

STARS AND STRIPES®

Thursday, April 11, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Moran tapped for chief of naval operations

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON— Adm. Bill Moran has been nominated by President Donald Trump to become the next chief of naval operations, the Navy's most senior officer, the service announced Thursday.

Moran would become the 32nd chief of naval operations if confirmed by the Senate. He has been the vice chief of naval operations since May 2016.

As the Navy's top admiral, he is a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and reports to the secretary of the Navy.

"[Moran] has been central to the Navy adopting a fighting stance in this great power competition," Adm. John Richardson, who is now chief of naval

operations, said in a Navy statement. "As I turn over and go ashore, I will rest easy knowing that, pending confirmation, Adm. Moran has the watch."

Richardson is scheduled to retire in the summer after 37 years of service. He has been chief of naval operations since September 2015.

Moran is from Newburg, N.Y., and graduated in 1981 from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., with a bachelor's degree in naval science. He also earned a master's degree in 2006 from the National War College, located at Fort McNair in Washington.

Moran is an "extraordinary leader who has been a stalwart partner and adviser," Navy Secretary Richard Spencer said in the statement. "I look

forward to working with him in the years ahead when he is confirmed."

Serving as a pilot, Moran flew P-3 Orion patrol aircraft. He previously served as commander of Patrol Squadron 46 and Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing 2, according to his official biography and the Navy statement. He has also commanded the Patrol and Reconnaissance Group and was on the staffs of the chief of naval operations and the commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

His military awards include the Distinguished Service Medal, the Defense Superior Service Medal and the Legion of Merit.

It was also announced Thursday that Vice Adm. Robert Burke was nominated by the

president to become the Navy's 40th vice chief of naval operations. He is now the deputy chief of naval operations for manpower, personnel, training and education.

If confirmed, Burke will be promoted to the rank of admiral, according to the nomination notice received by the Senate on Wednesday.

A Portage, Mich., native, Burke has a bachelor's and a master's degree in electrical engineering from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo and the University of Central Florida in Orlando, according to his official biography.

Burke has also commanded the USS Hampton and was the commodore of Submarine Development Squadron 12.

Charges dropped; Fitzgerald officers to get censure letters

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Navy will drop charges against two former USS Fitzgerald officers accused of criminal negligence in the 2017 fatal collision of the ship that killed seven sailors, according to a Navy statement Thursday.

Former Fitzgerald commanding officer Cmdr. Bryce Benson and the destroyer's former tactical action officer, Lt. Natalie Combs, will instead receive secretarial letters of censure from Navy Secretary Richard Spencer. The two were previously dismissed from their jobs and received nonjudicial punishment, the Navy said.

Censure letters are public rebukes that draw shame and acknowledge wrongdoing but do not carry legal implications or affect retirement benefits or

pay for officers reprimanded. However, they are often career-ending in terms of promotion, particularly at higher ranks.

"This decision is in the best interest of the Navy, the families of the Fitzgerald Sailors, and the procedural rights of the accused officers," the Navy said in the statement.

On June 17, 2017, the Fitzgerald collided with a commercial vessel, the Philippine-flagged ACX Crystal, in the waters off Japan's coast about 80 nautical miles southwest of Tokyo. Seven sailors died, and the ship sustained millions of dollars in damages. It remains under repair in Pascagoula, Miss.

Post-collision reports pointed to a culture of negligence, crew exhaustion and a lack of training and communication as factors in the collision.

In a letter to one of the fallen sailors' families, Navy officials wrote that "the cases are being

dismissed for legal reasons that impede the continued prosecution of either officer," according to a Thursday report by the Navy Times.

In January, a military judge disqualified Navy Adm. Frank Caldwell from being the convening authority in Benson's case because he "abdicated his neutral role in favor of a prosecutorial role" and made prejudicial statements, according to court documents.

That shrank the pool of naval officers eligible to pursue charges against Benson to the Navy's top two — the chief of naval operations and vice chief of naval operations.

Legal expert and retired Navy Capt. Lawrence B. Brennan told Stars and Stripes at the time that the ruling made it "highly improbable" that the case would move forward.

Benson was charged with two counts of dereliction of duty

through neglect and improper hazarding a vessel through negligence. He was accused of failing to ensure the ship's safe navigation and "approve an adequate watch bill," "revise standing orders to account for degraded equipment" and to "adequately train and inspect the conduct of members under his command," according to court documents.

Combs was charged with negligent dereliction of duty resulting in death and negligent hazarding of a vessel in the collision. She was accused of failing to "communicate with the bridge vital contact information and safe speed and maneuvering recommendations, enforce watch-standing principles in the combat information center and support the officer of the deck," according to court documents.

Senate panel raises Space Force concerns

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A Senate panel on Thursday raised a long list of reservations over a Trump administration plan to create Space Force as a new military branch that could require \$500 million in annual funding.

In their first hearing on the proposal, Senate Armed Services Committee members met top Pentagon officials with skepticism and concerns that a Space Force will result in a new, costly layer of military bureaucracy.

Some Senate committee members suggested a unified command rather than a separate military branch could be a better way to improve national space security.

