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Trump's threat to leave summit tempers hopes

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — President Donald Trump threatened to walk away from the summit with North Korea if the talks aren't "fruitful," underscoring the fragile nature of a burst of diplomacy aimed at ridding the communist state of its nuclear weapons.

His comments tempered growing optimism as U.S. and South Korean officials have raised expectations from hopes that the North would join the Olympics earlier this year to an agreement to discuss denuclearization and the possibility of a peace treaty to formally end the 1950-53 Korean War.

The president's decision to send CIA Director Mike Pompeo on a clandestine mission to Pyongyang over Easter weekend boosted confidence that the sides were sincere about holding the first U.S.-North Korean summit in coming weeks. Trump has said it could be held in May or early June, but no date or venue have been set.

Trump tweeted that the meeting between Pompeo and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un "went very smoothly and a good relationship was formed."

He later warned that he's willing to cancel plans for the summit or even to walk out of the meeting in progress if it doesn't look like the sides are headed toward agreement.

"Hopefully, that meeting will be a success and I'm looking forward to it," he said Wednesday during a joint press conference with visiting Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at his Florida resort.

"If I think that it's a meeting that is not going to be fruitful, we're not going to go. If the meeting when I'm there is not fruitful I will respectfully leave the meeting," he said.

Trump also insisted the U.S. would maintain its "maximum pressure" campaign of punishing economic sanctions and pressure until the North agrees to abandon its nuclear weapons program.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who is preparing for his own summit with Kim on April 27, called for bold solutions to maintain the momentum toward peace after months of missile and nuclear tests by the North and threats of military action by both sides.

"President Trump's absolute support for dialogue on denuclearization has been a critical force in creating the dramatic

change in conditions," Moon said Thursday during a meeting of news executives. "But to speak objectively, we are only stepping over the threshold of dialogue now. It is too early to boast of success."

Susan Thornton, acting assistant secretary of state for the region, is traveling to Seoul and Tokyo next week as part of summit planning, according to the State Department.

Experts have warned the process could fall apart as the sides will likely have sharply opposed differences over the meaning of denuclearization.

While the U.S. and its allies insist on the verifiable dismantling of the North's nuclear weapons program, the communist state traditionally has referred to a phased approach that would include the removal of what it perceives as the U.S. nuclear threat in the region.

That would be complicated because the North in the past has insisted that a treaty would mean the end to the need for U.S. troops on the divided peninsula as well as Washington's guarantee to protect the South under its nuclear umbrella. Washington and Seoul repeatedly have rejected that idea.

Navy touts progress on 7th Fleet manning issues

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The head of the Navy's Surface Forces says the service is solving manning shortages that have plagued the 7th Fleet, which experienced a pair of deadly collisions last year.

Undermanned ships were cited among the factors that led to the deaths of 17 sailors aboard the Yokosuka-based guided-missile destroyers USS Fitzgerald and USS John S. McCain.

Vice Adm. Richard Brown told Stars and Stripes in a recent interview that "significant progress" has been made to-

ward increasing manning levels for 7th Fleet ships since a summit on the issue took place in Yokosuka last summer.

Brown — then serving as head of Navy Personnel Command and deputy chief of Naval Personnel — participated in the three-day meeting alongside officials from the 7th Fleet, Naval Forces Japan, Pacific Fleet and Navy Personnel Command. They discussed the impact manning policies were having on the 7th Fleet's ability to complete its missions, along with possible solutions.

"There are individual manning challenges, but if you look at the fit/fill numbers today as

opposed to June of last year, significant improvement ... many of the ships are running near 100 percent fill of their billets authorized and well above the minimum 92 percent fit," he said.

Navy officials told Stars and Stripes last summer that the 7th Fleet was facing a manning crunch, especially in certain high-demand technical jobs such as sonar techs or operations specialists. During one deployment cycle, the fleet's Task Force 70 had to redistribute more than 40 sailors among various ships to make them deployable.

Brown said more junior

sailors are receiving orders to the 7th Fleet after completing basic training or jobs schools, which has done much to alleviate manning issues.

Brown said last summer's manning summit accomplished its objective of boosting manning in the fleet.

"We're running in the low 90s or the high 80s on fit/fill across all the ships," he said. "Many of the ships are at 100 percent fill, high 90s fill, and they're above 92 percent. Not all of them — there are still issues we are working on individually — but significant improvement a year later. It had the desired effect."

Neller: Marines 'in better place' after reforms

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Gen. Robert Neller, commandant of the Marines, told a Senate panel on Thursday that the Marine Corps has enacted a series of reforms to rein in the culture of harassment that has included sexual misconduct that has long plagued the service.

Neller said the service has made significant progress installing the reforms since the "Marines United" scandal last year involving a Facebook group in which nude photos of female servicemembers were exchanged.

Neller's comments follow the dismissal Monday of a Marine brigadier general who told a large gathering that a sexual harassment complaint at his

command was "fake news."

"They are not the majority. They are not even close to the majority and yes, you should expect more from a more senior officer," Neller told the Senate panel. "Are we where we want to be? Are we where you want us to be? No. Are we in a better place than we were a year ago? I believe we are."

The comments were part of a wide-ranging discussion during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing that hosted top Navy and Marine Corps officials to talk about budget priorities for 2019.

Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., the ranking Democrat for the committee, turned the hearing toward the sexual misconduct concerns, highlighting the Marines United scandal, among

others.

"You are not the only service facing this, but some of these have been quite notorious," Reed said. "Are you addressing a culture that might be contributing to this issue?"

In March 2017, a now-defunct Facebook page called Marines United with an estimated 30,000 followers was uncovered. Active-duty and veteran Marines were exchanging nude photos of female servicemembers, making derogatory comments and even threats in some cases on the webpage. Two commanders were fired in connection with the scandal in August, and more than 30 Marines have since faced reprimands.

Last month, an investigation was launched into allegations that hundreds of lewd images

of servicewomen were shared online via Dropbox.

"Aside from those events, as disturbing as they are, I think today you look at our Marine Corps ... we are as diverse, as integrated and inclusive as we've ever been," Neller told Reed. "I would give credit to members of this committee for holding the mirror up and making us look at ourselves and ask ourselves some hard questions."

Neller said he has led significant changes since the Marines United scandal as the service has clarified policies, rules and regulations so Marines know what's expected of them. The service also had to clarify to commanders what they could do to hold perpetrators of sexual misconduct accountable, he said.

US bombs Afghanistan more than Iraq, Syria

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The U.S. dropped more bombs and other munitions in Afghanistan last month than it did on Islamic State fighters in Iraq and Syria for the first time since the anti-ISIS campaign began in 2014.

American aircraft dropped 339 weapons in Afghanistan in March and dropped 294 in Iraq and Syria, according to the Air Force's monthly strike report.

The report attributed the shift to "increased progress in coalition efforts to annihilate remaining ISIS forces in Iraq and Syria, coupled with Syrian Democratic Forces shifting to an active defense scheme of maneuver in Syria's Middle Euphrates River Valley."

March's figure was the lowest monthly tally of weapons dropped by U.S. drones and manned aircraft in the anti-ISIS campaign, known as

Operation Inherent Resolve.

Meanwhile, the number of weapons dropped in Afghanistan in March — against targets like the Taliban and the local ISIS affiliate, Islamic State-Khorasan Province — was the highest for that month in five years. While ISIS is being pushed underground in Iraq and Syria, the number of fighters pledging loyalty to the group appears to be growing in Afghanistan.

Last year, the U.S. dropped the largest non-nuclear bomb ever used in combat on an ISIS cave complex in eastern Nangarhar province. Since then, the militants have spread north and their numbers have grown from between 600 and 700 to more than 1,000, according to U.S. officials.

The air war in Afghanistan reached a climax during the troop surge in 2010, when U.S. and allied warplanes conducted more than 1,000 strike missions in some months.

USS Milius to join 7th Fleet in late May

BY TYLER HLAVAC
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Navy's Japan-based 7th Fleet will add another guided missile destroyer to its ranks this summer.

The USS Milius is scheduled to depart its San Diego homeport Friday and arrive at Yokosuka in late May, a Navy statement said. The assignment is part of the Navy's goal of sending its most advanced and capable ships to the Pacific region.

"Destroyers are capable of sustained combat operations supporting forward presence, maritime security, sea control and deterrence," the statement said. "Maintaining the most technologically advanced ships is vital to support the United States' commitment to the security, stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region."

The Milius was supposed to arrive in Japan last year. How-

ever, the Navy announced in July that the destroyer's deployment would be delayed so it could be outfitted with the Aegis Baseline 9 combat system.

The upgrade boosts the ship's air defense, missile defense, surface warfare and undersea warfare capabilities, the Navy said. The Yokosuka-based destroyers USS Barry and USS Benfold have the same system.

The Milius' arrival will be a welcome addition for the 7th Fleet, which is short two destroyers after collisions last year that killed 17 sailors and severely damaged the USS Fitzgerald and USS John S. McCain. Both ships have Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense Systems that allow them to intercept short-and-intermediate-range missiles.

Pacific Fleet commander Adm. Scott Swift told Stars and Stripes last year the Milius was being sent to Japan to alleviate the 7th Fleet's workload, not to replace the destroyers.

President to speak at Naval Academy commencement

The (Annapolis, Md.) Capital

President Donald Trump will speak at the Naval Academy commissioning ceremony next month in Annapolis, Md., city officials confirmed Wednesday.

It will be Trump's first time speaking to the academy's graduating class. Vice President Mike Pence gave the address last year. Graduation will be at the Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium at 10 a.m. May 25 with a Blue Angels flyover to begin the ceremony.

Trump did not attend last year's commissioning ceremony, as he was in Sicily for the Group of Seven summit. That broke with precedent that both presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama set in their first years in office. Trump instead spoke to the graduating cadets at the Coast Guard Academy the week before.

Pence told the graduating class that Trump is the "best friend the armed forces of the United States will ever have."

In January, graduating seniors who are going to serve in the Surface Warfare Community selected the ships they will serve on.

At a news conference on March 23, following the signing of the omnibus spending bill, Trump said \$23.8 billion has been set aside to procure 34 new Navy ships.

