

STARS AND STRIPES®

Friday, April 20, 2018

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Navy to commission USS Portland

BY TYLER HLAVAC

Stars and Stripes

The Navy will bolster its amphibious force by adding a new ship to its ranks over the weekend.

The amphibious transport dock the USS Portland will be commissioned Saturday in Portland, Ore., in a ceremony attended by Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan and Bonnie Amos, the ship's sponsor and wife of retired Marine Corps commandant Gen. James Amos.

The Portland — which will be homeported in San Diego — is the 11th San Antonio-class amphibious ship in the Navy's inventory, and boasts the ability to embark more than 800 Marines and accommodate the MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor

aircraft. It can also launch and recover landing craft and amphibious vehicles.

San Antonio-class ships can “support a variety of amphibious assault, special operations or expeditionary warfare missions, operating independently or as part of Amphibious Ready Groups, Expeditionary Strike Groups, or Joint Task Forces” as well as humanitarian or anti-piracy missions, a Defense Department statement said.

The Portland should be a welcome addition for the Navy, which has been criticized for having a lack of amphibious ships to support Marine Corps operations. During congressional testimony last December, Defense Capabilities and Management Director Cary Russell said the lack of amphibious ships was causing “training

shortfalls.”

“In summary, Navy and Marine Corps units completed training for certain amphibious operations priorities but not others due to several factors,” he said. “The most prevalent factor we found that hampered training completion was a lack of available amphibious ships on which to train. The Navy and Marine Corps have taken some steps to identify and address amphibious operations training shortfalls, but these efforts are incomplete.”

The number of amphibious transport docks has been declining since a peak in the 1980s when the Navy had 16 such vessels. The service expects to have 12 in its ranks by 2024, according to a Government Accountability Office report released in December.

The USS Portland was tentatively chosen to serve as the flagship for this summer's Rim of the Pacific naval exercise in Hawaii, Capt. Brian Metcalf, program manager for landing platform dock amphibious warfare vessels, said in January at the Surface Navy Association's annual symposium in Arlington, Va. However, the final decision will not be made until a RIMPAC planning meeting this month, Navy officials said.

The ship is slated this fall to be fitted with the next generation of the Navy's laser weapons system for testing, according to USNI News. The previous iteration was tested in the Middle East aboard the USS Ponce.

Secretary of the Navy Richard Spencer said the new ship will be entering a world of “dynamic security challenges.”

Army won't meet recruiting mission, lowers goal by 3,500

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Army will not meet its mission to recruit 80,000 active-duty soldiers this year and has officially lowered that goal. But Army leaders said the service has been able to encourage more experienced servicemembers to stay on the job to satisfy a growing demand for troops.

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel Dailey said Friday that the updated goal will be 76,500. Six months into the recruiting year, the service has brought in just 28,000 new soldiers. Army officials were expected to provide more details on the issue later Friday.

Dailey said the goal is to grow the Army to 483,500, as approved by Congress, and it's up to the Army whether to use

more recruiting or re-enlistment. He said that retaining current soldiers has been more successful this year than in the past, with 86 percent staying on, compared with 81 percent in previous years.

Army Secretary Mark Esper said there is a mismatch between the number of soldiers in the Army and the demand for more troops, and acknowledged that the “strong economy does make it challenging.” He said, however, that the Army will not sacrifice quality for quantity and that standards will not be lowered to meet recruiting goals.

The struggle to meet this year's higher recruiting numbers — a significant increase over last year's mission of 69,000 — was expected, mainly due to the favorable American

economy and increased competition from private-sector employers who are able to pay graduates more money.

Maj. Gen. Jeff Snow, head of the Army's recruiting command, predicted late last year that the higher enlistment goal would be difficult to meet, considering economic factors and the military's need for recruits to pass strict physical testing that many young people can't complete. Meeting the increased mission this year, he said, could force the Army to take in more recruits who would require waivers for marijuana use, low test scores or other more basic health issues.

Asked if the Army has approved more waivers so far this year, Esper and Dailey said they didn't know totals. The Army historically has kept

and provided detailed data on waivers.

“The numbers don't tell the whole story,” Dailey said, adding that waivers require the Army to take a closer look at a recruit who may have had a legal problem when they were younger, smoked pot, or has had some type of health problem. The issue could range from simple color blindness to an arrest.

But in December, Snow said his goal for 2017 was to have fewer than 2 percent of the new recruits be considered “category four,” meaning they scored 31 or less, out of 99, on the aptitude test. Esper said Friday that he had directed that the Army not exceed the 2 percent limit, even though the Defense Department allows up to 4 percent.

Flintlock gave US chance to work with African militaries

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

NIAMEY, Niger — U.S. special operations troops ended their largest training mission in West Africa on Friday, as part of a bid to better train local soldiers to fight against extremists.

“Flintlock represents a new level of cooperation ... in a troubled region,” U.S. Special Operations Command chief Maj. Gen. Marcus Hicks said at a ceremony in Niger’s capital city of Niamey. “We do this as brothers in arms.”

Hicks called this year’s Flintlock “the most successful” since the exercises began in 2005.

Hicks said he sees a growing threat from extremist groups in the region, who are applying pressure in countries such as Niger and Burkina Faso.

