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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Jackson withdraws as VA nominee

BY NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Rear Adm. Ronny Jackson withdrew from consideration as secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs early Thursday morning and denied allegations raised against him during the past two days of drinking on the job and doling out controlled substances.

“Going into this process, I expected tough questions about how to best care for our veterans, but I did not expect to have to dignify baseless and anonymous attacks on my character and integrity,” Jackson, the White House physician, said Thursday in a statement.

The decision came after details emerged late Wednesday of allegations made by 23 of Jackson’s current and former coworkers in the White House Medical Unit. They described him as an unstable leader who drank on duty and handed out

prescription medication, including opioids, without keeping records of it.

The allegations, which have not been substantiated, were compiled in a summary provided to reporters Wednesday by Democrats on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee.

“The allegations against me are completely false and fabricated,” Jackson said. “If they had any merit, I would not have been selected, promoted and entrusted to serve in such a sensitive and important role as physician to three presidents over the past 12 years.”

Minutes after Jackson withdrew, President Donald Trump defended him in an interview with “Fox & Friends” and blamed Democrats for Jackson’s failed nomination, describing them as “obstructionists.”

Trump specifically went after Sen. Jon Tester, of Montana, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Commit-

tee. Trump said Tester has a “big price to pay in Montana.” Tester is up for re-election in November.

Tester said Thursday in a statement it was his constitutional responsibility to “make sure the veterans of this nation get a strong, thoroughly vetted leader.”

Jackson’s nomination became imperiled Tuesday when Tester and Sen. Johnny Isakson, the Republican chairman of the Senate committee, decided together to postpone his confirmation hearing because of the new allegations.

“The next secretary must have a commitment to reform a strained health care system and a willingness to stand up to special interests who want to privatize the VA,” Tester said. “My sleeves are rolled up and ready to work with Chairman Isakson to vet and confirm a secretary who is fit to run the VA.”

Trump told Fox & Friends

that he had a new nominee in mind. He declined to name the individual, but said the potential nominee is “somebody great” with “political capability.”

Before the allegations against Jackson emerged, lawmakers and veterans groups already had concerns Jackson lacked the experience necessary for the job. The VA is the second-largest federal agency, with more than 375,000 employees, and operates on a nearly \$200 billion budget.

Co-workers described to senators multiple occasions that Jackson was drunk while on call when he was expected to report to duty in the instance that the president had a health issue. At least once, Jackson couldn’t be reached because he was “passed out drunk in his hotel room,” the coworkers alleged. They told senators that Jackson got drunk at a Secret Service going-away party and wrecked a government vehicle.

Risk-taking, poor training cited in Niger deaths

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

A culture of excessive risk-taking, poor training and complacency were factors in the deaths of four U.S. soldiers killed in an October ambush in the West African country of Niger, a Pentagon investigation has determined.

The findings in the 6,000-page report, which were described to The Wall Street Journal by military officials, include recommendations from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis on steps needed to improve training and chain-of-command protocols.

The ambush in the Nigerien

village of Tongo Tongo, near that country’s border with Mali, has roiled the special operations community and has cast a spotlight on high-risk military operations that have occurred far from the public eye.

The Wall Street Journal reported that there were mission command failures at multiple levels. For example, one instance highlighted in the report said an officer copied and pasted orders for a separate mission into the concept of operations for the October mission to gain approval for the patrol that ended in the deaths of the four soldiers.

The report reveals that low-level commanders, eager to

make their mark against local militants in Niger, “took liberties to get operations approved through the chain of command,” the Journal reported.

The report did not single out any military personnel for punishment. However, the Army or U.S. Special Operations Command could seek to impose punitive measures if deemed necessary.

The Journal reported that Mattis provided the Special Operations Command and U.S. Africa Command with 10 “primary directives” to address problems that led to the ambush, giving the commands four months to put better guidelines in place.

Killed in the ambush were

Staff Sgt. Bryan C. Black, Staff Sgt. Dustin M. Wright, Staff Sgt. Jeremiah W. Johnson and Sgt. La David T. Johnson.

The troops were overrun and outgunned by about 50 fighters who claimed allegiance to Islamic State.

The unit was on what the military has called a joint security patrol with Nigerien soldiers, but that mission changed as troops were redirected to search for a high-value target in the region.

There are about 800 U.S. troops in Niger, which is a hub for the U.S. military in western Africa. A \$110 million drone base is now under construction in the country.

Mattis vows re-energized fight against ISIS in Syria

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — American troops will be key in a soon-to-be re-energized campaign against remaining Islamic State fighters in Syria, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis told senators Thursday on Capitol Hill, pledging the U.S. was not preparing to pull its forces from the war-torn country.

“This is an ongoing fight right now,” Mattis told Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., during a hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee. “We’re continuing the fight, and we’re going to expand it with more regional support.”

Shaheen and Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., asked Mattis to explain recent comments by President Donald Trump indicating the commander in chief was considering the removal of about 2,000 American troops in Syria serving as advisers to Kurdish-Arab forces battling ISIS.

“We want to come home, we’ll be coming home, but we want to leave a strong and lasting footprint and that was a big part of our discussion,” Trump said Tuesday during a news conference at the White House alongside French President Emmanuel Macron. He added later, “So, we’ll see what happens. But we’re going to be coming home relatively soon.”