“I don’t understand how putting a new box in an organizational chart is going to help us to respond to the new challenge that we face,” Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, told top military officials. “I think Space Command makes sense ... but to create a new bureaucracy that is going to cost us half-a-billion dollars a year, I’ve got to be convinced that there’s going to be some incremental value there.”

However, acting Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan; outgoing Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson; Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Air Force Gen. John Hyten, commander of U.S. Strategic Command, told committee members that the new service was the best approach to U.S. security in space.

“We are all open-minded on the plan but are wrestling with different aspects of it,”

said Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of Senate Armed Services Committee. “This is one of those rare times where we are having a hearing where people haven’t made up their minds.”

Rhode Island Sen. Jack Reed, the committee’s ranking Democrat, said Congress hasn’t created a new military branch in 70 years and it’s a decision that should not be taken lightly.

Among Reed’s concerns, Space Force would see the military’s highest ratio of headquarters personnel to its overall servicemember population. For example, the Air Force has an estimated 320,000 airmen to its 2,300 headquarters personnel, while the Space Force ratio would be 16,500 to 1,000, he said.

“How do we avoid that and why didn’t we think harder about coming with a leaner structure?” Reed asked.

Committee members also expressed concerns that a Space Force will drain the Air Force and that its culture is too similar. They also shared reservations about a four-star general overseeing the new service and competing with the needs of the Air Force.

“I am airman at heart. When I bleed, I bleed blue. I love my Air Force and I love the history of the Air Force and space,” Hyten told the Senate committee. “But every physical domain we have, when it becomes contested, we create a military service to deal with that. So, we’re going to have a Space Force one day. I think what the committee has to decide is when that is going to happen.”

In 2017, a House proposal to create a

“Space Corps” as a sub-unified command was met with fervent opposition from the Pentagon’s then-leadership and their Senate colleagues. However, President Donald Trump then upped the proposal last March, suggesting the military should create a new branch instead called Space Force as a result, giving the move new momentum.

“I appreciate the president putting this idea forward. You can tell that we’re all wrestling with it; we’re struggling with it,” Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, told the military officials. “It’s pretty clear that watching some of your evolutions, that you’ve struggled with it as well.”

For example, Wilson, who leaves her Air Force job next month to become the next president of the University of Texas at El Paso, was vocal about her opposition before reversing her stance last year.

Sen. Gary Peters, D-Mich., quoted Wilson saying in 2017 after a Senate hearing that the Pentagon was already complicated enough without a space command; it would just add a new organizational box and new funds should be spent on lethality, not bureaucracy. Peters said money can’t continue to be thrown away on such military initiatives, and he’d rather see Pentagon officials offer plans to spend more efficiently.

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., also expressed confusion over the move even after previous conversations with Shanahan on the reasoning for a Space Force.

“I’m having a real hard time understanding why we need this other agency,” Manchin said. “You’ve got everything at your disposal right now ... this doesn’t make any sense to me at all.”

AAFES clarifies guidance on TV channels

Stars and Stripes

The Army and Air Force Exchange Service dropped a reference to news channels being politically divisive in a second memo recommending that its retail facilities show mainly sports programming on TVs in common areas.

The new memo was sent two days after the first to clarify that AAFES’ call for televisions in its retail facilities to be tuned to sports programming was a recommendation, not a policy, according to the agency.

The previous version said AAFES had “elected to play sports channels/sports programming on all common area TVs” when its own informational service isn’t

being shown.

“As a federal entity, we remain neutral on political issues. News channels should not be shown on common area TVs due to their divisive political nature,” it added.

The new memo, which a Dallas-based spokesman said was being sent to stores late Wednesday, drops the wording about news channels and politics without explanation.

“The Exchange recommends sports channels/sports programming on all common area TVs when an Exchange channel is not being shown,” it said. “This guidance allows flexibility to make adjustments based on the ‘news of the day’ and local needs.”

The spokesman, Chris Ward, said in an

email that the updated memo was “an effort to provide better clarity for the stores regarding the fact that this was just guidance and not a policy.”

The updated policy memo appeared after Stars and Stripes inquired Wednesday about AAFES discouraging news programming in its common areas.

TVs mounted on walls in food courts, customer service centers and other areas on bases around the world frequently show a loop of news channels including Fox, CNN and MSNBC.

AAFES operates nearly 2,700 facilities that provide goods and services to U.S. military personnel and their families worldwide.

Another 'bomb cyclone' makes travel dangerous in Midwest

Associated Press

A storm system known as a "bomb cyclone" slowly churned through the U.S. interior Thursday for the second time in a month, unleashing a blizzard in parts of the Midwest while creating hazardous fire conditions farther south.

As much as 18 inches of snow fell in South Dakota, where Gov. Kristi Noem has closed state offices in much of the state for a second day as heavy snow and strong winds made travel conditions dangerous.

Whiteout conditions were reported in northwest Kansas and western Nebraska, where the Department of Transportation closed several highways Thursday morning. Schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul were among hundreds that closed in Minnesota, where as much as 2 feet of snow is expected by Friday.

The Minnesota State Patrol said it has responded to more than 200 crashes statewide since

Wednesday.

The storm knocked out power Wednesday to thousands of homes and businesses in South Dakota, disrupted air and ground travel from Colorado to Minnesota, and threatened to swell rivers in the Midwest that flooded after March's drenching.