SIGAR: Afghan economy stalled in absence of coalition troops

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

The Afghan economy tanked after large numbers of coalition troops — and the jobs created to support them — left the country, indicating a 16-year, \$122 billion reconstruction effort failed to develop a sustainable economic system, according to a U.S. watchdog agency.

Businesses that boomed in Afghanistan during the height of the international mission were construction and logistics for international troops and aid organizations. Once most of the troops left in 2012, the country's economy, which once enjoyed double-digit growth, stopped growing, according to the Special Inspector General for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan report released Thursday.

"Any hope that the upward trend would be lasting was an illusion," SIGAR boss John Sopko said Thursday in prepared remarks for a speech at a Washington-based think tank.

The speech coincided with the release of the SIGAR report, which examined U.S. government's support to private sector development in Afghanistan since 2001.

The report cited multiple mistakes made by policymakers. Financial aid often encouraged corruption, experts lacked expertise in Afghanistan, and there was not enough aid given at the beginning of the war and too much money given at the height of it, the report said.

Per capita income rose quickly after the invasion, increasing from \$117 per person in 2001 to a peak of \$669 in 2012. Growth dropped significantly beginning in 2013, in parallel with the drawdown of coalition military and civilian personnel. This "confirmed that much of the growth was driven largely by the international presence," the report stated.

In 2014, property prices plunged, unemployment rose and wages declined, leading to a mass exodus of Afghan refugees hoping for jobs in Europe. An estimated 500,000 jobs disappeared in the two years after the drawdown, according to a 2016 International Monetary Fund report.

"It was the shock associated with the troop withdrawal that caused the initial downturn," William Byrd, senior expert on Afghanistan for United States Institute of Peace. Byrd, who peer-reviewed the SIGAR report, said other factors included the messy 2014 election and the deterioration of security in the country.

Afghanistan has relied on foreign aid in recent decades. When money from the Soviet Union dried up in the early 90s, the Afghan government collapsed, leading to a bloody civil war and the rise of the Taliban. Without a strong economy, the Afghan government continues to depend on international money, Sopko said.

"Even if the Taliban signs a peace deal tomorrow, the Afghan government still relies on international donors to cover roughly half of its budget," Sopko said. "Our soldiers may come home, but our wallets will have to stay behind."

Federal auditors found some successes in aid, including the development of Afghanistan's telecommunications industries.

Experts underestimated the severity of Afghanistan's economic woes, the report said, with one estimate in 2001 stating the country would need just \$10 billion in developmental aid over a decade.

"There was an unrealistic idea of how this could be done on a shoestring, both in terms of troops on the ground and developmentally," Michael McNerney, a RAND Corp. senior researcher who previously worked at the Office of the Secretary of Defense, told Stars and Stripes.

Navy lends aid as Hawaiian island eyes more flooding

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — With flash flood warnings issued once again for the Hawaiian island of Kauai, the Navy is continuing relief efforts for residents hit by devastating landslides and flooding last weekend.

Personnel from Barking Sands Pacific Missile Range on Kauai are providing aid in coordination with the U.S. Pacific Fleet, the Navy said in a statement Wednesday.

The service has delivered a bulldozer, an excavator and 40 55-gallon drums of fuel to the disaster site. The cargo was brought

using a landing craft mechanized vessel owned by the Navy and operated by a family farm operation on neighboring Niihau Island, the statement said.

The 2,400-acre missile range, which has a 6,000-foot runway, uses a portion of Niihau for its operations.

The recent storm dropped 28 inches of rain on the island in 24 hours, causing flooding, utility outages and road closures and destroying homes on the north shore of Kauai.

The National Weather Service in Honolulu has issued a flash flood watch for the entire state through Friday afternoon.

The Army's 25th Infantry Division dis-

patched two CH-47 Chinook helicopters to help evacuate more than 180 Kauai residents and tourists from flooded areas.

The helicopters, which returned to Wheeler Army Airfield on Oahu on Tuesday evening, also delivered about 43,000 pounds of food, water and clothing on Monday and Tuesday, the Army said.

Soldiers with the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade also moved more than 40 emergency services personnel, as well as emergency service vehicles and fuel.

The multiagency relief effort also included the Coast Guard the Hawaii Army National Guard, Kauai police and fire departments and the Red Cross.

Top bump stock maker to stop taking orders

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The largest manufacturer of bump stocks, which allow semi-automatic weapons to fire rapidly like automatic firearms, announced Wednesday it will stop taking orders and shut down its website in May.

The announcement comes about a month after President Donald Trump said his administration would “ban” bump stocks.

The devices became a focal point of the national gun control debate after they were used in October when a man carried out the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

About a dozen bump stocks were found among the weapons used by Stephen Paddock when he unleashed a hail of bullets from his high-rise Las Vegas hotel suite, killing 58 people and leaving more than 800 others injured.

Slide Fire Solutions posted a message on its website saying the company will stop taking orders at midnight May 20.

The Brady Center for Gun Violence filed a lawsuit against Slide Fire after the Las Vegas shooting and alleged the company “provided a product that turned a semi-automatic gun into the functional equivalent of a machine gun, thereby evading longstanding federal law.”

The Justice Department said last month that it had started the process to amend federal firearms regulations to clarify that federal law defines bump stocks as machine guns.

