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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Report: Civilian deaths down; US-led coalitions kill more

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Civilian casualties in Afghanistan in the first three months of 2019 dropped nearly a quarter from the same period last year but the number of deaths caused by U.S. and pro-government forces rose, a United Nations agency said Wednesday.

The U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan documented 581 civilian deaths and 1,192 injured in its latest quarterly report, which ranged from January through March.

It's the lowest number of noncombatant deaths and injuries caused by the conflict in any similar period since 2013, but the first time deaths caused by pro-government forces — Afghan security forces and their allies — outnumbered those caused by terrorist and insurgent groups, UNAMA said.

Despite the overall reduction in civilian bloodshed, officials remained "very concerned" by the targeting of civilians and increase of nonsuicide explosive attacks by insurgents and a "significant increase" in civilian casualties caused by pro-government forces' aerial operations and ground raids searching for weapons or insurgents, UNAMA said.

U.S. airstrikes were the leading cause of civilian war deaths in the country over the period, the report said.

Aerial operations killed 145 civilians and injured more than 80 others in the quarter, the report said. "International military forces" — namely the U.S., which is the only foreign country officially conducting airstrikes in Afghanistan — were said to be responsible for all but five of those deaths, with the remaining attributed to the Afghan air force.

The U.S. military regularly disputes UNAMA's figures. The U.N. mission routinely attributes more casualties to U.S. forces than the Pentagon does, citing different methodology.

"We hold ourselves to the highest standards of accuracy and accountability," U.S. Forces-Afghanistan spokesman Col. Dave Butler said in a statement. "We strive for precision in all of our operations."

After some recent reports of civilian casualties during fighting in northern Afghanistan, U.S. officials said Taliban militants were fighting from civilian homes, using women and children as shields and moving through compounds without

regard for the families living there.

International forces have the right to defend themselves and their partner Afghan forces, Butler said Wednesday.

"The best way to end the suffering of noncombatants is to end the fighting through an agreed-upon reduction in violence on all sides," he said.

Of the 305 civilian deaths attributed to pro-government forces during the reporting period, airstrike fatalities were responsible for about half of them. The Taliban, Islamic State and other anti-government elements were blamed for 227 deaths.

Ground fighting was the leading cause of civilian injuries and the second-leading cause of death among noncombatants. An ISIS mortar attack on a Shiite memorial in Kabul early last month killed 11 civilians and wounded 104 — about one-fifth of the total caused by ground attacks, which UNAMA said totaled 134 killed and 486 injured.

Anti-government elements remained responsible for the majority of overall civilian casualties — deaths and injured combined — during the first three months of the year, UNAMA said. But the combined 227 deaths and 736 injured attributed to those parties represented a 36% decrease compared with the period last year.

The findings mark the first time since systematic documentation of Afghan civilian casualties began a decade ago that the Afghan military and its international supporters were responsible for more noncombatant deaths than their adversaries on the battlefield, UNAMA said. The numbers also show a 76% increase over the numbers of deaths attributed to pro-government forces for the same period last year and a more than 30% increase in injuries.

UNAMA has been reporting an increase in civilian casualties from aerial operations since the U.S. stepped up airstrikes in Afghanistan in 2017, part of the Trump administration's strategy to push the Taliban to the negotiation table.

The report did not draw a conclusion on the cause for the recent downward trend.

"It is unclear whether the decrease in civilian casualties was influenced by any measures taken by parties to the conflict to better protect civilians, or by the ongoing talks between parties to the conflict," the report said.

President says armed soldiers sent to border

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump tweeted Wednesday that armed soldiers are now being sent to the U.S.-Mexico border, more than a week after two American soldiers were confronted by Mexican troops on the southern border in Texas.

"Mexico's Soldiers recently pulled guns on our National Guard Soldiers, probably as a diversionary tactic for drug smugglers on the Border. Better not happen again!," Trump tweeted. "We are now sending ARMED SOLDIERS to the Border. Mexico is not doing nearly enough in apprehending & returning!"

On April 13, two soldiers conducting surveillance near Clint, Texas, in an unmarked U.S. Customs and Border Protection vehicle were confronted by five or six Mexican troops, Maj. Mark Lazane, spokesman for U.S. Northern Command, said Monday.

The U.S. soldiers were approached and questioned by the Mexican troops, believing the Americans had crossed the border into Mexico. However, the U.S. soldiers were south of the border fence but still on U.S. territory, Lazane said.

A report by Newsweek on the incident stated the Mexican troops approached the U.S. soldiers with rifles pointed at them. The private and sergeant involved in the incident were part of 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment, out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state, Newsweek reported.

Firebolt's fallen honored in Bahrain

By JOSHUA KARSTEN
Stars and Stripes

MANAMA, Bahrain — More than 200 troops and civilians gathered on the U.S. Navy base here Wednesday to honor the memory of three USS Firebolt crewmembers killed in a suicide attack 15 years ago.