Graham, long a proponent for greater American intervention in Syria, asked Mattis whether he supported pulling all American troops out of Syria once ISIS is completely destroyed. The senator compared such a departure to the U.S.’ withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, which officials have said contributed to the rise of ISIS across Syria and Iraq.

“I’m confident that we would probably regret it,” Mattis said.

Norse Pagan soldier’s beard OK’d

Stars and Stripes

First the Sikhs. Now the Pagans.

A member of the Norse Pagan faith, serving in the 795th Military Police Battalion at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., has been granted permission to wear a beard under a 2017 Army policy directive that makes it easier for soldiers to receive exemptions from grooming and appearance regulations if they conflict with their religious beliefs.

“In observance of your Heathen, Norse Pagan faith, you may wear a beard, in accordance with Army uniform and grooming standards for Soldiers with approved religious accommodations provided in Army regulation (AR) 670-1,” said a memo signed by Col. Curtis M. Shroeder, commander of the 14th Military Police Brigade.

The 2017 policy change allowed brigade-level commanders to authorize the exemption based on religious grounds — and with some limits on the length and appearance of beards.

A copy of the memo circulated on social media with the soldier’s name redacted. Fort Leonard Wood spokeswoman Tiffany Wood confirmed the authenticity of the memo to Army Times.

The 2017 change to Army Regulation 670-1 was authorized by then-Army Secretary Eric Fanning mostly to accommodate observant Sikhs, whose religion requires adult males to wear beards, and conservative Muslim women who must wear head coverings under tenets of their faith.

“The soldier’s brigade-level commander will approve a request for a religious accommodation ... unless the commander determines the

request is not based on a sincerely held religious belief, or identifies a specific, concrete hazard that is not specifically addressed in this directive and that cannot be mitigated by reasonable measures,” Fanning wrote.

However, the directive didn’t stipulate which religions were covered by the exemptions. Nor did the directive differentiate between mandatory requirements — such as Sikh men wearing beards — and customary practices — such as wearing apparel in other faiths.

According to the Open Halls Project, an advocacy group for heathens serving in the military, the beard is a tradition, but not a requirement.

“There is no religious requirement for beards in Heathenry,” said an April 2017 post on the Open Halls Project website. “Sikhs are allowed to wear beards and turbans because it actually is a religious requirement of their faith that they do so. Kesh, or ‘uncut hair’ is one of the five religious requirements of baptized Sikhs. We, as Heathens, have no such religious requirement with regards to hair.”

Heathenry is a religious movement based on pre-Christian belief systems of Germanic peoples in early Medieval Europe. Their communities exist in the U.S., Europe and Australia.

In March of 2017, the Pentagon expanded its list of recognized faith groups to include among others atheists, agnostics, shamans, humanists and pagans.

The Hammer of Thor, the emblem of the Norse Pagan faith, is authorized for military headstones.

House panels push pay hike, ships, innovation in DOD policy plan

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Several House panels on Thursday issued their first wave of proposals for the next defense policy plan with aims to boost military pay and benefits, troop levels, innovation efforts, weapons and equipment.

The proposals, approved before several House Armed Services Committee subpanels, include the highest military pay raise in nearly a decade (2.6 percent), an end-strength boost across all the services, an extension to special pay and bonuses for servicemembers, and new ships, planes and other

acquisitions.

The effort appears to build on new momentum to grow the size and might of the military in response to China’s and Russia’s growing capabilities as laid out in President Donald Trump’s budget request for the Pentagon issued earlier this year.

For example, provisions of the House budget proposals “provide our warfighters, military families and retirees the care and support they need, deserve and have earned,” Rep. Mike Coffman, R-Colo., chairman of the House Armed Services Committee subpanel on military personnel issues, said Thursday in a hearing.

In recent weeks, the House

Armed Services Committee, its subpanels and its Senate counterparts have held dozens of hearings to discuss the 2019 budget priorities for each of the branches as well as a wide-ranging list of challenges facing the military.

The proposals follow Trump’s February rollout of the Pentagon’s proposed 2019 budget, which asked for a hike in funding to \$686.1 billion. Some experts said the effort was likely to get a positive response on Capitol Hill, especially with a deal already in place to break statutory spending limits and with Congress invested in military improvements during an election year.

US, S. Korea suspend war games for summit

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — The U.S. and South Korea will suspend joint war games Friday to help ensure a successful summit between President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, military officials said.

The talks will lay the groundwork for a subsequent summit between Kim and President Donald Trump. No date or venue have been set for the first-ever U.S.-North Korean summit, although Trump has said it will be in May or early June.

“The military will exert all efforts to ensure stable support for the inter-Korean summit,” the U.S.-led Combined Forces Command and South Korea’s military said in a joint statement.

Thursday’s decision was the latest in a series of adjustments to the annual springtime drills as diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the crisis over the North’s nuclear weapons program gained momentum.

The allies agreed earlier this year to delay the start of the exercises until after the Winter Olympics to help the South persuade the North to join the games and begin talks.

They resumed the field exer-

cise dubbed Foal Eagle on April 1 and a computer-simulated, command-post exercise known as Key Resolve on Monday.

Military officials said the two-week Key Resolve would be suspended Friday during the historic summit and would resume Monday, as previously scheduled.

The statement stressed the decision was based “on a common assessment that the objectives and desired outcomes” of the first week of Key Resolve “have been achieved.”