In March, al-Qaida claimed responsibility for an attack on an army headquarters and French Embassy in Burkina Faso. The attack represents a

shift away from softer, civilian targets and serves as an indication that the militants are gaining in capabilities, U.S. military officials said.

Flintlock 2018 was designed to help local militaries take on the growing threat, Hicks said. The training pivoted from tactic-centered drills of years past to coordination between small units and higher headquarters.

In West Africa, a group of five regional militaries known as the G-5 Sahel Force formed last year in the hopes of bringing more unity of effort to the battle against Islamic State and al-Qaida affiliates. The G-5 group aims to have about 5,000 soldiers.

For the U.S., Flintlock 2018 served as an opportunity to work alongside militaries that will be part of that effort.

In all, some 1,900 troops took part in the exercise that included soldiers from the Fort Bragg, N.C.-based 3rd Special Forces Group.

USS Truman arrives in Mediterranean

By SCOTT WYLAND
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The USS Harry S. Truman carrier strike group has entered the Mediterranean Sea, less than a week after the U.S. launched missile strikes on suspected chemical weapons sites in Syria.

The Harry S. Truman, a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, deployed April 11 from Norfolk and arrived in the 6th Fleet theater this week. It is the first carrier to operate in the area since the USS George H.W. Bush launched airstrikes against Islamic State last year.

“There is no more recognizable symbol of American naval power than a carrier strike group,” said Vice Adm. Lisa Franchetti, 6th Fleet commander, in a statement. “Their presence in this vital region is a reflection of our commitment to a safe, prosperous and free Europe and Africa.”

Navy officials declined to discuss the Truman’s planned

operations or when the strike group would move to the Persian Gulf. However, strike group deployments to the region in recent years have contributed a mix of patrols and strikes against terror groups and other adversaries.

The strike group’s arrival was planned well in advance of last week’s attacks by the submarine USS John Warner, which fired six Tomahawk missiles into Syria in conjunction with other U.S., British and French operations.

The Harry S. Truman last conducted Mediterranean operations in July 2016.

Its current strike group includes the destroyers USS Farragut, USS Forrest Sherman, USS Bulkeley and USS Arleigh Burke, along with the missile cruiser USS Normandy and several aviation and support squadrons.

The destroyers USS Jason Dunham and USS The Sullivans will join the group later.

Air Force to pay nearly \$1 million over tainted water

The (Colorado Springs, Colo.) Gazette

Nearly two years after toxic chemicals from Air Force fire-fighting foam were found in water drawn from the Widefield aquifer, the military announced a string of measures Wednesday to deliver clean drinking water to residents of southern El Paso County, Colo.

Under the deal, the Air Force will pay more than \$900,000 to procure untainted water and to filter water from the aquifer to remove perfluorinated compounds that studies have found were released at Peterson Air Force Base when airmen used the foam, which has since been banned by the military.

“As a longtime member of

the Front Range, we place an extremely high value on all of our community partnerships, and are pleased we can move forward with these support agreements,” Peterson vice-commander Col. Eric Dorminey, said in a statement.

The military had faced criticism from civic leaders in Security, Widefield and Fountain for moving too slowly to address the contamination that was made public with an Environmental Protection Agency health advisory in 2016. The EPA has determined that the tiniest amounts of the chemical — comparable to a shot glass in 2.1 million bathtubs of water — can lead to long-term health impacts including high cholesterol and some forms of

cancer.

In 2016, the Air Force pledged \$4.3 million to initial efforts to deal with the contamination, with most of that cash going to bottled water and filtration systems. The new money is designed to deal with continuing problems from the contamination, and to ease tensions with local governments that have complained about the costs associated with delivering clean drinking water.

Under the agreement, the Air Force also promised to ensure filter systems installed in Fountain are working properly and agreed to buy 235 million gallons of drinking water from other sources, so the town won’t have to rely on the tainted aquifer.

Widefield Water and Sanitation District gets \$606,000 to operate and maintain water filters for its users.

What’s coming for the Security Water District remains unclear in monetary terms, but the Air Force says it will “complete efforts to acquire alternate drinking water supplies for the community through an existing contract with the Army Corps of Engineers and, due to limited funding of that contract, evaluate additional ways to procure alternate water.”

While the water agreements will solve some of the Air Force’s problems over the contamination, a long-term cleanup for the aquifer is likely years away.

1 injured in shooting at Fla. school

Associated Press

OCALA, Fla. — One student shot another in the ankle at a Florida high school and a suspect is in custody, authorities said Friday.

The Ocala Star-Banner reports the shooting happened Friday morning at Forest High School, which was put on lockdown. The injured student was taken to a local hospital.

Police said the suspected shooter is also a student at the school.

The shooting happened as students around the country prepared to walk out to protest gun violence on the anniversary of the massacre at Colorado's Columbine High School.

Chris Oliver said his 16-year-old son, a Forest student, told him the shooting happened near his classroom. The boy told Oliver the shooter was standing in a hallway and shot at a closed classroom door. The shooter then dropped an unspecified weapon, ran and tried to hide, the boy told his father.

Army: No VA benefits for false warning of bad anthrax vaccine

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Army told soldiers stationed in South Korea on Thursday that they were not eligible for disability benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs after the service retracted a memorandum warning of bad batches of the anthrax vaccine.

The Army said the warning of bad batches of the anthrax vaccine was “false” and “completely without merit.”