That would reverse a 2010 decision by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives that found bump stocks did not amount to machine guns and could not be regulated unless Congress amended existing firearms law or passed a new one.

California reaches deal on Guard mission at border

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California has reached an agreement with the federal government that the state’s National Guard troops will deploy to the border to focus on fighting transnational gangs as well as drug and gun smugglers, Gov. Jerry Brown said.

The announcement Wednesday came after a week of uncertainty in which President Donald Trump bashed the governor’s insistence that troops avoid immigration-related work.

Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen wrote on Twitter that final details were still being worked out “but we are looking forward to the support.”

Brown said he secured federal funding for terms similar to those outlined in last week’s proposed contract: The Guard cannot handle custody duties for anyone accused of immigration violations, build border barriers or have anything to do with immigration enforcement.

Federal officials refused to sign the proposal because they said it was outside established protocol for the Guard.

Brown’s office said Wednesday that the previous contract was unnecessary after he secured federal funding for his goals. Brown spokesman Evan

Westrup said the exact cost has not been determined.

Some troops may be deployed this month and are expected to stay until at least Sept. 30, Brown said. Members of the contingent will be assigned to all parts of the state, not just the border.

Brown elicited rare and effusive praise from Trump last week when he pledged 400 troops, which helped put the president above the lower end of his threshold of marshaling 2,000 to 4,000 troops for his border mission.

Federal officials said Monday that Brown refused to commit California Guard troops to some initial jobs that were similar to assignments for National Guard troops from the three other Mexico border states — Arizona, New Mexico and Texas — all governed by Republicans. Trump bashed Brown’s position two days in a row, even as the governor said a deal was near.

“There’s been a little bit of back and forth, as you always get with bureaucrats, but I think we can find common understanding here,” Brown said Tuesday in Washington.

He added, “There’s enough problems at the border and the interface between our countries that California will have plenty to do — and we’re willing to do it.”

FAA orders inspections after jet engine failure

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — U.S. airline regulators have ordered inspections on engine fan blades like the one that snapped off a Southwest Airlines plane, leading to the death of a woman who was partially sucked out a window.

The Federal Aviation Administration’s announcement late Wednesday comes nearly a year after the engine’s manufacturer recommended the additional inspections, and a month after European regulators ordered their airlines to do the work.

Pressure for the FAA to act grew after an engine on a Southwest plane blew apart Tuesday, showering the aircraft with de-

bris and shattering a window. A woman was partially blown out and died of her injuries.

Investigators said a blade that broke off midflight and triggered the fatal accident was showing signs of metal fatigue — microscopic cracks that can splinter open under stress.

The National Transportation Safety Board also blamed metal fatigue for a 2016 engine failure on a Southwest plane in Florida.

That led manufacturer CFM International, a joint venture of General Electric Co. and France’s Safran SA, to recommend in June that airlines inspect fan blades on many Boeing 737s.

The FAA proposed making the recommendation manda-

tory in August but never issued a final decision.

On Wednesday, the FAA said it would issue a directive in the next two weeks to require ultrasonic inspections of fan blades on some CFM56-7B engines after they reach a certain number of takeoffs and landings.

Southwest announced its own program for similar inspections of its 700-plane fleet over the next month. United Airlines executives said Wednesday they had begun inspecting some of their planes.

American Airlines has about 300 planes with that type of engine, and Delta Air Lines has about 185.

Tuesday’s emergency broke a string of eight straight years without a fatal accident involv-

ing a U.S. airliner.

Robert Sumwalt, NTSB chairman, expressed concern about such a destructive engine failure but said he would not yet draw broad conclusions about the safety of CFM56 engines or the entire fleet of Boeing 737s.

Federal investigators were still trying to determine how a window came out of the plane. The woman sitting next to it, identified as Jennifer Riordan, 43, was wearing a seat belt. Philadelphia’s medical examiner said the banking executive and mother of two from Albuquerque, N.M., died from blunt impact trauma to her head, neck and torso.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Pickup rolls atop man at drive-thru, kills him

IA MARION — Authorities said a man died after his pickup truck rolled atop him at a restaurant drive-thru in a Cedar Rapids suburb.

The accident occurred just before noon Monday at a Dairy Queen in Marion.

Police said the man's pickup broke down while he was in line at the drive-thru. It rolled atop him after he got out to fix it. Police said he died at a hospital.

Police identified him as Curtis Schantz, 74, of Alburnett.

Video contradicts man's Hooters claim

FL MADEIRA BEACH — A Florida man said the letter "O" from a Hooters sign blew off the wall and landed on his foot, leaving him with injuries, but surveillance video said otherwise.

WFLA reported that John Bradley Kane, of St. Petersburg, was arrested for insurance fraud Friday. Deputies said he lied to investigators about an incident outside a Hooters restaurant in Pinellas County.

In a November insurance claim against Hooters, Kane said he was struck when a sign blew down during Hurricane Irma. A manager showed detectives surveillance video of the sign falling onto the sidewalk and hitting no one.

Kane was released on \$5,000 bond.

Jury awards \$34,000 to girl bitten by dog

SD BROOKINGS — A Brookings County jury awarded a girl more than \$34,000 after she was attacked by a dog that had been declared

vicious by county authorities twice before.