Both storms are known as a "bomb cyclone," a weather phenomenon that entails a rapid drop in air pressure and a storm strengthening explosively, according to David Roth, a forecaster at the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center in Maryland.

The latest storm's impacts are likely to be similar to last month's storm, Roth said. That blast dropped heavy snow and led to massive flooding in the Midwest that caused billions of dollars in damage in Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa and South Dakota.

"Hopefully, this time it will be a slow snowmelt," Roth

said.

Particularly hard hit by the storm were eastern South Dakota and southwestern Minnesota. Winds in excess of 50 mph also were expected, creating life-threatening conditions, according to the National Weather Service.

"We're calling it historic because of the widespread heavy snow. We will set some records," said Mike Connelly, a weather service meteorologist in Aberdeen, S.D. An unusual but not rare weather phenomenon known as "thunder snow" — snow accompanied by thunder and lightning — was reported in central South Dakota.

"It's essentially a thunderstorm, but it's cold enough for snow," Connelly said.

The weather service posted an ice storm warning into Friday morning for a portion of southern Minnesota, warning that thick ice could accumulate on power lines and lead to outages.

Lightning hits runway on damaged base

By ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — Lightning strikes during a severe storm Wednesday night damaged the runway at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska, where extreme weather has kept officials on the defensive in recent weeks.

Still in the early stages of recovery from mid-March flooding, base engineers spent Thursday morning repairing nearly a dozen 3- to 5-inch gashes in the runway caused by lightning strikes, Col. Michael H. Manion, commander of 55th Wing, posted to Facebook.

In advance of the overnight storm, which produced quarter-inch-sized hail, the base on Wednesday evacuated its fleet of RC-135, a fixed-wing reconnaissance aircraft. The aircraft was scheduled to return Thursday afternoon following repairs to the runway, said Ryan Hansen, spokesman for the 55th Wing, which oversees operations at the base.

The damaged runway was just one of many repairs underway as the southeastern Nebraska base is still assessing damage caused by flooding that began March 15 when snowmelt in areas north of the base overwhelmed the banks of the Missouri River. Home to U.S. Strategic Command, the base sits just west of the Missouri River near the city of Bellevue. About one-third of the base sat underwater for days.

"The recovery process is going to be very long," Hansen said.

The base is now in a 90-day assessment of facilities. Once complete, they will have a better idea of how many facilities can be retrofitted, renovated or must be demolished.

Officials are also monitoring for the potential for more flooding, Hansen said.

By Thursday morning, the risk of flooding had downgraded to barely minimal, said David Pearson, a hydrologist with the National Weather Service in the Omaha Valley.

Lack of disaster aid for bases unresolved

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A House lawmaker voiced his alarm and displeasure Wednesday with the failure of Congress to deliver more funds to help the military with disaster recovery, several months after hurricanes devastated a Marine Corps base and an Air Force base.

"I'm a little taken aback with what's happened at Camp Lejeune and with the (Marine) Corps. And the damage and the need that you have for a supplemental appropriations bill," Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga., told a panel of Navy and Marine Corps leaders during a budget hearing of the House Armed Services Committee.

Last week, the Marine Corps

received \$400 million in reprogrammed funds to address the immediate needs at Camp Lejeune, N.C., after Hurricane Florence caused widespread damage at the base in September.

The Air Force also received authorization to reprogram \$200 million in funds to help Tyndall Air Force Base on the Florida Panhandle, which was devastated by Hurricane Michael in October.

Scott raised concerns about the Air Force's available funding to rebuild Tyndall. Without supplemental disaster assistance, the base might have to stop flights there.

Even with the reprogrammed money, it will cost \$3.1 billion during the next three to four years to fix Camp Lejeune "so

that we don't have to go through this again," Gen. Robert Neller, commandant of the Marine Corps, said at the hearing.

Since Hurricane Florence hit Camp Lejeune in September, about 50% of the homes on the base have been repaired, Neller said. They also have identified 31 buildings on base that will cost more to repair than they are worth, so they will have to be rebuilt.

"Otherwise, we're going to have to figure out how we're going to self-fund this," he said. "We don't have insurance, the Congress is our insurance."

Congress will leave for a two-week recess, Scott said, "and I'm embarrassed, quite honestly, that this job hasn't been done," referring to approval for disaster assistance funding.

WikiLeaks' Julian Assange arrested by British police

Associated Press

LONDON — WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was forcibly bundled out of the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and into a waiting British police van on Thursday, setting up a potential court battle over attempts to extradite him to the U.S. to face charges related to the publication of tens of thousands of secret government documents.

British police arrested Assange after the South American nation decided to revoke the political asylum that had given Assange sanctuary for almost seven years. Ecuador's President Lenin Moreno said he took the action due to "repeated violations to international conventions and daily life."

In Washington, the U.S. Justice Department accused Assange with conspiring with Chelsea Manning to break into a classified government computer at the Pentagon. The charge was announced after Assange was taken into custody.

His lawyer has previously said that Assange planned to fight any U.S. charges against him.

Assange took refuge in the embassy in 2012 after he was released on bail in Britain while facing extradition to Sweden on sexual assault allegations that have since been dropped.