According to the April 10 memo that circulated online among veterans and servicemembers, its purpose was to identify soldiers who could've been affected and to notify them of a possible 100 percent disability benefit from the VA because of health risks caused by bad anthrax vaccine batches.

The vaccines were administered at Fort Campbell, Ky., and Fort Drum, N.Y., from 2001 to 2007 for Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, the memo stated.

The memo also made the rounds on Twitter and military Facebook groups this week, with some people questioning its authenticity.

Christina Wright, a public affairs officer with the Eighth Army, said Thursday in a written statement that the memo was published by the 8th Army, 2nd Battalion, 1st Air Defense Artillery Regiment, 35th Air Defense Artillery Bri-

gade, located at Osan Air Base in Pyeongtaek, South Korea.

The anthrax immunization is required for deployment to U.S. Central Command and the Korean Peninsula, as well as for designated U.S. Northern Command personnel, emergency response and other units, Wright said. A yearly booster is required to maintain immunity.

At the time the memo was published, the 35th Brigade believed the information was correct, Wright said. In subsequent days, the Defense Health Agency has verified it's false, she said.

“Once the brigade discovered the error, the correct information was published to their soldiers,” Wright said.

A brigade typically comprises about 2,000 soldiers.

Wright did not clarify what specific information in the memo was incorrect, nor did she say whether there were bad anthrax vaccines administered at the locations and times mentioned in the memo. But she said the side effects of the vaccines were “generally mild and temporary.”

“While the risk of serious harm is extremely small, there is a remote chance of a vaccine causing serious injury or death,” Wright said. “In those rare cases, VA disability or death benefits may be granted.”

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Comey memos: Trump talked of Flynn, ‘hookers’

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a series of startlingly candid conversations, President Donald Trump told former FBI Director James Comey that he had serious concerns about the judgment of a top adviser, asked about the possibility of jailing journalists and described a boast from Vladimir Putin about Russian prostitutes, according to Comey's notes of the talks obtained by The Associated Press on Thursday night.

The 15 pages of documents contain new details about a series of interactions with Trump that Comey found so unnerving that he chose to document them in writing. Those seven encounters in the weeks and months before Comey's May 2017 firing include a Trump Tower discussion about allegations involving Trump and prostitutes in Moscow; a White House dinner at which Comey said Trump asked him for his loyalty; and a private Oval Office discussion during which, the ex-FBI head said, the president asked him to end an investiga-

tion into Michael Flynn, the former White House national security adviser.

The documents had been anticipated eagerly since their existence was revealed last year, especially because Comey's interactions with Trump are a critical part of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into whether the president sought to obstruct justice. Late Thursday night, Trump tweeted that the memos “show clearly that there was NO COLLUSION and NO OBSTRUCTION.”

The president also accused Comey of leaking classified information. The memos obtained by the AP were unclassified, though some portions were blacked out as classified. Details from Comey's memos reported in news stories last year appear to come from the unclassified portions.

In explaining the purpose of creating the memos, which have been provided to Mueller, Comey has said he “knew there might come a day when I would need a record of what had happened” to defend not

only himself but the FBI as well.

The memos cover the first three months of the Trump administration, a period of upheaval marked by staff turnover, a cascade of damaging headlines and revelations of an FBI investigation into potential ties between the Trump campaign and Russia. The documents reflect Trump's unease about that investigation, though not always in ways that Comey seemed to anticipate.

In a February 2017 conversation, for instance, Trump told Comey how Putin told him, “we have some of the most beautiful hookers in the world” even as the president adamantly, and repeatedly, distanced himself from a salacious allegation concerning him and prostitutes in Moscow, according to one memo.

In another memo, Comey recounts how Trump at a private White House dinner pointed his fingers at his head and complained that Flynn, his embattled national security adviser, “has serious judgment issues.”

Unexploded WWII bomb forces evacuation of part of Berlin

Associated Press

BERLIN — Berlin police evacuated thousands of people from a central area of the German capital Friday and shut down the main train station in preparation for the removal of an unexploded World War II bomb found during recent construction work.

Some 10,000 residents and workers were being forced to leave an area of nearly a square mile, including the train station, while bomb experts defused the 1,100-pound British bomb.

Trains were prevented from stopping at the busy station from 10 a.m., and through traffic was shut down at 11:30 a.m. before experts began their work, German rail operator Deutsche Bahn said.

Rail traffic was planned to resume early in the afternoon. Some 300,000 travelers use the station daily, according to Deutsche Bahn.

The evacuation area, a circle around the construction site north of the train station where the bomb was discovered during digging, also includes a hospital, the main office of Germany's foreign intelligence service, and parts of both the economy and transportation ministries.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's office and Germany's parliament building are close by, but outside the zone.

Even 73 years after the end of the war, such discoveries remain common in major German cities.

Downtown Berlin was largely reduced to rubble in hundreds

of Allied bombing raids during the war and street-to-street fighting between the Nazi and Soviet armies in the final days of the conflict in Europe.

Experts estimate that more than 5 percent of the bombs dropped on Berlin failed to explode due to a variety of reasons, including faulty fuses, poor assembly and bad angle of impact. The city estimates at least 3,000 bombs, grenades and other munitions are still buried.

In one of the more sensational finds, a 550-pound British bomb was found in 2002 beneath the lower ring of seats during renovation work at Berlin's Olympic Stadium, where tens of thousands of fans regularly watch the city's Hertha BSC soccer club play its home games.