The Argus Leader reported that the award consists of \$29,208 in compensatory damages and \$5,000 in punitive damages from the dog's owner, Doyle Johnson, who is the mayor of Sinai.

The girl was 12 when she was attacked in March 2015 by an English setter who bit her multiple times and left 17 wounds that put her in the hospital.

2 stranded skydivers are rescued from tree

NC SALISBURY — Two skydivers who had a parachute malfunction that left them hanging in a North Carolina tree are thanking their lucky stars.

The Salisbury Post reported that when Casey Ellis and her instructor, Derek Abernathy, leaped from the plane Saturday over the Rowan County Airport, something went wrong. Ellis said they were spinning and falling out of control before they were caught in a tree off a sewer right-of-way.

Salisbury Fire Department Deputy Chief David Morris said a call came in about 7:58 p.m. Emergency responders used a ladder to scale the tree, and a hoist was set up to lift and lower the pair, who escaped with minor scratches.

Man shoots himself, blames 2 black men

VA SPOTSYLVANIA — Authorities in Virginia said a white man who said he was shot by two black men had actually shot himself.

Spotsylvania sheriff's Lt. Charles Carey said deputies responding to a report of a shooting at a motel Saturday night found Eric Hunter Jones, 23, with a gunshot wound to his leg.

Jones told the deputies that two black men had approached him outside, and one of them had shot him.

Detectives began interviewing witnesses and determined there were no suspects and that Jones had shot himself. A search of Jones' motel room yielded a stolen gun. He was charged with possession of a firearm by a felon, felony receiving stolen property, reckless handling of a firearm and filing a false police report.

2 men use signs to spread happiness

NH NASHUA — Two New Hampshire men are trying to spread some positivity in Nashua with their feel-good signs.

NH1 reported that Greg Amaral and Wendell Walker have stood in downtown Nashua with signs carrying positive messages each weekend since Easter Sunday. They say their goal is to encourage people to be happy and follow their dreams.

Photographer Craig Michaud shared a picture of the pair on Facebook. Michaud tagged Mayor Jim Donchess, who later shared the post on his page. Donchess said Amaral and Walker are helping Nashua become "a city of kindness."

'Remote detonator' WiFi spurs evacuation

MI SAGINAW TOWNSHIP — A Michigan gym patron looking for a WiFi connection found one named "remote detonator," prompting an evacuation and precautionary search of the facility by a bomb-sniffing dog.

The Saginaw News reported that nothing was found in the search Sunday at Planet Fitness in Saginaw Township, about 85 miles northwest of Detroit.

Saginaw Township police Chief Donald Pussehl said the patron brought the WiFi connection's name to the attention of a manager, who evacuated the building and called police. The gym was closed as police responded.

Boy, 14, arrested in shooting of brother

KS WICHITA — Authorities arrested a 14-year-old Kansas boy accused of shooting his 13-year-old brother in the chest while they played video games at home.

Officer Charley Davidson said the younger brother was taken to a Wichita hospital with serious injuries that were not life-threatening after being shot about 12:15 p.m. Monday.

Davidson said there was a handgun in the room where the brothers were playing video games and that the older boy was handling the weapon when it discharged. He was booked on juvenile charges of criminal possession of a firearm, aggravated battery and possession of marijuana.

1 killed, 2 hurt when power line is struck

PA JOHNSTOWN — One worker was killed and two others were injured when a piece of machinery being used to repair a sewer hit an overhead power line in Pennsylvania.

Cambria County Coroner Jeffrey Lees said a 30-year-old man died after being electrocuted at a work site in Johnstown. The current condition of the injured workers was unclear.

Lees said the machine they were using hit a power line that carries about 23,000 volts of electricity.

From wire reports

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James, Cavaliers even series

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — LeBron James scored 46 points and added 12 rebounds as the Cleveland Cavaliers bounced back from a poor performance in the opener by holding off the Indiana Pacers 100-97 on Wednesday night to even their Eastern Conference series at one game apiece.

Dazzling from the start, James scored the game's first 16 points and had 29 at halftime, dominating the way he has in so many previous postseasons.

But in a season in which nothing has been easy for the Cavs, Cleveland was lucky that Indiana's Victor Oladipo missed a wide-open three-pointer that would have tied it with 27 seconds left.

Kevin Love scored 15, but Cleveland's All-Star center injured his left hand, the same one he broke earlier this season, with 3:43 left. Love's status could affect the remainder of this series — and perhaps Cleveland's season.

Kyle Korver added 12 points, all on threes, and made several hustling plays for the Cavs.

Oladipo scored 22 — he was in early foul trouble — and Myles Turner 18 for the Pacers, who shocked the Cavs with an overpowering win in Game 1.

Indiana clawed back from an 18-point deficit and was within 95-92 when Oladipo, who scored 32 in the opener, somehow came free but missed

maybe his easiest shot in two games. James grabbed the rebound and made three free throws over the final 22 seconds as the Cavs avoided falling behind 2-0 in the series.

Game 3 is Friday night in Indianapolis.

The 33-year-old James was expected to be more aggressive than in Game 1, when he was unusually passive, deferred to teammates and suffered the first playoff-opening loss of his career.

