with the eighth pick, giving coach Pokey Chatman a strong young core to build around.

The Chicago Sky took Diamond

DeShields, who spent the season playing professionally in Turkey, and Gabby Williams of Connecticut with the next two picks.

“I’m excited to see what we can do,” DeShields said.

UCLA guard Jordin Canada was selected fifth by the Seattle Storm. She’ll get a chance to learn from Sue Bird.

“I love Sue Bird, she’s one of my role models,” Canada said.

Azura Stevens, who decided to forego her final year of eligibility at UConn, was taken sixth by Dallas. Washington drafted Ariel Atkins of Texas seventh. Lexie Brown was picked ninth by Connecticut.

New York took Kia Nurse 10th, marking the third UConn player to be taken in the opening round. It’s the second time in three seasons that three Huskies were drafted in the first round. UConn players went 1-2-3 in 2016.

“It’s really cool that we were all here for each other,” Williams said.

Los Angeles drafted 19-year-old Russian star Maria Vadeeva with the 11th pick. She’s the first foreign player who didn’t play at an American college to be taken in the first round since 2012.

Marie Gulich of Oregon State was drafted by Phoenix to close out the first round.

UCLA’s Monique Billings was the final player invited to the draft to be taken. She went with the 15th pick to Atlanta. The Dream had traded for that pick earlier in the day, sending Bria Holmes to the Connecticut Sun.

“I wasn’t nervous, I knew that I would be drafted,” Billings said.

The draft was held at Nike’s New York headquarters. The athletic apparel company is a global partner and outfitter for the WNBA this season. They unveiled the new WNBA uniforms earlier Thursday.

Training camps open up on April 29 and the 22nd season of the WNBA begins play on May 18.

Briefly

Cowboys release WR Bryant after 8 seasons

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — The Dallas Cowboys have released Dez Bryant, deciding salary cap relief with the star receiver’s declining production outweighs the risk of him returning to All-Pro form with another team.

Cowboys owner and general manager Jerry Jones said in a statement Friday it wasn’t an easy decision, but was what the organization believes is in its best interest.

Bryant never lived up to the \$70 million, five-year contract he signed after leading the NFL with 16 touchdowns receiving in 2014.

Bryant sent a tweet late Friday morning addressing Cowboys fans to say he had met with Jones.

“Cowboy nation I need you to know this wasn’t my decision.. I will always love y’all... forever Dallas in my heart,” he tweeted.

That came only minutes after he tweeted, “lets start the process.”

Stars coach Hitchcock retiring after 22 years

Dallas Stars coach Ken Hitchcock is retiring, ending a 22-year career as the third-winningest coach in NHL history.

Hitchcock will become a consultant for the team he led to its only Stanley Cup championship in 1999. The 66-year-old says it was “the right time to step away and let the younger generation of coaches take over.”

Hitchcock returned to Dallas this season after 15 years away, with stops in Philadelphia, Columbus and St. Louis. General manager Jim Nill hoped Hitchcock could get the Stars back to the playoffs, but a late-season slump kept them out for the second straight year and the eighth time in 10 seasons.

Hitchcock’s 823 wins are third all-time behind Scotty Bowman and Joel Quenneville. He’s fourth in games with 1,536.

Hornets fire Clifford after 5 seasons

The Hornets have fired coach Steve Clifford after the team failed to reach the playoffs for the third time in the last four seasons.

The move comes after a meeting with new general manager Mitch Kupchak on Friday.

Charlotte finished 36-46 despite what Clifford on Wednesday called his most talented team. Clifford missed 21 games this season because of headaches stemming from sleep deprivation. He acknowledged that the Hornets “didn’t make good progress” this year.

The Hornets were 196-214 in five seasons under Clifford. They reached the playoffs twice, but failed to make it out of the first round in 2014 and 2016.

Clifford is the third NBA coach to be dismissed since the end of the regular season, following New York’s Jeff Hornacek and Frank Vogel of Orlando.

Tony Stewart, Ward family settle lawsuit

UTICA, N.Y. — Tony Stewart and the parents of Kevin Ward Jr. have agreed to settle a wrongful death lawsuit filed against the former NASCAR star for his role in the death of their son.

Minor stipulations remain to be settled and details of the agreement were not divulged at Thursday’s hearing in federal court before Judge David Hurd. A jury trial had been set to begin May 7.

The 20-year-old Ward was killed Aug. 9, 2014, during a sprint car race on dirt at Canandaigua Motorsports Park in New York.

Ward crashed after contact with Stewart’s car. He climbed out onto the dimly lit track while the race was under caution. One car appeared to swerve to avoid Ward, but he was struck by the back right tire of Stewart’s car and died of blunt force trauma.