'Poop train' that stunk up Ala. town is finally empty

Associated Press

The last train car full of New York City sewage sludge that has stunk up a small Alabama community for more than two months has finally been emptied, the town's mayor said.

For over two months, the sludge has blown an unbearable stench throughout the tiny town of Parrish, Ala., population 982.

All of the containers have now been emptied from the so-called Poop Train, Parrish Mayor Heather Hall said on social media Wednesday. Some of the containers are still at the site, awaiting shipment back to the northeast U.S., she said.

The sludge is a byproduct of New Yorkers' excrement. It was shipped to the nearby Big Sky landfill. Hall said after a public outcry, the Norfolk Southern railroad required Big Sky to hire more truck drivers, so the sludge could be removed more quickly.

"Other towns and cities have been fighting this material in their towns for years," Hall said in announcing the end of what she described as a nightmare. "While what happened in Parrish was, to our understanding, an unprecedented event, there are still small towns like Parrish fighting this situation on a smaller scale."

Experts say some cities send their waste to Alabama and other Southern states due to low landfill fees and lax zoning laws. New York has discontinued shipments to Alabama for now.

Environmental advocates say there's nothing just about a city dumping waste in poor communities that lack the political clout to stop it. In Alabama, residents of tiny Parrish say they felt blindsided by the sudden horrid smells that enveloped their town in late January.

In her Facebook post announcing that the last container of sludge had been removed, Hall remarked, "This material does not need to be in a populated area ... period."

N. Korea dials down anti-US rhetoric

The Washington Post

SEOUL, South Korea — As the presidents of South Korea and the U.S. prepare for summits with the previously reclusive Kim Jong Un, there has been lots of conjecture about what, exactly, the North Korean leader is prepared to discuss.

North Korea is willing to negotiate with the U.S. about potential denuclearization, Trump administration officials said earlier this month. North Korea won't insist on the withdrawal of American troops from the peninsula as part of any deal, South Korea's Moon Jae-in said Thursday.

But North Korea has said very little about all this — and that has plenty of people worried that expectations for this summit are too high.

"I sure wish KCNA were the one saying this stuff," Robert Kelly, a political scientist at Pusan National University in South Korea, wrote on Twitter after Moon said that North Korea was "not making demands that the U.S. cannot accept, such as the withdrawal of the U.S. forces in Korea." The Korean Central News Agency is the one of the state's main mouthpieces.

During the past quarter-century, it has always paid to be doubtful about North Korea's promises. Like after the 1992 denuclearization deal with South Korea. Or after the 1994 denuclearization deal with the U.S. Or after the 2005 denuclearization deal with its four neighbors and the U.S. Or after the 2012 denuclearization deal with Washington.

As a result, many North Korea policy experts around the world are casting doubt on the suggestion that Kim, 34, who has trumpeted North Korea's nuclear achievements as a way to inject some legitimacy into his reign, now suddenly would give them up.

More likely he's playing for time, they say. Staving off an American invasion, showing China that it doesn't need to implement sanctions quite so strictly, betting that Trump won't be around long enough to see any deal through.

The fact that North Korea's state media, while briefly alluding to the planned summit with Trump, has said nothing about denuclearization feeds into this narrative.

But this overlooks the fact that there are many other things North Korea is not talking about. It's not talking about the American strike on Syria, it's not talking about the American military conducting drills in South Korea, and it's not talking about the "heinous" and "hostile" U.S.

It hasn't even commented on the return of John Bolton, a man the regime once derided as "human scum and a bloodsucker."

And it hasn't been using one of its favorite phrases, the one about being a "strong nuclear power." It's a phrase that was used almost every day in the Rodong Sinmun, the newspaper of the ruling Workers' Party, for months on end. But it hasn't appeared since March 10 — the day after Trump agreed to meet with Kim.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Town thinks cameras may solve poo problem

CT NEW CANAAN — A Connecticut town is considering installing cameras at a park to catch dog owners who don't clean up after their pets.

New Canaan Parks and Recreation Chairwoman Sally Campbell told Hearst Media Connecticut the plan to install cameras was just one part of an effort to address the park's dog excrement problem. She said police are also stepping up patrols near parks.

Parks Commissioner Francesca Segalas said some cameras would be placed in the parking lot to record license plates, while others would be hidden along trails, so police could match pet owners with their vehicles and issue a fine.

Not everyone is on board. Some said they were uneasy about being watched while on a trail, while others wonder how long the video would be kept.

Woman finds intruder in her tub, eating Cheetos

LA MONROE — Police in Louisiana said a woman came home to discover a naked stranger in her tub eating her Cheetos while taking a bath.

A Monroe police affidavit said Evelyn Washington, 29, was arrested on burglary and property damage charges.

The Fort Worth (Texas) Star-Telegram reported that a responding officer found "a full tub of water and a plate of food along with half eaten Cheetos belonging to the victim on the toilet next to the tub."

Washington told the homeowner and police that an unknown male had told her to break into the house. Police found a tall ice chest under a broken window.

Tortoise's cracked shell gets \$4,000 repair job

CA SAN DIEGO — A wayward tortoise that cracked its shell after falling off a 10-foot wall in San Diego County is recovering after vets used screws, zip ties and denture material to repair it.