But James was his unstoppable self again, and there wasn't a whole lot the Pacers could do about him in the first half.

Cavs coach Tyrone Lue shook up his starting lineup, going with Korver and J.R. Smith over Jeff Green and Rodney Hood. Green didn't score in the opener and Hood only started because Korver was dealing with a sore right foot.

The three-time champion was in attack mode from the start. After not attempting his first shot in the opener until 1:52 remained in the first quarter, he dropped a short jumper just 16 seconds into Game 2.

And he was just getting started.

James made his first five attempts and scored Cleveland's first 16 points, making a pair of three-pointers and then picking up assists on threes by Love and Korver. James outscored the Pacers 20-18 in the first 12 minutes.

Paul, Rockets rout T-wolves

Associated Press

HOUSTON — James Harden predicted Chris Paul would "come back and drop 30" after not playing his best in Houston's playoff opener.

Close enough.

Paul had 27 points and Gerald Green came off the bench to score a playoff career-high 21 as the Rockets used a huge second quarter to cruise to a 102-82 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves on Wednesday night that gave them a 2-0 lead in the first-round playoff series.

Paul, a nine-time All-Star, scored 14 points and tied a season high with six turnovers in the first game. Early on, it was clear that Paul wouldn't struggle again as he had 15 points, three assists, two steals and a block by halftime.

Paul, who joined the Rockets in an offseason trade from the Clippers, finished with eight assists and three steals.

"Just tried to push the tempo, tried to be aggressive ... getting into the lane and getting a couple of easy ones early helped us," Paul said.

Houston fell behind early but went on top for good with a 37-point second quarter, powered by four three-pointers from Green, and the Wolves didn't threaten again.

The top-seeded Rockets won the opener by three behind a 44-point performance from James Harden on a night when most of the team struggled offensively. Things were much different Wednesday when Harden went 2-for-18 and had just 12 points as one of four Rockets who finished in double figures.

Minnesota's Karl-Anthony Towns had another disappointing game, scoring all of his five points in the first quarter after being criticized for finishing with eight in the series opener.

Towns said he can't be frustrated with how the first two games have gone for him.

"I think we all have to be better, including myself," he said. "We've got to find ways. We can come up with some tweaks and be ready for the next game."

Mitchell leads Jazz over Thunder

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — It wasn't even clear until an hour before the game if Utah rookie Donovan Mitchell was going to play in Game 2 against Oklahoma City.

The Thunder probably wish he hadn't.

Mitchell, who played with a bruised left foot, scored 13 of his 28 points in the fourth quarter to help the Jazz defeat Oklahoma City 102-95 and tie their Western Conference playoff series at one win apiece.

"I think if he was feeling something, he didn't show it and he played through it," Jazz coach Quin Snyder said.

Derrick Favors had career playoff bests of 20 points and 16 rebounds for the Jazz, and Ricky Rubio had 22 points, nine assists and seven rebounds in the first playoff win of his seven-year career.

Mitchell did his damage attacking the basket. He missed

all seven of his three-pointers, but made 10 of 18 from inside the arc and eight of nine free throws. Mitchell said center Rudy Gobert told him to quit settling for jumpers.

"He let me know I went 0-of-7 from three and I'm letting guys off the hook," Mitchell said. "We've got to keep applying pressure and getting to the rim."

Russell Westbrook had 19 points, 13 assists and nine rebounds for the Thunder. Paul George, who scored 36 points in Game 1, finished with 18 on 6-for-21 shooting. Carmelo Anthony scored 17 points, but made just six of 18 shots.

"We just have to be aggressive," Westbrook said. "We miss and make shots. Shots are going to fall. Those guys (George and Anthony) are unbelievable scorers, and we have trusted those guys all season long, and we will continue to do that."

Gobert added 13 points and 15 rebounds for the Jazz, who outrebounded Oklahoma City 56-46 to seize home-court advantage from the Thunder. Game 3 will be Saturday in Utah.

Oklahoma City had two chances in the final minute to trim Utah's lead with the Jazz leading 99-95, but Anthony missed three-pointers on back-to-back possessions.

"I thought we had some good shots," Thunder coach Billy Donovan said. "I think the entire game, we could have executed better."

Westbrook, George and Anthony combined to miss all 14 field goals in the fourth quarter and score just two points.

"I don't know," Anthony said. "We missed. We all missed. I don't really have an answer to what happened or an excuse to why we didn't make shots. We just didn't make shots in that fourth quarter."

Reds dump manager Price

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Cincinnati's worst start since the Great Depression prompted a quick hook for Bryan Price.

The Reds fired their fifth-year manager on Thursday because of their 3-15 record, the first managerial change in the major leagues this season. The Reds hadn't changed managers so early in a season since Tony Perez was fired after 44 games in 1993.

Price managed a rebuilding effort that relied on rookies more than any other team in the majors during his tenure. The Reds have lost at least 94 games in each of the past three seasons while finishing last in the NL Central.

Although the Reds have been patient with their coaching staff during the rebuild, their worst start since 1931 prompted the change.

"We felt we had to act now, we couldn't afford to wait," general manager Dick Williams said during a conference call. "I know it seems early to some people and it certainly is early in the regular season, but ... we've had a lot of chances to observe this group together and see them get off to the start we'd hoped, and it wasn't there."