British police said Thursday that Assange had been arrested for breaching his bail conditions in Britain and in relation to the U.S. arrest request.

Moreno, speaking in a video released on Twitter, said the country was no longer willing to give Assange protection. Other Ecuadorian officials in Quito accused supporters of WikiLeaks and two Russian hackers of attempting to destabilize their country.

Moreno appeared to suggest that a swift extradition to America was not likely.

"In line with our strong commitment to human rights and international law, I requested Great Britain to guarantee that Mr. Assange would not be extradited to a country where he could face torture or the death penalty," Moreno said. "The British government has confirmed it in writing, in accordance with its own rules."

EU grants extension on Brexit

Associated Press

LONDON — British Prime Minister Theresa May urged lawmakers Thursday to spend the upcoming Easter break to "reflect" on the need for a Brexit compromise after a clearly frustrated European Union gave the country six more months to find a way to leave the bloc.

She said doing so and passing an EU withdrawal agreement quickly would allow Britain to avoid taking part in European parliamentary elections set for late May, an unpalatable prospect to many, particularly in her Conservative Party.

May was addressing lawmakers just hours after returning from a special summit in Brussels at which the other 27 EU leaders delayed Britain's scheduled departure from the bloc from this Friday to Oct. 31.

Given that Britain's fractious Parliament has rejected her Brexit withdrawal deal with the EU on three occasions this year, her hopes for a quick resolution could rest in large part on whether her Conservative Party-led government can find common ground with the opposition Labour Party.

The talks, which both sides call serious and constructive, are expected to continue in the coming week.

Without support from the Labour Party, May's path toward actually taking Britain out of the EU remains unclear.

She is blocked by a strong faction in her own Conservative Party that hates her withdrawal deal and hopes to oust her.

May's own authority has been gravely compromised by the long Brexit ordeal, and she has promised to step down once Britain leaves the bloc — if efforts to get rid of her more quickly do not bear fruit.

Ex-pope writes a letter on sexual abuse

The Washington Post

ROME — Breaking years of silence on major church affairs, Pope Benedict XVI has written a lengthy letter devoted to clerical sex abuse in which he attributes the crisis to a breakdown of church and societal moral teaching and says he felt compelled to assist "in this difficult hour."

The 6,000-word letter, published in tandem Thursday by a Catholic outlet and an Italian newspaper, decries the 1960s sexual revolution, laments the secularization of the West and describes seminaries filled with "homosexual cliques."

"Why did pedophilia reach such proportions?" Benedict wrote, according to the Catholic News Agency, which published the full text in English. "Ultimately, the reason is the absence of God."

Since abdicating the papacy six years ago, Benedict — living in a monastery inside the

Vatican City walls — had remained nearly silent on issues facing the Roman Catholic Church, in part to yield full authority to his successor, Pope Francis. The new letter marks an unprecedented moment in the modern church: a significant pronouncement from an ex-pope on the most central problem facing the church.

"Since I myself had served in a position of responsibility as shepherd of the Church at the time of the public outbreak of the crisis, and during the run-up to it, I had to ask myself — even though, as emeritus, I am no longer directly responsible — what I could contribute to a new beginning," Benedict said.

In the letter, Benedict wrote that he contacted both Francis and the Vatican's secretary of state before proceeding.

The pope emeritus finished his essay by thanking Francis for his work to show "the light of God." But Benedict's remarks on the topic differ

sharply from those of Francis, who has emphasized the corrupted power of clergy and has acknowledged systemic problems that result in coverup.

Benedict took a far more theological and historical approach and said little about concrete reforms that could better safeguard young people in the church.

Benedict devoted the first third of his letter to changes in society and inside the church beginning in the 1960s that gave rise to an "all-out sexual freedom." He wrote that Catholic moral theology "suffered a collapse" of its own during a period of major reforms.

Benedict in the letter also took aim at some of the shortcomings of church law for handling abuse cases. He said the church was "overwhelmed" by cases in which a "genuine criminal process" was required in order to impose a maximum penalty.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Boy, 3, disables tablet for 25M minutes

DC WASHINGTON — A 3-year-old boy tried to unlock his family's iPad recently. He ended up disabling it for nearly 50 years.

The toddler's father asked for help on Twitter, sharing a photo of a device message reading "try again in 25,536,442 minutes."

"Uh, this looks fake but, alas, it's our iPad today after 3-year-old tried (repeatedly) to unlock. Ideas?" tweeted Evan Osnos, a staff writer at The New Yorker and a fellow at the Brookings Institution.

By Tuesday morning, Osnos tweeted that he had managed to start restoring the device after putting it in Device Firmware Update mode. Osnos did not indicate whether he will give his toddler the new password.

Buyer of \$8M island accused in \$300 theft

FL KEY WEST — Police in Florida said a man who bought an \$8 million island off Key West is accused in a scheme to steal \$300 in household items from Kmart.

Key West police said Andrew Francis Lippi, 59, was arrested on a felony charge of grand theft.

The Miami Herald reported Lippi bought Thompson Island, which had been the home to the family of philanthropist Edward B. Knight. Lippi also owns the "Real World" house in Key West, where MTV shot its 17th season.

Police said Lippi bought items including a Keurig coffeemaker between March 30 and April 5. He returned the original boxes with other items packed inside.