The statement didn’t mention Foal Eagle, which South Korea’s military said would last only four weeks this year, half the duration of last year’s exercise.

U.S. Forces Korea spokesman Col. Chad Carroll said Foal Eagle will continue into May.

But the Yonhap News Agency quoted a military official as saying the two sides have effectively wrapped up the training Thursday and “most of the programs in the Foal Eagle exercise will finish today.”

Joint military exercises between Seoul and Washington usually infuriate Pyongyang, which considers them a rehearsal for an invasion despite the allies’ insistence they’re defensive in nature.

N. Korea’s nuclear test site likely collapsed, Chinese geologists say

Associated Press

BEIJING — Research by Chinese geologists suggests that the mountain above North Korea’s main nuclear test site likely has collapsed, rendering it unsafe for further testing and requiring that it be monitored for any leaking radiation.

The findings by the scientists at the University of Science and Technology of China may shed new light on North Korean President Kim Jong Un’s announcement that his country was ceasing its testing program ahead of planned summit meetings with South Korean President Moon Jae-in and U.S. President Donald Trump.

The results also support some of the findings of an earlier study by another group of Chinese researchers that was published last month by the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*.

Nuclear explosions release enormous amounts of heat and other forms of energy, and the North’s largest test in September was believed early on to have rendered the site in northeastern North Korea unstable.

Chinese authorities have said

they’ve detected no radiation risk from samples collected along the border. Calls to those departments were not immediately answered Thursday.

The data in the latest Chinese study were collected following the most powerful of North Korea’s six nuclear device tests on Sept. 3, which is believed to have triggered four earthquakes in the following weeks. The yield of the bomb was estimated at more than 100 kilotons of TNT, at least 10 times stronger than anything the North had tested previously. (The bomb the U.S. dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, in 1945 had a yield of about 15 kilotons.)

The University of Science and Technology of China paper, authored by Tian Dongdong, Yao Jiawen and Wen Lianxing, said the first of those earthquakes, which occurred 8½ minutes after the explosion, was “an on-site collapse toward the nuclear test center,” while those that followed were an “earthquake swarm” in similar locations.

The study is peer-reviewed and has been accepted for publication by the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*.

Marine aircraft makes 3rd emergency landing in week in Japan

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — No injuries or damage were reported after a U.S. military helicopter made an emergency landing Wednesday afternoon in Japan’s Kagoshima prefecture — the third such incident in the past week, officials said.

The MV-22 Osprey from Marine Corps Air Station Futenma’s 1st Marine Aircraft Wing made the precautionary landing at Amami Airport about 4:30 p.m. after a warning light came on, Japanese and Marine officials said.

The helicopter-plane hybrid was flying

from Futenma to Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni at the time of the incident, Marine spokeswoman Capt. Karoline Foote said in a statement to *Stars and Stripes*. It was joined on the ground by a second Osprey that had experienced no technical difficulties.

“The reason for the landing was a maintenance issue,” Foote wrote.

“The aircraft functioned as designed in that the cockpit indicators informed the aircrew of the issue,” she wrote. “The aircrew performed as trained; they took the appropriate action in accordance with standard operating procedures to safely land the aircraft at the closest airport.”

Once on the ground, the crew investi-

gated the malfunction and found there was no problem, a Kyushu Defense Bureau spokesman said. Both tilt-rotor aircraft left the airport about 5:50 p.m.

The Osprey that experienced the malfunction headed back to Futenma and landed at approximately 6:40 p.m., the Defense Bureau spokesman said. The other Osprey proceeded to Iwakuni as planned and landed about 7:20 p.m.

The emergency landing did not interrupt airport operations on the island between Okinawa and mainland Japan.

The incident comes on the heels of an emergency landing Tuesday in Fukuoka by an Iwakuni-based F-35B Lightning II fighter due to a cockpit warning, officials said.

Cosby guilty of 3 indecent assault counts

Associated Press

NORRISTOWN, Pa. — Bill Cosby was convicted Thursday of drugging and molesting a woman in the first big celebrity trial of the #MeToo era, completing the spectacular late-life downfall of a comedian who broke racial barriers in Hollywood on his way to TV superstardom as America's Dad.

Cosby, 80, could end up spending his final years in prison after a jury concluded he sexually violated Temple University employee Andrea Constand at his suburban Philadelphia

home in 2004. He claimed the encounter was consensual.

The verdict came after a two-week retrial in which prosecutors put five other women on the stand who testified that Cosby, married for 54 years, drugged and violated them, too. One of those women asked him through her tears, "You remember, don't you, Mr. Cosby?"

The panel of seven men and five women reached a verdict after deliberating 14 hours over two days, vindicating prosecutors' decision to retry Cosby after his first trial ended with a

hung jury less than a year ago.

Cosby could get up to 10 years in prison on each of the three counts of aggravated indecent assault. He is likely to get less than that under state sentencing guidelines, but given his age, even a modest term could mean he will die behind bars.

Constand, 45, a former Temple women's basketball administrator, told jurors that Cosby knocked her out with three blue pills he called "your friends" and then penetrated her with his fingers as she lay immobilized, unable to resist or say no.

It was the only criminal case to arise from a barrage of allegations from more than 60 women who said the former TV star drugged and molested them over a span of five decades.