County Animal Services Director Dan DeSousa said the male 90-pound African spurred tortoise probably was a pet that got loose from a yard.

It showed up in Fallbrook on Sunday and fell over the wall while escaping a dog.

DeSousa said the animal's shell cracked into three pieces. Vets repaired it Tuesday in a three-hour operation.

The \$4,000 cost is covered by the county's Spirit Fund. The tortoise will live with a rescue group.

DeSousa said it will take a year to heal, but the 35- to 40-year-old tortoise could have many more decades of life.

Police: Sandwich error spurred assault

DE DOVER — Police in Delaware said a woman assaulted convenience store workers with pepper spray and hot coffee over a botched sandwich order.

Dover police said in a statement that the incident occurred Wednesday at a Wawa.

Police said Tiffany Evans, 34, ordered a sandwich and then yelled at a male employee for making a mistake. A female employee said they would make another sandwich and told Evans to stop talking like that.

An argument ensued. Police said Evans threw hot coffee in the woman's face, causing burns. It also struck the male employee and damaged \$200 worth of food.

Police said Evans pepper

sprayed the female employee when she walked out from behind the counter.

According to police, Evans fled in a Honda but later turned herself in without incident.

Department sorry for 'inappropriate message'

WA SEATTLE — Washington state's transportation department has apologized for an "inappropriate message" that appeared on one of its traffic signs.

Motorist Ruslan Kozlov told KCPQ-TV he was driving on Interstate 5 south Tuesday afternoon when he spotted the message "U Suck" on an overhead sign. The transportation department said it was "clearly a mistake" that was caused by a "training error." The agency said it's taking steps so it doesn't happen again.

Mammoth's remains found on federal land

WY POWELL — The skeletal remains of what appears to be an ancient mammoth have been found in northwest Wyoming.

The Powell Tribune reported that the fossil was discovered at the Buffalo Bill Reservoir west of Cody this week by a hiker.

Federal law enforcement agents and officials have secured the site located on Bureau of Reclamation land.

University of Wyoming paleobiology professor Mark Clementz said the discovery is important because Wyoming doesn't have a lot of mammoth fossils. UW archaeology and anthropology professor Marcel Kornfeld said it's important that the site be processed quickly because the exposed fossils appear to be in poor condition, and the area will soon be submerged as the reservoir fills with snow melt.

Over 1,000 guns stolen after being left in cars

NM ALBUQUERQUE — Authorities said more than 1,000 guns were either stolen from cars or left in cars that were stolen in Albuquerque during a 22-month span.

An Albuquerque Police Department analysis found thieves stole 882 firearms from inside a vehicle while another 153 firearms were stolen during an auto theft since July 2016. Albuquerque police said this month two auto theft suspects fired at officers and barricaded themselves inside an apartment for hours. Police said the gun used to fire at police was stolen during a carjacking less than two weeks prior.

Albuquerque Police Department Cmdr. Joe Burke said officers are going to the community and urging residents to avoid leaving their guns in their cars and make sure their weapons are secured.

Lego model of Titanic on display at museum

TN PIGEON FORGE — A 26-foot-long model of the Titanic made out of 56,000 Legos built by a boy in Iceland who has autism can now be seen in the U.S.

The model of the ocean liner is on display through 2020 at the Titanic Museum Attraction in Pigeon Forge, Tenn.

Brynjar Karl Birgisson, 15, said he started building the model when he was 10 years old, and it took him 11 months to finish.

The teen from Reykjavik, Iceland, told the museum the project helped him out of what he calls his "autistic fog." He says being autistic can sound "a bit scary," but there are ways to "become more functional."

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

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Embiid scores 23 in playoff debut as Sixers beat Heat

Associated Press

MIAMI — Joel Embiid had trouble with his new mask.

It didn't slow him down.

Embiid's playoff debut was a smashing success for Philadelphia. The All-Star center returned from a 10-game absence by scoring 23 points, including a personal 7-0 run down the stretch that iced matters, and the 76ers reclaimed control of their Eastern Conference first-round series by topping the Miami Heat 128-108 on Thursday night.

The 76ers outscored the Heat 32-14 in the fourth quarter, and took a 2-1 lead in the series.

"I am just so proud of what he did," 76ers coach Brett Brown said.

Rightly so, too. Embiid started the day doubtful, ended it dominant, and had plenty of help as well. Marco Belinelli and Dario Saric each scored 21 for Philadelphia, and Ben Simmons finished with 19 points, 12 rebounds and seven assists.

"It was annoying," Embiid said of getting used to the mask. "But that was the only way I could play in this game, if I wore the mask and protected my face with goggles. I had to work through it and I did."

Thursday began with the 76ers saying Embiid wasn't likely to play. His status was upgraded to probable in the afternoon and then he finally was inserted into the starting lineup — medical clearance coming from the team, mask clearance coming from the NBA after the league signed off on the dark, translucent, carbon-fiber, goggled apparatus that was made in consultation with independent experts.

The mask came off a couple of times, the goggles were askew at times as well — Heat forward Justise Winslow even stomping on them once for good measure, a play that Brown chalked up to the intensity of playoff basketball — but in the end Embiid found a way.

"It's definitely a different look when you have an All-Star back in the lineup," Winslow said. "It changes things, for sure."

Goran Dragic scored 23 points for Miami, which got 19 from Winslow and 14 from Josh Richardson.