Bench coach Jim Riggleman will manage the team on an interim basis, the fourth time in his career he's been promoted during a season. Riggleman also has managed the Padres, Cubs, Mariners and Nationals. He's expected to be a candidate for the full-time job. Williams said the club will pick its next manager later in the season.

Riggleman said his focus will be "to really put an exclamation point on the details of the game." Eight of the Reds' losses have been by two runs or less.

Rosario gets winning run for Twins

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Ryan LaMarre started this series as Minnesota's extra player. He got the Twins a split in extra innings, and gave Eddie Rosario a memory he'll never forget.

Rosario scored the winning run in his homeland in the bottom of the 16th inning, coming around on LaMarre's single that gave Minnesota a 2-1 win over the Cleveland Indians on Wednesday night, and a split of the teams' two-game series in Puerto Rico.

The game took 5 hours, 13 minutes — with the teams combining for 117 at-bats. They were a combined 0-for-21 with runners in scoring position until LaMarre ended it around 12:23 a.m.

"It was a heck of a baseball game," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "Obviously, just try to find a way to put some points on the board and find a way to win. Outstanding pitching on both sides."

Rosario led off the 16th with a single and went to third when Logan Morrison's grounder — which could have been a double-play ball — got past second baseman Jason Kipnis. Eduardo Escobar was intentionally walked to load the bases with none out, and LaMarre came through with the game-ending swing.

LaMarre was brought to San Juan as the Twins' 26th player; Major League Baseball allowed each club an extra body for the series. LaMarre didn't even come into the game until the 10th, and was 3-for-4.

"He's a nice guy to have around," Molitor said.

The game took so long that Minnesota's Joe Mauer and Zach Duke both aged a year — they turn 35 on Thursday, which meant their birthdays started around the 16th inning.

The teams were scoreless until trading solo homers in the 14th. Cleveland used 23 players, with only three starting pitchers left on the bench by game's end.

MLB roundup

Mets stun Nats with 9-run rally

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Six outs from getting swept at home by Washington, the New York Mets stunned their NL East rivals with a nine-run rally instead.

Yoenis Cespedes launched a grand slam for his second key hit of the eighth inning, capping a colossal outburst that propelled the Mets past the Nationals 11-5 on Wednesday night and prevented a three-game sweep.

"We just went out and took it," manager Mickey Callaway said.

Todd Frazier tied it at 4 with a two-run single and pinch-hitter Juan Lagares put New York ahead for the first time with a two-run double off ineffective setup man Ryan Madson (0-2), who was pitching for the third night in a row and fourth time in five games.

"I think I had about five or 10 good bullets in there. The ball started getting away from me after that. I kind of emptied the tank the night before," Madson said. "But I signed up for it."

The right-hander has made 11 relief appearances already this season.

Red Sox 9, Angels 0: Rafael Devers hit his first career grand slam, Rick Porcello threw six scoreless innings and visiting Boston extended its best start in franchise history.

Dodgers 13, Padres 4: Corey Seager had four hits and three RBIs, Kenta Maeda struck out 10 and visiting Los Angeles completed a three-game sweep.

Athletics 12, White Sox 11 (14): Matt Olson singled in Marcus Semien with two outs in the 14th inning, lifting host Oakland to the wild victory.

Giants 4, Diamondbacks 3 (10): Brandon Belt hit a two-run homer with two out in the 10th inning, helping visiting San Francisco stop a four-game slide.

Tigers 6, Orioles 5: Dixon Machado led off the bottom of the ninth with a home run, capping a wild final two innings and lifting host Detroit to the win.

Astros 7, Mariners 1: Gerrit Cole pitched seven strong innings and visiting Houston broke it open with six runs in the seventh.

Brewers 2, Reds 0: Milwaukee center fielder Chris-

tian Yelich returned from the disabled list and made a snazzy sliding catch in front of the home crowd, snagging a fly ball that deflected off the glove of left fielder Hernan Perez.

Blue Jays 15, Royals 5: Teoscar Hernandez had four hits, including a two-run homer, and host Toronto routed Kansas City to complete a three-game sweep.

Braves 7, Phillies 3: Ryan Flaherty homered and drove in four runs, Brandon McCarthy outpitched Vince Velasquez and host Atlanta beat Philadelphia.

Rays 4, Rangers 2: Jake Faria won for the first time since last July 25, allowing one run over six innings to lead host Tampa Bay over Cole Hamels and Texas.

Faria (1-1) struck out six and walked one.

Pirates 10, Rockies 2: Sean Rodriguez hit a two-run homer that backed Chad Kuhl and helped host Pittsburgh avoid a three-game sweep.

Josh Bell drove in three runs and David Freese added a two-run double as Pittsburgh improved to 8-0 in day games.

NHL playoffs roundup

Sharks finish sweep of Ducks, advance

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Very little separated San Jose and Anaheim in the regular season, with the Ducks edging out the Sharks by one point for second place in the Pacific Division.

Their first-round series wasn't nearly as competitive.

The Sharks rode their superior depth, potent power play and stellar goaltending from Martin Jones to the second sweep in franchise history, knocking out the Ducks with a 2-1 victory on Wednesday night.