Semi overturns, dumps candles

NM LORDSBURG — A semitruck overturned in southern New Mexico, dumping candles all over the highway.

The Las Cruces Sun-News reported investigators said the truck rolled, then flipped onto its side while sending wax and wicks all over the eastbound interstate.

New Mexico State Police said the cause of the crash is still under investigation. No injuries were reported.

Police trade patrol car for ice cream truck

OH TOLEDO — Police officers in one Ohio city will be cruising neighborhoods in a new ride this summer — an ice cream truck.

Toledo's police chief said officers will be in the truck handing out ice cream to children as a way to build better relationships with the community.

A donation from the Toledo Mud Hens baseball club to the Toledo Police Foundation will pay for the truck.

Police Chief George Kral told The Blade newspaper that he came up with the idea after hearing about departments in other states that have ice cream trucks.

Garbage trucks escort fellow hauler's hearse

IL SPRINGFIELD — The hearse carrying the late Ronnie Davis had some curious escorts: a dozen garbage trucks.

The 60-year-old Springfield resident spent 21 years driving for Republic Services and its predecessors.

The (Springfield) State Jour-

nal-Register reported that he was accompanied to his burial by some of the 16-ton garbage trucks that haul off trash from city neighborhoods.

Leading the procession was the commercial-container truck that Davis drove until his March 24 death. A black wreath was attached to the grille of the truck.

Deputies: Men tried to steal cellphone tower

AL MCINTOSH — Three men were jailed in southwest Alabama on charges that they cut down a cellphone tower and tried to saw it up to sell for scrap.

Washington County Sheriff's Lt. Bobby Jeter told WALA-TV that a worker cutting grass for the tower company reported it had fallen. An inspection of the site near McIntosh revealed guy wires had been cut.

Jeter said deputies began watching the area and a resident called Saturday reporting noises.

Deputies arrived to find three men cutting up the tower.

William Cameron, Ricky Reed and David Weaver were jailed with bail of \$15,000 set.

Man arrested hunting rats along the highway

WA SEATTLE — Authorities said officers arrested a man near Interstate 90 in Seattle after he reportedly pointed a realistic-looking airsoft rifle into traffic while hunting rats.

The Seattle Police Department said on its website that a motorist called 911 and reported seeing a man with a rifle in a homeless encampment between I-90 and a nearby overlook.

Officers said they arrived and found the 41-year-old man in the encampment and took

him into custody. Police said the man told officers he was using the airsoft rifle to "shoot rats" in the encampment. He was charged with unlawful use of a weapon in a public place.

Firefighter rescues puppy, adopts him

SC NORTH CHARLESTON — A South Carolina firefighter rescued a puppy twice.

First, North Charleston Fire Department Capt. Paul Bryant dug a shepherd mix puppy out from under a pile of rocks and concrete slabs on March 30 after cyclists heard the puppy's cries.

Now the 34-year firefighting veteran has adopted the puppy, taking him home from the Charleston Animal Society.

Bryant said that when he learned the dog was headed for the animal shelter, he decided that "he's my dog and he's coming home with me."

Motorist's finger partly bitten off

NM SUNLAND PARK — Police said a man had a portion of his finger bitten off during a violent road rage fight in southern New Mexico.

The Las Cruces Sun-News reported Robert Moore, 49, of El Paso, Texas, was injured last month following a traffic altercation with Marco Antonio Gomez, 40, in Sunland Park. Police said Gomez was angry at Moore for cutting him off and later confronted Moore on a street.

Investigators said the men and a 17-year-old eventually came to blows and Moore said someone bit off a part of his left middle finger.

From wire reports

Your objective source for military news
updated 24/7 from bases
around the world.
Now online at www.stripes.com.

STARS AND STRIPES®

NBA roundup

Pistons win, earn East's last playoff spot

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Luke Kennard scored 27 points, Reggie Jackson had 21 and Andre Drummond added 20 points and 18 rebounds as the Detroit Pistons locked up the Eastern Conference's final playoff spot with a 115-89 victory over the New York Knicks on Wednesday night.

The Pistons will face the top-seeded Milwaukee Bucks in the opening round.

Jackson scored 14 points and Drummond had 10 points and seven rebounds in the first quarter as the Pistons never trailed and led by as many as 16 points. Neither Jackson nor Drummond played in the fourth quarter.

Wayne Ellington added 12 points for the Pistons, who hadn't made the playoffs since the 2015-16 season, the last time they finished over .500 (44-38). Before, Detroit hadn't made the postseason since 2008-09.

John Jenkins led the Knicks with 16 points, and Kadeem Allen added 13. Henry Ellenson scored 12 points, and Mitchell Robinson and Isaiah Hicks each had 11.

Nuggets 99, Timberwolves 95: Nikola Jokic had 29 points, 14 rebounds and had a key strip in the closing seconds as host Denver scored the game's final 15 points and secured the No. 2 seed in the Western Conference playoffs.

James Murray added 17 for the Nuggets,

who are in the postseason for the first time in six years and will face seventh-seeded San Antonio.

Gorgui Dieng added 18 points for the Timberwolves backups and rookie Cameron Reynolds scored a career-best 17 points, including a three-pointer that put Minnesota ahead 95-84 with 4:01 left.