Game 4 is Saturday afternoon.

Embiid banked in a turnaround straight-away jumper — a fortuitous bounce — to put Philadelphia up nine late, then connected on a three-pointer and added a pair of free throws to start the spurt that put away the game.

Pelicans lead Blazers 3-0

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Nikola Mirotic watched his third three-pointer of the first half swish through the hoop, turned to acknowledge the raucous, roaring crowd and raised his first triumphantly as he trotted back up court.

Portland had a hard enough time dealing with Pelicans All-Star Anthony Davis and the backcourt duo of Jrue Holiday and Rajon Rondo in Games 1 and 2. Pile on the finest playoff performance of Mirotic's career, and the rout was on in Game 3.

Mirotic scored a career playoff-best 30 points to go with eight rebounds, three steals and a block, and the Pelicans pushed Portland to the brink of elimination with a 119-102 win on Thursday night.

To illustrate how hard New Orleans has been to defend in the series, Portland coach Terry Stotts made a point of noting that Mirotic was the third different Pelicans player to score 30 in a game. Davis had 35 in Game 1 and Holiday 33 in Game 2.

"New Orleans played extremely well," Stotts said. "We arguably had one of our worst games of the year, so it was a bad combination."

Davis had 28 points, 11 rebounds, three steals and two blocks for New Orleans, which can advance past the first round of the playoffs for the first time since 2008 with one more win. Game 4 is Saturday.

The 6-foot-10 Mirotic, acquired in a midseason trade after DeMarcus Cousins' season-ending Achilles tear, made 12 of 15 shots, scoring on everything from quick-release three-pointers to cutting dunks and fast-break layups.

"I knew I was capable to have games like this, but I never want to force any shots and always want to play simple, play for my teammates the same way they play for me," Mirotic said. "I just want to show them they were right to bring me here."

Damian Lillard scored 20 for Portland, but missed nine of an unusually low 14 shots. He averaged about 19 shots per game this season, but said the Pelicans were defending him relentlessly.

"They're making me give the ball up," Lillard said. "This is a different coverage than I've seen at any point in my career."

CJ McCollum scored 22 and Al-Farouq Aminu added 21, but Portland trailed by double digits for most of the first half and all of the second.

The Blazers had no answer for a Pelicans offense orchestrated once again to prolific effect by Rondo, who had 16 points and 11 assists — giving him 37 assists in the series. Holiday added 16 points for New Orleans, which shot 53 percent (46-for-87).

Warriors top mourning Spurs

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Playing basketball seemed trivial to the Spurs following the death of Erin Popovich.

They competed as best they could Thursday night. It just wasn't enough against Golden State, again.

Kevin Durant had 26 points, nine rebounds and six assists, and the Warriors beat San Antonio 110-97 for a 3-0 series lead over the Spurs, who were still reeling from the death of coach Gregg Popovich's wife.

The Warriors can close the first-round series with a win Sunday in San Antonio in Game 4.

"It's hard to think about that for me, personally, right now because there is other stuff bigger than basketball," Spurs veteran Tony Parker said.

The Spurs were playing a day after the death of Erin Popovich, who passed away after battling an undisclosed long-term illness. Erin and Gregg Popovich were married four decades and have two children

and two grandchildren.

San Antonio did not air a video tribute or hold a moment of silence for Erin in an apparent attempt to make the game as routine as possible for its players, but that was impossible.

Popovich was not in his customary position roaming the sidelines, choosing instead to be with his family. San Antonio assistant Ettore Messina coached the team in Popovich's place.

"We are all hurting," Spurs veteran Manu Ginobili said after the morning shootaround. "It's not an easy day to be here."

The Spurs had an emotional start, but could not sustain it against the talented Warriors.

"This was about what I expected," Golden State coach Steve Kerr said. "First half they were getting after us like they did in Game 2 and we stayed with it, we had some bursts. The whole point is take care of the ball and defend over 48 minutes and things should work out."

Robertson pitches out of jam for Yanks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — David Robertson went wild and loaded the bases in the eighth inning, and the Yankees weren't all that concerned.

"Whenever it's a tough situation like that, I want D-Rob on the mound," Aaron Judge said.

Or as manager Aaron Boone put it: "He doesn't blink."

Judge hit his fifth home run, Robertson pitched out of a self-inflicted jam and New York overcame some shaky defense on a chilly night to beat the Toronto Blue Jays 4-3 on Thursday.

Robertson loaded the bases with no outs on consecutive walks but limited Toronto to one run on pinch-hitter Curtis Granderson's RBI single. Robertson struck out two and got a flyout from Luke Maile to hold

a one-run lead.

"He's the one guy that, even if it gets a little sideways for a minute, you always feel like he can bring it right back in," Boone said.

Not that Robertson wasn't feeling some stress.

"I had to do something," he said. "I was going to blow the game."

Toronto was eyeing a big inning for a second straight game. Granderson hit his ninth career grand slam in a 15-5 win over Kansas City on Wednesday.

"That guy Robertson? He's not going to melt," Blue Jays manager John Gibbons said.

Judge lofted a solo shot to make it 4-2 in the seventh. He turned on a 3-2 splitter from Tyler Clippard, spoiling the reliever's first outing at Yankee Stadium since New York traded him to the White Sox last July.