Cosby's retrial took place against the backdrop of #MeToo, the movement against sexual misconduct that has taken down powerful men in rapid succession, among them Harvey Weinstein, Matt Lauer, Kevin Spacey and Sen. Al Franken.

Central American caravan reaches southern US border

Associated Press

TIJUANA, Mexico — About 130 Central Americans, mostly women and children, have arrived at the U.S. border with Mexico in a "caravan" of asylum-seeking immigrants that has drawn the fury of President Donald Trump.

Two busloads arrived Tuesday in the Mexican border city of Tijuana at two migrant shelters just steps from one of the most fortified stretches of border separating the U.S. from Mexico. They joined another 50 or so who arrived in Tijuana during the past week or two.

Four more busloads of about 200 Central Americans — mostly women and children but including some men — were expected to arrive in Tijuana on Wednesday, said Alex Mensing, project coordinator for Pueblos Sin Fronteras, which is organizing the effort.

U.S. lawyers planned to lead clinics later this week on U.S. asylum law to tell the immigrants what to expect when they seek asylum. The first groups plan to try to enter the U.S. on Sunday at San Diego's border crossing.

The caravans have been a relatively common tactic for years among advocacy groups to bring attention to Central American citizens seeking asylum in the U.S. to escape political persecution or criminal threats from gangs.

The latest one drew more attention because Trump tweeted about it from almost the moment it began March 25 in the Mexican city of Tapachula, near the Guatemalan border.

While it traveled slowly across Mexico, Trump used it as an example to try to win more support for his planned border wall — even though the asylum-seekers plan to turn themselves in to border inspectors.

Ex-policeman charged with 1970s, '80s Golden State Killer crimes

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — A man once sworn to protect the public from crime was accused Wednesday of living a double life terrorizing suburban neighborhoods at night, becoming one of California's most feared serial killers and rapists in the 1970s and '80s before leaving a cold trail that baffled investigators.

Former police officer Joseph James DeAngelo, 72, was arrested at his home Tuesday after DNA linked him to crimes attributed to the so-called Golden State Killer. He initially was charged with eight counts of murder and could face dozens more charges, authorities said.

The culprit also known as the East Area Rapist, among other names, is suspected of at least 12 slayings and 50 rapes in 10 counties across California. The armed, masked prowler sneaked in through windows at night and surprised sleeping victims who ranged in age from 13 to 41.

When encountering a couple, he was known to tie up the man and to pile dishes onto his back. He threatened to kill both victims if he heard plates crash to the floor while he raped the woman. He then ransacked the house, taking souvenirs, notably coins and jewelry, before fleeing on foot or bicycle.

Despite an outpouring of thousands of tips over the years, DeAngelo's name had not been on the radar of law enforcement before last week, Sacramento County District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert said.

"We knew we were looking for a needle in a haystack, but we also knew that needle was there," she said. "It was right

here in Sacramento."

A break in the case and the arrest came together at "light speed" during the past six days, Schubert said, though authorities refused to reveal what led to DeAngelo.

Sacramento Sheriff Scott Jones said detectives with "dogged determination" were able to get a sample of DNA from something DeAngelo discarded, though he wouldn't say what the item was. The genetic material was not a match, but there were enough similarities for investigators to return for more and they said they were able to get a conclusive match.

After watching DeAngelo for several days, deputies took him by surprise Tuesday.

"It looked as though he might have been searching his mind to execute a particular plan he may have had," but never had time to act on, Jones said.

DeAngelo was arrested on suspicion of committing double killings in Sacramento and Ventura counties and later was charged with four counts of murder in Orange County, officials said.

Ventura County District Attorney Gregory Totten said that before prosecutors decide whether to seek the death penalty, there will be a "solemn and formal death review process that typically takes many months before a decision is made."

DeAngelo, who served in the Navy, was a police officer in Exeter, in the San Joaquin Valley, from 1973 to 1976, at a time a burglar known as the Visalia Ransacker was active, Jones said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman uses someone else's tainted urine

OH ST. CLAIRSVILLE — An Ohio woman might want to ask some questions if she tries to borrow someone's urine again to pass a drug test.

WTOV-TV reported Kiana Wallace, 24, was sentenced to 18 months in prison Monday in eastern Ohio's Belmont County after submitting a borrowed urine sample that tested positive for drugs. Wallace pleaded guilty earlier this month to attempted tampering with evidence.

Judge Frank Fregiato called the failed urine swap "bizarre" and told Wallace he wouldn't allow her to make a mockery of the drug and alcohol testing system.

Police: Man exposed himself in school lot

MA NORTHBOROUGH — Police have arrested a Massachusetts man they alleged ran around a middle school parking lot wearing nothing but a thong and twice exposed himself to a woman walking her dog.

Zachary Teplansky, of Northborough, was released on \$1,000 bail after pleading not guilty Monday to charges including open and gross lewdness.

Police arrested Teplansky, 21, after a woman called Sunday to say she was walking near the school when she encountered a man running laps in the parking lot. She told police the man was wearing just a thong, which he pulled down twice.

State researchers tag alligators with GPS

SC HILTON HEAD ISLAND — An old children's story speaks of mice

putting a bell on a cat's tail.

Researchers in South Carolina are tagging alligators' tails. And necks.