Trail Blazers 136, Kings 131: Rookie Anfernee Simons scored a career-high 37 points in his first start of the season and host Portland secured the No. 3 seed in the Western Conference using just six players in a win over Sacramento.

The Blazers have won 14 of 17 games en route to their sixth straight trip to the playoffs. Portland will open the postseason against the Oklahoma City Thunder, who finished in sixth.

Marvin Bagley III had 20 points to lead the Kings, who lost their 11th straight game in Portland.

Clippers 143, Jazz 137 (OT): Montrezl Harrell scored 24 points to lead seven players in double figures and host Los Angeles beat Utah in overtime, snapping a three-game skid to close the regular season.

Ivica Zubac added 22 points and 11 rebounds and Patrick Beverley had 14 points in his return from injury.

Thunder 127, Bucks 116: Russell Westbrook got his 34th triple-double of the

season and Oklahoma City won at Milwaukee to lock up the sixth seed in the Western Conference playoffs.

Magic 122, Hornets 114: Kemba Walker scored 43 points in what may be his final game with Charlotte, a loss to visiting Orlando that eliminated it from playoff contention.

Nets 113, Heat 94: Miami's Dwyane Wade recorded one last triple-double before heading off to retirement, and host Brooklyn headed to Philadelphia for the first round of the Eastern Conference playoffs after securing the win and the No. 6 seed.

Spurs 105, Mavericks 94: LaMarcus Aldridge had 34 points and 16 rebounds and host San Antonio beat Dallas in Dirk Nowitzki's final game.

Grizzlies 132, Warriors 117: Jevon Carter scored a career-high 32 points, Justin Holiday added 22 and host Memphis beat Golden State in the teams' regular-season finale.

76ers 125, Bulls 109: Jonathon Simmons scored 20 points to lead host Philadelphia over Chicago in the regular-season finale for both teams.

Pacers 135, Hawks 134: Edmond Sumner sank three free throws with three-tenths of a second remaining, lifting playoff-bound Indiana to a win in Atlanta.

Cavs have hope at end of post-LeBron season

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — After handing out sneakers, signed balls and other gifts to fans, the Cleveland Cavaliers gathered one last time after the fourth-worst season in franchise history ended and took photos with adored teammate Channing Frye, whose retirement triggered a three-day celebration.

Losing usually doesn't look like this.

There were smiles and hugs as a group that never splintered during a taxing season that ended two months earlier than the previous four bonded as brothers. Later, in a pin-drop quiet locker room, coach Larry Drew urged the Cavaliers to reflect and challenged each "to

come back a different player."

Then, Drew, who doesn't know if he himself will be back, offered thanks.

"I understand how difficult the season was with everything that took place," said Drew, who took over seven games in following Tyronn Lue's firing. "But they stayed professional and they kept working hard, and I just wanted to let them know how much I appreciated it."

And with that, an offseason of uncertainty and optimism began.

Drew's future is the first order of business for Cleveland, which finished 19-63 and ended its first season since LeBron James left for a second time on a 10-game losing streak.

The 61-year-old Drew steered the team through countless injuries and other challenges while overseeing the development of point guard Collin Sexton, who didn't miss a game and joined Larry Bird and Stephen Curry as the only rookies in NBA history to average at least 16 points while shooting better than 40% on three-pointers and 80% from the foul line.

Drew was handed a difficult situation that became worse when star forward Kevin Love underwent foot surgery in November, effectively ending any thought the Cavaliers entertained of competing for a playoff spot. But Drew never blinked.

"L.D. was outstanding," said forward Larry Nance Jr., an-

other of the season's success stories. "That was not an easy position he got put into. Six games into the season — here are the reins, figure it out. That's exactly what he did. Got us on the right path. Would have been easy for him to mail it in, too, just because a year like this, this isn't fun."

Cleveland finished tied with Phoenix for the league's second-worst record behind New York. Those three teams will have a 14% chance of picking first in the draft, but there's the possibility of falling as far as sixth and missing out on Zion Williamson, his Duke teammate RJ Barrett or Ja Morant, Murray State's electrifying guard.

Mariners tie record with late homer

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Even baseball's hottest hitter can't keep pace with the Seattle Mariners right now.

Mitch Haniger hit a tiebreaking homer with two outs in the ninth inning, lifting the Mariners over the Royals 6-5 Wednesday night after Whit Merrifield extended his hitting streak to a Kansas City-record 31 games.

Merrifield's RBI bunt single in the seventh tied it at 5 and moved him past Hall of Famer George Brett for the Royals mark.

That pumped up the home crowd, but Haniger deflated it two innings later when he took Brad Boxberger (0-2) deep, lifting Seattle to 12-2 following an offseason roster overhaul.

"It was a nice team win," manager Scott

Servais said.

The Mariners and the 2002 Cleveland Indians are the only teams since 1908 to homer in each of their first 14 games. The Mariners have 34 homers, tied with the 2000 St. Louis Cardinals for most ever through 14 games. Seattle has scored at least five runs 13 times.

Haniger struck out in his two at-bats previous to the homer.