"We're playing well going into the second round," defenseman Marc-Edouard Vlasic said. "Everybody is contributing if it's offensively, blocking shots, taking a hit. Everybody is doing what they have to for us to win."

After jumping on Anaheim early to win the first two games on the road, the Sharks earned a lopsided win in Game 3 thanks to undisciplined play by the Ducks and then withstood a strong push to end the series in

Game 4.

Jones kept Anaheim at bay for long stretches in the second and third period before finally allowing a tying goal to Andrew Cogliano. San Jose then took 1:16 to answer and scored the eventual series-clincher when Vlasic's point shot deflected off Tomas Hertl and into the net.

"The response goal was huge," coach Peter DeBoer said. "We were on our heels. They were pressing. It's tough to play an elimination game when you get an opportunity to sweep a really good team like that."

The Sharks were in control for most of the series, outscoring the Ducks 16-4 in their most lopsided series in franchise history, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

San Jose got as many goals from its fourth line in the series as Anaheim had from its entire team with Marcus Sorensen scoring his third of the series to give the Sharks a 1-0 lead in the first period of the clincher. Eric Fehr also had a goal from the

fourth line in the series.

Predators 3, Avalanche 2: Filip Forsberg scored another creative goal, Pekka Rinne rebounded from a rocky performance with 31 saves, and visiting Nashville withstood a furious rally by Colorado in Game 4 to take a 3-1 lead in the first-round series.

Colton Sissons and Craig Smith also added goals for the Predators, who can close out the series Friday when it shifts back to Nashville for Game 5.

Rinne was solid early after being pulled from the last game. Cruising along and up 3-0, the Vezina Trophy finalist allowed Gabriel Landeskog's 5-on-3 power-play goal in the third and another on Alexander Kerfoot's tap-in off a rebound.

Colin Wilson nearly tied with about 2 minutes left when his shot appeared to hit the post. The Avalanche pulled backup goalie Andrew Hammond late, but couldn't get the tying goal.

Lightning 3, Devils 1: A feisty Nikita Kucherov scored two goals, set up another and

knocked the opponent's top defenseman out of the game with a big hit, and visiting Tampa Bay moved within a game of making New Jersey's first trip to the playoffs in six years a short one.

J.T. Miller also scored and had two assists, and Vezina Trophy finalist Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped three breakaways in making 27 saves as the Lightning bounced back from a loss in Game 3 to take a 3-1 lead in the first-round series.

Tampa Bay can wrap up the best-of-seven series in Game 5 at home on Saturday.

Kyle Palmieri scored on a 5-on-3 advantage for the Devils, who are back in the playoffs for the first time since reaching the Stanley Cup Final in 2012. It was the only time they beat Vasilevskiy, whose 44 wins in the regular season shared the league lead with Winnipeg's Connor Hellebuyck. Cory Schneider made 34 saves for New Jersey in starting his second straight game.

Crosby leads Penguins to 3-1 series lead over Flyers

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Sidney Crosby passed Mario Lemieux in Pittsburgh's record book and pushed the Philadelphia Flyers to the brink of elimination.

Flyers fans booed the goal — and the ones that stuck around for the end belted a familiar refrain: "Fire Hakstol! Fire Hakstol!"

Crosby scored his fifth goal of the series and became the Penguins' career postseason points leader in a 5-0 win over the Flyers on Wednesday night.

The Penguins lead the first-round playoff series 3-1 as it shifts to Pittsburgh for Game 5 on Friday. Crosby and the Penguins followed a 7-0 Game 1 win and a 5-1 Game 3 victory with another dominant outing.

Matt Murray stopped 26 shots for his second shutout of the series and the two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Penguins are a win away from playing in the second round for the 11th time in the last 12 seasons.

Crosby scored in the second period for a 4-0 lead and topped the team owner and Hall of Famer in Lemieux for most playoff points with 173.

"A lot of his records aren't going to be touched," Crosby said. "The fact I can be close to him and around that one, I guess I've been fortunate to play in a number of playoff games helps a lot."

The Flyers were already on their second goalie by the time Crosby scored. The Penguins chased Brian Elliott early in

the period after the maligned goalie allowed his 14th goal of the series. Michal Neuvirth relieved Elliott and it didn't matter. Neuvirth lost track of the puck behind the net and had his head turned to the right when Crosby found it and snapped it under the goalie's left skate.

"I was in a good spot. The puck ended up right on my stick," Crosby said.

The Flyers were confused. The Penguins were composed.

And it so it goes in Philly, the Flyers are a loss away from another empty season without the Stanley Cup.

"Somehow, we need to get our confidence back and go from there," team captain Claude Giroux said.

Disgruntled Flyers fans chanted from the balcony to

the concourse for the Flyers to fire third-year coach Dave Hakstol.

Both teams played without key cogs in their lineup: Sean Couturier (who had career highs with 31 goals and 76 points) was injured Tuesday at practice in a vicious collision with teammate Radko Gudas; the Pens played without top-line forward Patric Hornqvist because of an undisclosed injury.

Giroux, who scored 102 points during the season, has not scored a postseason goal since 2014.

"One game away for the season to be over," Giroux said. "You can expect this team to have some fight the next game."