CC Sabathia allowed two unearned runs over 4¹/₃ innings and 71 pitches in his first start since straining his right hip on April 6. He is 9-0 with a 1.88 ERA in his last 13 regular-season starts following a Yankees loss.

"He gave us what we needed," Boone said.

Chad Green (1-0) retired five straight batters, Dellin Betances pitched a perfect seventh and Robertson delivered a lead to Aroldis Chapman, who struck out the side on 12 pitches for his third save, twice topping 100 mph.

Aaron Sanchez (1-2) held New York to three runs over six innings. He allowed seven hits, one start after no-hitting Baltimore into the eighth inning.

"They dunked a couple of balls in early and scored," Gibbons said. "But for a tough

lineup to face, I thought he was pretty good."

Moved from cleanup to the three-spot and flipping slots with struggling slugger Giancarlo Stanton, Didi Gregorius put New York ahead 3-2 with an RBI single in the fifth. Gregorius entered leading the majors in OPS (1.268) and tied for second in the AL with 16 RBIs.

Stanton followed with an infield single to snap an 0-for-15 skid. He was 1-for-3 with a walk and is 4-for-38 with 20 strikeouts at Yankee Stadium this season.

Neil Walker sparked New York's two-run second inning by snapping an 0-for-16 skid with a double off the right-field wall. He scored on a single by Ronald Torreyes.

MLB roundup

Morton, Altuve power Astros to rout of Mariners

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Charlie Morton pitched seven innings of three-hit ball, Jose Altuve had a three-run double and the Houston Astros beat the Seattle Mariners 9-2 on Thursday after Evan Gattis hit into a bizarre 5-4-3 triple play in the fourth inning.

Morton (3-0) retired 15 straight during one stretch and didn't allow a runner to reach second base.

Marco Gonzales (1-2) allowed three runs — all unearned because of a throwing error by third baseman Kyle Seager — and four hits in 4²/₃ innings.

Red Sox 8, Angels 2: Mookie Betts hit his second leadoff homer in three games, Andrew Benintendi homered and drove in three runs and visiting Boston completed a dominant sweep of AL West-leading Los Angeles.

J.D. Martinez and Rafael De-

vers also drove in runs during the seventh consecutive victory by the major league-leading Red Sox, who have won 16 of 17 since losing on opening day.

Eduardo Rodriguez (2-0) pitched six innings of three-hit ball as Boston extended the best start in the 118-year-old franchise's history.

Cubs 8, Cardinals 5: Jon Lester (2-0) was dominant through six innings of two-hit ball in his 100th start with host Chicago, and Jason Heyward hit a two-run homer against St. Louis.

Kris Bryant and Kyle Schwarber each had two RBIs as Chicago took a 6-1 lead after two innings. Every Cubs starter had a hit, including three by Anthony Rizzo and two each by Heyward, Schwarber and Javier Baez.

Brandon Morrow pitched a perfect ninth to complete a five-hitter and remain perfect in three save chances.

Tigers 13, Orioles 8: Leo-

nys Martin hit his first big league grand slam, and Jeimer Candelario had four hits and three RBIs as host Detroit completed a three-game sweep and extended Baltimore's losing streak to six.

Jordan Zimmermann (1-0) gave up four runs and seven hits in 5¹/₃ innings, allowing two home runs to Manny Machado and one to Chris Davis.

Phillies 7, Pirates 0: Jake Arrieta (2-0) struck out 10 and tossed one-hit ball over seven innings to lead host Philadelphia past Pittsburgh.

Yacksel Rios allowed a hit in the eighth and Victor Arano finished the two-hitter with a perfect ninth.

Rhys Hoskins homered and Cesar Hernandez had a three-run single.

Braves 12, Mets 4: Preston Tucker drove in a career-high five runs, and Matt Wisler (1-0) allowed one run and two hits in seven innings after being called up from the minors to lead host

Atlanta past New York.

Kurt Suzuki had three hits and drove in three runs, including a two-run homer in the first off Matt Harvey (0-2), who allowed six runs and eight hits in six innings.

Brewers 12, Marlins 3: Lorenzo Cain homered, doubled twice and scored four times, and pinch-hitter Ryan Braun launched a three-run homer that gave him 1,000 RBIs for host Milwaukee.

The Brewers erased a 3-2 deficit with three runs in the fifth inning and added seven in the sixth.

Diamondbacks 3, Giants 1: Zack Greinke (2-1) allowed one run and three hits in seven innings, giving up a solo homer to Brandon Belt, and host Arizona won its sixth straight series.

Brad Boxberger got Belt to pop out with two on in the ninth inning for his fifth straight save to open the season, a night after allowing the go-ahead homer to Belt in the 10th.

Capitals even series with Blue Jackets

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio—Game 4 lacked the intensity of the three before it, and no overtime heroics were necessary. Instead, the workmanlike Washington Capitals turned in their most complete game of the playoffs, putting away the Columbus Blue Jackets to tie their series at two games apiece.

Not that the Blue Jackets did themselves any favors in the 4-1 loss Thursday night. They came out flat, squandered an early power play, surrendered pucks in the neutral zone and couldn't seem to get any traction until late in the game.

Columbus had overcome deficits to win the first two games in Washington. When the series shifted to Columbus on Tuesday, the Capitals prevailed on a lucky bounce in double-overtime.

Now the best-of-seven series moves back to Washington for Game 5 on Saturday afternoon.