"Every at-bat I'm trying to swing at good pitches and hit the ball hard," he said. "I hadn't had great at-bats leading up to that earlier. I stayed confident that my time would come and I'd get a good pitch, and I put a good swing on it."

Anthony Swarzak (1-0) got two outs in the eighth, and Roenis Elias worked out of a bases-loaded jam in the ninth for his second save.

Seattle's Jay Bruce, tied for the AL homer lead with seven, left the game in the fourth inning with tightness in his left Achilles tendon.

Kansas City dropped to 2-9 with its ninth straight loss.

Merrifield bunted with Terrance Gore on third in the seventh. He placed the ball perfectly up the third-base line and tipped his cap to a cheering crowd after reaching first without a throw.

"I used to bunt a lot when I was young," Merrifield said. "I couldn't drive the ball. Those young years paid off."

Gore made his first major league start and had three hits in the game after entering with two hits over six major league seasons.

Roundup

Astros sweep Yankees for first time ever

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Jose Altuve needed video review to confirm his first home run Wednesday night.

His second shot was a no-doubter — just like the Houston Astros' status as a team to beat in the American League.

Altuve hit two homers, Carlos Correa homered with three RBIs and the Astros completed their first-ever sweep of the New York Yankees with an 8-6 win Wednesday night.

The Astros required late-game comebacks to win the first two games of the series but used a four-run fifth inning to break the finale open and held on for their sixth straight win despite a big eighth inning by the Yankees.

It's the first time since 2004 the Astros have swept a home-stand of at least two series. They beat the Athletics three times last weekend before the Yankees arrived.

The 5-foot-6 Altuve didn't have an explanation for his recent power surge.

"I want to know, too, to do it again," he said. "I'm as surprised as you are. I'm not used to hitting this many homers in

two or three games, but I'll take it."

Manager AJ Hinch said Altuve's health and timing have contributed to the recent barrage, but he isn't surprised by anything the 2017 AL MVP does.

"He's seeing the ball, sure, picking the right pitches of course [but] he's just pretty damn good," he said.

Altuve hit his first one off James Paxton (1-2) to tie it at 1 in the first inning after Brett Gardner hit a leadoff homer for New York. Altuve's hit was initially ruled a double, but a review showed it cleared the wall.

Padres 3, Giants 1: Manny Machado put San Diego ahead with his third home run of the season in a win over host San Francisco.

Cardinals 7, Dodgers 2: Yadier Molina and Marcell Ozuna homered, Jack Flaherty tossed six effective innings and host St. Louis beat Los Angeles.

Angels 4, Brewers 2: Justin Bour hit a two-run single in a four-run third inning and Los Angeles beat Milwaukee for its sixth straight victory.

Rangers 5, Diamondbacks

2: Lance Lynn struck out nine over six solid innings, Hunter Pence homered into the Chase Field swimming pool and Texas rallied to beat host Arizona after being held without a hit for five innings.

Rays 9, White Sox 1: Tommy Pham homered twice and extended his on-base streak to a club-record 45 games, leading Tampa Bay to its first series sweep in Chicago.

Chicago lost its fifth consecutive game and at 3-8 is off to its worst opening since 1997.

Nationals 15, Phillies 1: Jeremy Hellickson pitched three-hit ball over six innings, Matt Adams drove in four runs and Washington routed host Philadelphia.

Pirates 5, Cubs 2: Jordan Lyles struck out 10 in six crisp innings to tie a career high, Francisco Cervelli and Starling Marte homered off Yu Darvish, and Pittsburgh topped host Chicago.

Athletics 10, Orioles 3: Slugger Khris Davis homered twice and had three hits, and Baltimore's Chris Davis extended his record hitless streak to 50 at-bats in visiting Oakland's victory.

Mets 9, Twins 6: Jake Odor-

izzi and his team's bullpen suddenly went wild, allowing seven straight batters to reach base despite not hitting a single fair ball and letting Noah Syndergaard and host New York stroll past Minnesota.

One day after the teams set a Citi Field record by totaling 10 home runs in the Twins' 14-8 romp, the Mets barely had to swing to build a big lead.

A startling stretch that kept snowballing saw Odorizzi, newly promoted reliever Andrew Vasquez and Trevor Hildenberger combine to walk six and hit a batter with a pitch without getting an out. At one point, the Twins threw 21 pitches — 19 missed the strike zone, many of them bouncing or sailing all over.

Tigers 4, Indians 1: Trevor Bauer allowed home runs to Niko Goodrum and John Hicks, who powered host Detroit over Cleveland for its sixth win in seven games.

Reds 2, Marlins 1: Jose Iglesias led off the eighth inning with a tying homer — only his team's second hit of the game — and Jesse Winker connected one out later, rallying host Cincinnati to a victory over Miami.

NHL playoffs roundup

Bailey's goal lifts Isles over Pens in OT

Associated Press

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — Josh Bailey didn't have much time to think when he saw the puck on the side of the crease after Mathew Barzal's try hit the left goalpost in overtime. Bailey just swooped in and knocked it into the net to send the New York Islanders home with a win.

Bailey scored at 4:39 of the extra period and the Islanders beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 4-3 on Wednesday night in the opener of their Eastern Conference first-round playoff series.