The Island Packet of Hilton Head reported researchers from Clemson University, the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources and a local wildlife group hope to track alligators as they become more active this spring.

They caught three Tuesday, tagging them and fitting GPS tracking devices on the two biggest. The battery-powered devices are supposed to record the location of the alligator every three hours for the next two years.

Dog bites woman during subway dispute

NY NEW YORK — New York City police are searching for the owner of a dog that attacked a woman during an argument on the subway.

Police said the attack happened last week on the No. 4 train in Manhattan. Witnesses said the woman asked the owner to move his dog when it bumped her on a seat. Onlookers said the woman pushed the dog off the seat repeatedly before the man hit her.

Witnesses said the dog bit the woman's foot when she hit the man back.

Video shows the woman struggle as the dog clamps down and the surrounding crowd yells.

The dog released the woman and was taken off the train by its owner.

Viral video shows deer ice-surfing to safety

ME ALLAGASH — A video of a deer surfing an ice flow down river before nimbly jumping to safety is causing a sensation.

The young deer went viral on social media Monday as it floated downriver and avoided an icy death near the tiny town of Allagash.

More than 70,000 people had watched the video by Tuesday morning. The Bangor Daily News reported that people gathered on a riverbank and cheered on the deer as it sought safety.

Another resident took a video of the deer's escape to dry ground, which happened after the animal ice-surfed for at least 2 miles.

Frost museum ready to reopen

VT SHAFTSBURY — The Robert Frost Stone House Museum is ready to reopen under new ownership — Bennington College.

The Friends of Robert Frost announced last September that it was donating the house, seven acres of property and two barns to the college.

It's due to open for the season on May 3.

The Bennington Banner reported that Frost purchased the house in 1920 and lived there until 1929.

Young giraffe makes brief escape at zoo

IN FORT WAYNE — Workers at an Indiana zoo needed a couple of hours to corral a young giraffe that escaped from her enclosure.

The 7-month-old female got loose Monday from the African Journey exhibit at the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo. Zoo spokeswoman Bonnie Kemp said the giraffe, Thabisa, never left the property.

Staffers trapped the giraffe in a fenced parking lot in a non-public area of the zoo.

Fireworks set off in ruse to steal Rolex

FL SUNRISE — Police arrested a man they allege was part of a ruse to set off fireworks inside a Florida outlet mall on New Year's Eve to steal a nearly \$17,000 Rolex watch.

Kevin Triana, 22, was arrested in Greenville, S.C., on Sunday. Orange County sheriff's deputies said they're still looking for the man who set off the fireworks that allowed Triana to escape with the pricey watch.

Surveillance video shows frantic shoppers and employees running for cover and hiding in stock rooms at Sawgrass Mills.

The video shows Triana trying on the Rolex, then running off still wearing it after the explosions start.

Man arrested in ear-biting incident

CT STAMFORD — A Connecticut man police say was wanted for biting off another person's earlobe and swallowing it during a drunken brawl in 2013 was arrested again for what officials describe as another alcohol-fueled fight.

Stamford police said they responded to reports of a disturbance at an apartment early Sunday morning.

Police told the Stamford Advocate a victim said Lajuj Emiliano and a 17-year-old boy attacked him after they ran out of beer.

Officers later realized Emiliano, 33, was also Emilio Mendoza, wanted for skipping a court date to face an assault charge in the ear-biting incident.

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Raptors hold off Wizards

Associated Press

TORONTO — The Toronto Raptors rode to a seldom-used lineup to move within a game of advancing in the NBA playoffs.

DeMar DeRozan scored 32 points, Kyle Lowry had 17 points and 10 assists and the Raptors beat the Washington Wizards 108-98 on Wednesday night in Game 5.

Toronto rebounded after losing Games 3 and 4 on the road to take a 3-2 series lead back to Washington for Game 6 on Friday night. The home team has won all five games in the series.

The only team in the NBA to avoid losing three straight at any point this season, the Raptors went 5-0 following back-to-back losses during the regular season, and have not lost three straight since last year's second-round sweep against Cleveland. The last time Toronto lost three regular-season games in a row was from Feb. 8 to 14, 2017.

Raptors center Jonas Valanciunas had not played a single fourth-quarter minute in the series before getting the call down the stretch to play alongside Delon Wright, Lowry, DeRozan and C.J. Miles, a group that barely shared the floor this season.

"We're all capable of going it offensively and defensively and it showed tonight," DeRozan said. "Everybody stepped up and Delon stepped up big."

Raptors coach Dwane Casey acknowledged he was "searching" for the right lineup combination.

"I thought Delon Wright did a good job down the stretch handling the ball," Casey said. "It gave us an opportunity for Kyle and DeMar to get off the ball a little bit more and I thought that was the difference."

Wright scored 11 of his 18 points in the fourth quarter, and Valanciunas had 14 points and 13 rebounds as the Raptors improved to 5-0 in home Game 5s over the past five years.

Wall had 26 points, and Bradley Beal added 20 for the Wizards. They went nearly four minutes without scoring down the stretch. Marcin Gortat had 10 points and 12 rebounds.

James' buzzer-beater bails out Cavaliers

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The game, the series, the season and perhaps Cleveland's future were in jeopardy.

LeBron James saved everything.