"All we've done is gotten on

even terms," Washington coach Barry Trotz said. "We got ourselves in a hole, and we have to continue to push forward. The next game is a real pivotal game. Someone is going to take the lead in this series, and then your back is against the wall. We have to make sure we're ready to go."

Evgeny Kuznetsov had a goal and two assists for the Capitals, who made sure the game was never in doubt. Tom Wilson and Alexander Ovechkin each had a goal and an assist, and T.J. Oshie also tallied.

"We've been a confident group all year," said Washington goalie Braden Holtby, who finished with 23 saves. "I don't think we've ever doubted ourselves. We came into this building with the right mindset."

There was no comeback magic this time for the Blue Jackets, who couldn't seem to shift out of neutral until coach John Tortorella started switching up the lines in the second period.

Boone Jenner scored for Columbus, and Sergei Bobrovsky had 29 saves.

"There's no sense asking me things about the game," a bewildered Tortorella told reporters. "I'm telling you, we laid an egg, so I'm not going to break it down for you. We sucked. We sucked. Let's move by it and see if we play better Saturday afternoon."

Washington led 1-0 after the opening period. Just after Columbus' Thomas Vanek knocked the puck out of the blue paint with his glove, Kuznetsov shoveled the carom from the right boards out to Wilson, who connected from above the circle at 6:16.

The Capitals got their second halfway through the second period on a power play when Oshie flicked in a rebound. Ovechkin beat Bobrovsky from the right circle early in the third period to give the Caps a three-goal lead.

A few minutes later, Jenner redirected Josh Anderson's

slap shot to make it a 3-1 game and finally give the record Nationwide Arena crowd of 19,395 something to cheer about. Kuznetsov added an empty-net goal with 2:19 left in the game.

"They scored that goal to kind of sneak back in it a little bit, and we didn't miss a beat," Washington defenseman John Carlson said. "Our next shift I think we dominated them, and maybe one or two after that one, too. Those are the kinds of things you need to do to win."

Columbus captain Nick Foligno also couldn't explain what happened to the Blue Jackets after they had showed so much juice in the first three games.

"We know we have to be way better," he said. "Maybe it gives us a little kick in the rear to know we have a real good opportunity in front of us to go back there. Home ice hasn't been too nice to each team. We feel good about ourselves and the fact that we haven't played our best hockey yet. We've got to find it."

Bruins push Maple Leafs to the brink of elimination

Associated Press

TORONTO — Facing an opponent missing arguably its best player in front of a raucous home crowd, the Toronto Maple Leafs felt pretty good heading into their Game 4 matchup with the Boston Bruins.

Less than three hours later, they had been pushed to the brink of playoff elimination.

Brad Marchand scored the go-ahead goal and Tuukka Rask made 31 saves as the Bruins defeated the Leafs 3-1 to grab a commanding 3-1 lead in their first-round series. Boston was minus No. 1 center Patrice Bergeron, who was a late scratch with an upper-body injury, but it didn't matter as the Bruins ground out a victory on a night where some of Toronto's young stars failed to produce on the big stage.

"We were set up pretty good," Leafs coach Mike Bab-

cock lamented. "We didn't take advantage. That's on us."

Torey Krug and Jake DeBrusk had the other goals for the Bruins, who can clinch the Eastern Conference quarter-final series at home in Game 5 on Saturday at Boston's TD Garden. David Pastrnak added two assists.

Tomas Plekanec scored the lone goal for the Leafs, who got 18 saves from Frederik Andersen.

"We gave them opportunities and they didn't miss," Leafs forward Mitch Marner said. "Now it's do or die."

Bergeron, part of a top line that combined for 20 points in the Bruins' two home victories to open the series, was a surprise late scratch. Riley Nash took his spot between Marchand and Pastrnak, and played well in the four-time Selke Trophy winner's absence earlier

this season.

"It doesn't matter (if Bergeron's out)," Marchand said. "You play the same way."

Marchand snapped a 1-1 tie for Boston with 3:05 left in the second after the Bruins were called for icing. Babcock put his top line, centered by Auston Matthews, out hoping to pounce on a tired group, but Nash won the draw to Adam McQuaid, whose clearing attempt up the boards skipped past Toronto defenseman Jake Gardiner. Pastrnak moved in on a 2-on-1 with Marchand, faking a shot to draw the overaggressive Nikita Zaitsev to him before feeding his linemate with a slick pass for a wide-open net.

The Leafs had a number of chances earlier in the period to go ahead, including Mitch Marner's breakaway off a stretch pass from Morgan Rielly that Rask turned aside with

the blocker, but were unable to get one by Rask.

Boston then made it 3-1 at 4:17 of the third. David Krejci blocked Travis Dermott's shot and raced the other way on a 2-on-1 before finding DeBrusk, who beat a helpless Andersen after Roman Polak failed to block the pass across.

"We had a breakaway and a good 2-on-1, and we got nothing out of it," Babcock said. "Both their 2-on-1s ... they buried and we didn't make good plays on them to help our goalie out. In the end, that's the game."

The Bruins stunned the Maple Leafs just 28 second into the game to quiet an electric Air Canada Centre when Krug's snapshot from the sideboards found its way past Nash and Plekanec in front before glancing in off Andersen's shoulder.

"It's one I've got to fight to see," Anderson said.