"It just happened so quick," Bailey said. "I wasn't sure. It didn't lay very flat for me. I was just trying to whack it and hope it went in. ... A crucial game. There's still a long way to go, but a good win for us."

Barzal had brought the puck into the offensive zone on a 2-on-1 break, faked in front to draw Matt Murray out and sent the backhand shot that bounced off the left post. He was initial-

ly upset with himself at missing the opportunity before he saw Bailey come up and put it in.

"I see the puck laying there and I was just obviously (angry), I thought the chance had ended," Barzal said. "And I see Bails come in and swoop in and bury it. I was obviously super happy to see that. Awesome for him. First game and that's nice for the confidence."

Jordan Eberle had a goal and an assist, and Brock Nelson and Nick Leddy also scored for New York, which was opening a postseason series at home for the first time in 31 years. Robin Lehner stopped 41 shots.

Phil Kessel and Evgeni Malkin each had a goal and an assist, and Justin Schultz also scored for the Penguins. Murray finished with 29 saves.

Blues 2, Jets 1: Tyler Bozak scored with 2:05 left in the third period to give visiting St. Louis the victory in Game 1 of the Western Conference opening-round playoff series.

Pat Maroon sent a backhand

pass from behind the net out to Bozak in the slot, and Bozak's quick shot went by Winnipeg's Connor Hellebuyck for the go-ahead goal.

David Perron also scored for St. Louis early in the third, and Jordan Binnington made 24 saves.

Patrik Laine scored late in the first period and Hellebuyck stopped 24 shots for the Jets.

Stars 3, Predators 2: Rookie Miro Heiskanen scored two goals in his first postseason game, and visiting Dallas beat Nashville in Game 1 of their first-round Western Conference series.

Heiskanen became the eighth rookie teenage defenseman in NHL history to score a goal in his first career playoff game and the first since Adam Larsson with New Jersey on May 1, 2012, against Philadelphia, according to NHL Stats. He also became the third-youngest with a multi-goal game and the youngest in franchise history with a postseason goal at 19

years, 266 days.

Mats Zuccarello also scored, helping Dallas continue its success from the regular season in Nashville, where the Stars won twice.

Roman Josi and P.K. Subban scored for Nashville.

Sharks 5, Golden Knights 2: Joe Pavelski took a puck off his chin to score the opening goal and host San Jose raced past Vegas in Game 1 of their first-round series.

Brent Burns, Marc-Edouard Vlasic and Evander Kane added goals in a wild second period that featured heavy hitting, a parade to the penalty box and the high intensity expected in a series between two franchises that have become fierce rivals in just two seasons.

Tomas Hertl added an empty-net goal and Martin Jones made 24 saves to get San Jose started off right in this series.

Mark Stone scored both goals for the Golden Knights.

Blue Jackets shock top seed Lightning in series opener

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — The Columbus Blue Jackets rebounded from a dismal start to stun the team that had the NHL's best regular-season record.

Seth Jones scored the go-ahead goal on the power play to cap Columbus' three-goal third period, and the Blue Jackets rallied to beat the Tampa Bay Lightning 4-3 in Game 1 of the teams' first-round Eastern Conference playoff series Wednesday night.

"We can't get comfortable," Jones said. "Nothing is going to get easier. It's only going to get harder."

Jones made it 4-3 from the slot with 5:55 to play as the Blues Jackets erased a 3-0 deficit after the Lightning scored three times in the opening period.

With Columbus trailing 3-1 in the third, David Savard deked around Lightning defenseman Victor Hedman and scored 7:56 into the period to make it a one-goal game. Josh Anderson picked up a short-handed goal that tied it at 3 at 11:54.

The Blue Jackets became the 27th NHL team to overcome at least a three-goal deficit to win a playoff game in regulation.

Nick Foligno had the other goal for Columbus, and Sergei Bobrovsky ended up with 26 saves after struggling in the first period.

The Lightning, who matched the 1995-96 Detroit Red Wings for the most wins in a regular season with 62, got first-period goals from Alex Killorn, Anthony Cirelli and Yanni Gourde. Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 22 shots.

"Our mentality was, we wanted to outscore them tonight instead of build a lead and then shut them down," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "Our mentality has to be when we get in these situations is shut teams down, not to add to the lead."

Tampa Bay scored 325 goals in 2018-19, the most by any team in 23 years.

Hedman returned after missing the final four regular-season games with an upper-body injury. He took a helmet to the face during a collision with Washington's Carl Hagelin on March 30.

Killorn stole the puck from Jones at the blue line during a power play for Columbus and put a backhand past Bobrovsky to open the scoring 4:12 into the game. Tampa Bay was tied for third in short-

handed goals during the regular season with 12.

After Cirelli had a rebound goal at 11:01, Gourde's deflection of Mikhail Sergachev's shot made it 3-0 with 2:10 left in the first.

"We're just losing too many battles," Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella said of his first-intermission message. "Just the grind of the game. We have to be able to grind with them."

Foligno cut the deficit to 3-1 at 9:15 of the second on a breakaway goal after Tampa Bay's Ryan McDonagh made an errant pass in the offensive zone.

Nikita Kucherov, who had an NHL-best 128 points in the regular season, was held without a point but had an in-close chance turned aside by Bobrovsky and hit the crossbar during a power play.