James dropped a 3-pointer at the buzzer, a crowning moment for another one of his brilliant performances, to give Cleveland a 98-95 victory over the Indiana Pacers on Wednesday night in Game 5, putting the Cavaliers within one victory of advancing in the Eastern Conference playoffs.

Moments after blocking Victor Oladipo's possible go-ahead layup — a play the Pacers felt was goaltending — James caught the inbounds pass, took two dribbles and hit his winner over Thaddeus Young.

As Cleveland's sellout crowd exploded, James hugged rookie teammate Cedi Osman before jumping on the scorer's table to celebrate another of those mo-

ments that will define a career he dreamed of while growing up in Akron.

"As a kid you always have those 3, 2, 1 moments and that's what it kind of felt like," James said. "I felt like I was a kid all over again playing basketball at my house on makeshift hoops and my socks as a basketball."

James finished with 44 points, 10 rebounds, eight assists and went 15 of 15 from the line.

"He does it at both ends every single night," Cavs forward Kevin Love said. "That's why he's the best player in the world."

Kyle Korver added 19 points and Cleveland's much-maligned defense tightened just in time as the Cavaliers seized their first lead in the first-round series after being down 1-0 and 2-1.

Cleveland can close out Indiana with a win Friday night in Indianapolis.

OKC avoids elimination

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Russell Westbrook unleashed the same fury he had in Game 4, just a little more efficiently this time.

Westbrook was controlled, and he was too much for Utah. Silent and serious, the reigning league MVP scored 33 of his 45 points in the second half, and the Oklahoma City Thunder rallied from 25 points down to fight off elimination and beat the Jazz 107-99 in Game 5 on Wednesday night.

"It was win or go home," Westbrook said. "Regardless of what is going on in the game, you have to give yourself a chance to win, and I thought our guys did a good job of that tonight. They did an amazing job of sticking together."

Westbrook got sidetracked during Monday's Game 4 by a one-on-one matchup with Ricky Rubio. He was in foul trouble for much of Oklahoma City's loss and was later fined \$10,000 and assessed a technical for an altercation late in that game.

With Oklahoma City trailing 3-1 in the series, he focused up in Game 5 and helped keep the season alive. He made 5 of 16 shots in the first half, then 12 of 23 in the second.

Westbrook also had 15 rebounds and seven assists. Paul George added 34 points and eight rebounds for the Thunder, who forced a Game 6 in Salt Lake City on Friday.

"We stopped playing defense," Jazz guard Donovan Mitchell said. "We stopped getting back. Our offense got stagnant. They made adjustments and we didn't make the right adjustments back. We will watch the film and figure out what went wrong, but from my analysis right after the game, we just stopped getting back in transition and they just fed off of that."

Jae Crowder scored a career playoff-high 27 points, Mitchell had 23 and Joe Ingles added 16 for the Jazz, who still have a 3-2 lead in the series.

Rockets boot T-wolves

Associated Press

HOUSTON — James Harden had another huge third quarter to propel the Houston Rockets to their latest win, and coach Mike D'Antoni wants to know what's behind those scoring bursts.

"When you do talk to him about it, would you let me know, because I'm dying in the first half. My health is an issue," D'Antoni said with a laugh.

Clint Capela had 26 points and 15 rebounds, Harden added 24 points and the Rockets pulled away in the third quarter to get another lopsided win and eliminate the Minnesota Timberwolves with a 122-104 victory in Game 5 of the first-round series Wednesday night.

The top-seeded Rockets are headed to the second round for the second year in a row after taking care of the eighth-seed-

ed Timberwolves. Minnesota was in the postseason for the first time since 2004.

Houston will await the winner of the Utah-Oklahoma City series, which the Jazz lead 3-2 after the Thunder rallied from a big deficit Wednesday night to avoid elimination.

After scoring 22 points in Houston's 50-point third quarter in a Game 4 blowout Monday night, Harden poured in half of Houston's 30 points in the third quarter Wednesday night to put the Rockets up for good. His 15 third-quarter points matched Minnesota's output in the frame, and he finished with 12 assists.

"I knew that Minnesota wasn't going to just go away," he said. "We had to do the right things to put them away."

Karl-Anthony Towns led the Timberwolves with 23 points and 14 rebounds.

Braves' Acuna singles, scores in debut

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Prized prospect Ronald Acuna Jr. looked like a polished veteran.

The 20-year-old Acuna singled and scored the tying run in the eighth inning of his big league debut, and the Atlanta Braves went on to beat the Cincinnati Reds 5-4 Wednesday night.

Acuna became the youngest player in the majors when he was called up from Triple-A before the game. He went 1-for-5 and played left field.

"As soon as I hit the field, I felt at home," Acuna said through a translator. "I felt comfortable."

Atlanta manager Brian Snitker saw no signs of nerves from his prodigy.

"I thought he was really good," Snitker said. "Nothing affected him. He wasn't overwhelmed. He went out and played his

game."

Acuna asked for jersey No. 13, following fellow Venezuelans Dave Concepcion, Ozzie Guillen and Omar Vizquel. The newcomer twice flied out deep, and struck out twice.

Ozzie Albies, the second-youngest player in the bigs at 21, homered for Atlanta. He was hit by a pitch to begin the ninth and scored the go-ahead run on Johan Camargo's second double of the game, a sharp one-hopper that shortstop Cliff Pennington couldn't backhand.

"If you put the ball in play, good things can happen," Snitker said.

Camargo drove in two runs and Ender Inciarte had three hits for the Braves, who led 3-0 after four innings. Acuna scored on Kurt Suzuki's two-out single in the eighth to make it 4-all.

Jesse Biddle allowed three hits over

two scoreless innings, Dan Winkler (1-0) pitched a perfect eighth and A.J. Minter worked the ninth for his first career save.

Kevin Shackelford (0-1) took the loss in his first appearance of the season since coming off the disabled list. The Reds dropped to 5-19, matching the 1931 team for the worst 24-game start in club history.

Joey Votto's two-run drive, his second homer in two nights, got the Reds on the board in the fifth.

Reds starter Brandon Finnegan, who opened the season on the disabled list with a strained left biceps, allowed two earned runs in five innings.

"We made it tough on Brandon Finnegan," manager Jim Riggleman said. "We missed a couple opportunities and fell behind early but we scored four after missing a couple. It came back to bite us."

MLB roundup

Ex-substitute bests Dodgers, ace Kershaw

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Trevor Richards has worked as a substitute teacher and in a brewery, just trying to make ends meet while he chased a major league career.

He outworked three-time Cy Young Award winner Clayton Kershaw on Wednesday night, and it seems his days of off-season odd jobs to help pay rent might be behind him.

Richards outpitched Clayton Kershaw just months removed from working as a substitute elementary school teacher, and the Marlins took advantage of a wild outing from the Dodgers' ace to beat Los Angeles 8-6 on Wednesday night.

Richards struck out 10 and pitched one-hit ball over 4²/₃ scoreless innings in his fifth major league start. The former independent league right-hander was pulled after throwing 100 pitches.

"We couldn't figure him out," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

"I just focused on keeping the ball down and attacking the zone early, throwing strikes and looking ahead," Richards

said. "We were just, fastball-changeups a lot. Trying to keep them off balance."

Richards' offseason jobs have included teaching and working for the Miller-Coors brewery since going undrafted out of Drury University. He joined a Marlins' Class A affiliate in 2016 after being noticed while pitching for Gateway of the independent Frontier League for two seasons. He spent this winter working at a school in his hometown of Aviston, Ill., according to the Miami Herald.

"Trevor was really good today" Marlins manager Don Mattingly said. "It's really what we needed."

J.T. Realmuto homered twice and Miguel Rojas went deep to help Miami capitalize on an unusually wild night by Kershaw (1-4).

The left-hander tied a career high with six walks, a mark he hadn't reached since 2010, and left after allowing three runs in five innings. Kershaw had only allowed three walks all season.

Astros 5, Angels 2: Justin Verlander pitched seven sharp innings, AL MVP Jose Altuve hit his first home run of the season and Houston ended Los

Angeles' road winning streak at a team record-tying 11.

Albert Pujols connected off Verlander for his 619th career homer. Pujols has 2,994 hits.

Indians 4, Cubs 1: Cleveland reliever Andrew Miller exited with tightness in his hamstring in the win over visiting Chicago and could miss a few days.

Rays 8, Orioles 4: Rays lefty Jonny Venters returned to the majors after a six-year absence and his fourth major elbow surgery, retiring the lone batter he faced in a win over host Baltimore.

Brewers 6, Royals 2: Jhoulys Chacin and the bullpen pitched visiting Milwaukee to its eighth consecutive victory.

Yankees 7, Twins 4: Didi Gregorius homered for the fourth straight game and added two RBIs to his major league-leading total, leading New York to its fifth win in a row at misty, foggy Yankee Stadium.

Red Sox 4, Blue Jays 3: Mookie Betts homered twice and drove in three runs as visiting Boston snapped its season-high three-game losing streak.

Phillies 5, Diamondbacks 3: Jake Arrieta outpitched Zack Greinke, Aaron Altherr

hit a go-ahead three-run homer and host Philadelphia topped Arizona.

Nationals 15, Giants 2: Trea Turner got five hits, Matt Adams homered and drove in six runs, and Washington broke out of an offensive funk in a big way, routing host San Francisco to end a four-game skid.

Cardinals 9, Mets 1: Marcell Ozuna hit a tiebreaking two-run single and Michael Wacha won his fourth straight start for host St. Louis.

Mariners 4, White Sox 3: Mike Zunino homered and scored twice to back visiting Seattle starter Felix Hernandez.

Rockies 5, Padres 2: Jon Gray struck out 11 in six innings and David Dahl lined a two-run triple, lifting host Colorado.

Rangers 4, Athletics 2: Isiah Kiner-Falefa hit a go-ahead single in the fifth inning and host Texas' bullpen protected the lead.

Pirates 10, 8, Tigers 13, 3: Jose Osuna, called up from the minors to serve as an extra player for the second game of a doubleheader, hit a three-run homer to give host Pittsburgh a split.

Bruins win Game 7, oust Maple Leafs

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Boston Bruins didn't need overtime this time, and they didn't even need all four third-period goals to send the Toronto Maple Leafs home for the summer again.

Five years after an unprecedented rally from a three-goal, third-period deficit to eliminate Toronto in Game 7 of their first-round playoff series, the Bruins scored four straight goals to beat the Maple Leafs 7-4 and advance to the Eastern Conference semifinals.

Rookie Jake DeBrusk scored twice, including the go-ahead goal with 14:35 to play. The Bruins will open the second round in Tampa Bay on Saturday against the Lightning, who finished off New Jersey in five games last Saturday.

"They've had some time to rest, and if they had any in-

juries, probably get a little healthier," Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said. "But, that's the advantage of winning in five. ... But we are battle tested now, and we've got to bring that mentality into the next round."

Despite the final score, the teams were tied or separated by one goal for the first 51:59.

"For entertainment value, that was probably one of the better Game 7s you'll see," said Bruins goalie Tuukka Rask, who stopped just 20 of 24 shots. "It was only a one-goal game going into the third and we shut it down and scored some good goals."

Kasperii Kapanen put Toronto ahead 4-3 with a short-handed goal in the second. But Torey Krug tied it early in the third, and DeBrusk gave Boston the lead when he slid the puck through Frederik Andersen's legs right before being

flattened by defenseman Jake Gardiner.

DeBrusk slid into the boards on his backside and didn't even have time to climb up off his knees before he was mobbed by teammates.

"Jake had a real coming-out party in the series," Cassidy said. "He scored going to the net, dirty areas. That's always the first thing: play inside, be willing to get hit, fight for your space. That's playoff hockey. They weren't freebies. They've been real greasy, as advertised."

David Pastrnak made it 6-4 with 8:21 to play, and Brad Marchand flipped one into the empty net with 51 seconds left to set off a celebration in the stands.

Danton Heinen scored his first NHL postseason goal, Patrice Bergeron had a goal and two assists, and David Krejci

had three assists for the Bruins. In his first NHL postseason series, DeBrusk had seven points in seven games.

"Uh, it went pretty well," he said sheepishly. "Obviously, with the win it was special — something I'll never forget. I'll never forget this series just in general, first playoffs. I was really happy to contribute."

Andersen had 29 saves for the Maple Leafs, who have not won a playoff series since 2004. They came close in the first round in 2013, when they rallied from a three-games-to-one deficit against Boston and took a 4-1 lead in Game 7.

"It's always disappointing," said Patrick Marleau, who scored twice for Toronto. "Obviously, you're trying to win the Cup. To fall short once again, it's heartbreaking every time."

Capitals, Penguins square off for third straight year

Associated Press

CRANBERRY TOWNSHIP, Pa. — Sidney Crosby has faced the Washington Capitals three times in the playoffs. All three times the Pittsburgh captain has led his team to victory. And all three times the Penguins used the win as the springboard to a raucous mid-June parade with the Stanley Cup in tow.

Still, Crosby sounded like a cautious investor on Tuesday when asked if Pittsburgh has a mental advantage over rival Alexander Ovechkin and the Capitals heading into yet another postseason showdown in the Eastern Conference semifinals that began Thursday night.

Past performance, the two-time MVP stressed, does not guarantee future results.

"I think it depends on what you do in the series and how you play," Crosby said. "I don't think it plays a huge role. I guess to answer your question, no."

A mantra Crosby's teammates repeated over and over

as they prepared for yet another showdown in a rivalry that somehow manages to be both compelling and one-sided. Pittsburgh is 9-1 all-time in the postseason against Washington, regardless of who is in the black-and-gold sweaters and who is in red, white and blue.

Not that Ovechkin is intimidated. The Capitals star said he "can't wait" to get another shot at the Penguins after spearheading Washington's first-round win over Columbus in six games. That's fine by Pittsburgh, which has played Lucy to Washington's Charlie Brown for more than a quarter century, dangling a potentially deep playoff run in front of the Capitals only to pull it back at the last minute.

The Penguins, however, remain wary. Just because they always beat Washington doesn't mean they're going to always beat Washington. The teams split their four meetings during the regular season, with the Capitals wrapping up their third straight Metropolitan

Division title with a 3-1 win in Pittsburgh on April Fools' Day.

Of course, none of it matters in the playoffs.

"It's a new year," Pittsburgh defenseman Kris Letang said. "The series is going to play out differently. The game is going to be won differently. You don't know how it is going to go. The only thing I know is it's a good rivalry, two really good teams, two teams that have a lot of punch offensively. It's going to be fun to be a part of."

Particularly for Letang. He missed all of Pittsburgh's run to a second straight Stanley Cup last spring while recovering from neck surgery, though he was able to make his way to the arena for Game 7 of the conference semifinals, when Marc-Andre Fleury stopped all 29 shots he faced and the Penguins escaped with a 2-0 victory to finish a series in which both teams scored 20 goals and won on opposing ice at least twice.

Though there are a handful of new faces on both sides, the

principals remain the same. Ovechkin and Crosby. Evgeni Malkin and Nicklas Backstrom. Letang and Braden Holtby. Two weeks of taut, tense hockey in the offing.

"I think it's the same old dangerous team," Letang said. "Like, don't get me wrong, those series went the distance, they went to overtime. It was a tough matchup that could have gone either way. They cause the same problems to our team. They cause problems on the power play. They have a lot of skill. They make a lot of plays."

Yet the Penguins have always found a way to make at least one more, though they may be at less than 100 percent when things get going. Malkin and forward Carl Hagelin both missed practice on Tuesday. Malkin is dealing with a lower-body injury while Hagelin has an upper-body issue after colliding with Philadelphia's Claude Giroux in Pittsburgh's clinching victory over the Flyers in Game 6.