Seven crewmembers set out from the Firebolt in an inflatable boat on April 24, 2004, to inspect fishing dhows lurking around protected Iraqi oil terminals in the Persian Gulf.

As the Americans approached, one of the vessels “made an abrupt maneuver” and set off an explosive, “inflicting serious casualties for all members aboard,” said Lt. Cmdr. Roger Young, Firebolt’s current skipper, speaking at the gathering.

Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Michael Pernaselli, Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Christopher Watts and Coast Guard Petty Officer 3rd Class Nathan Bruckenthal were killed in the attack.

“They paid the ultimate price in support of their mission,” Young said. “I am pleased to say that their example of selfless devotion to duty and to each other are alive and well among the crew that sails these

waters today.”

Today, the Firebolt is one of 10 Navy coastal patrol ships permanently deployed to Bahrain, along with six Coast Guard cutters.

The “fighting spirit” of the men who died 15 years ago lives on aboard the Firebolt, said 5th Fleet commander Vice Adm. James Malloy, who spoke at the ceremony and participated in a 5K memorial run that followed it.

Malloy told attendees that “there is no such thing as a routine mission” in the 5th Fleet theater.

“It is important that we revisit the Firebolt lesson and remember the brave servicemembers who lost their lives that day,” he said.

Reminders of the tragedy remain aboard the Firebolt, including a mess deck display of three stars and the names of the dead.

“We walk by it every day, we see that stuff,” said Petty Officer 1st Class Robert Eastman, a current Firebolt coxswain who participates on inspection teams. “This hits home near and dear to me because I could be one of those sailors out there.”

Eastman added that the deaths remind

him that any “easy day could be your last day.”

The memory of the fallen also hits home among the more than 250 Coast Guardsmen serving in Bahrain. Bruckenthal, the first Coast Guardsman to die overseas since the Vietnam War, was recently honored with a fast response cutter commissioned in his name.

Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Nathan Michalski, a Bruckenthal plank owner who served on the commissioning team from 2016 to 2018, attended the ceremony and ran in the 5K.

“I always wanted to run a 5K, and I just commissioned the Coast Guard FRC a couple months ago before my arrival here,” Michalski said. “If I was going to do it, this one right here would mean the most to me.”

Michalski, who met Bruckenthal’s family and learned about him from them, emphasized the tight-knit community of the Coast Guard.

“We’re such a small group that we come together when things like that happen, so showing our support was a great experience,” Michalski said.

Putin observes launch of new sub

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin has watched the launch of a new submarine intended to carry prospective underwater nuclear drones — a doomsday weapon capable of causing a devastating tsunami.

During Tuesday’s visit to a military shipyard in St. Petersburg, Putin viewed the departure of the Belgorod nuclear submarine at the Sevmash plant in Severodvinsk in northwestern Russia via a teleconference.

The navy said the submarine designed to carry Poseidon drones is set to enter service next year.

Poseidon can target coastal areas with a heavy nuclear weapon, causing a devastating tsunami wave. Putin has said its tests have been successful.

He first mentioned the nuclear-powered drone among an array of other new weapons in a state-of-the-nation address last year, saying they would render U.S. missile defense systems useless.

Navy SEAL awaiting war crimes trial also probed in civilian death

The San Diego Union-Tribune

A Navy SEAL awaiting trial for alleged war crimes in Iraq in 2017 also is being investigated in the shooting death of an Afghan civilian in 2010, according to his defense attorney, who complained to the judge about the investigation last week.

The attorney said during the SEAL’s court-martial last week that he suspects Navy officials were leaking information about the investigation to the media.

Chief Special Warfare Operator Edward R. Gallagher, 39, is awaiting a military trial in San Diego on a charge of premeditated murder for allegedly killing a wounded Islamic State fighter in 2017 and on charges of aggravated assault connected to the shooting of two Iraqi civilians and other related charges.

He has pleaded not guilty and denies all those charges. His case has gained national interest, with President Donald Trump recently ordering a less restrictive pre-trial confinement for him.

Gallagher’s lead defense attorney, New

York-based Timothy Parlatore, argued at a hearing at Naval Base San Diego last week that the government has been leaking information to the media about an investigation into a 2010 shooting of a goat herder in Afghanistan.

Gallagher has not been charged in that case.

The judge in Gallagher’s court-martial, Navy Capt. Aaron Rugh, ruled on Jan. 25 that other allegations involving Gallagher — including the alleged incident in Afghanistan — would not be admissible in his murder trial. He also imposed a protective order over investigative documents and evidence in the case.

Details of the 2010 shooting are laid out in a Naval Criminal Investigative Service summary report covered by that protective order. Part of the report was obtained by The San Diego Union-Tribune, with other details confirmed by Parlatore in response to questions about the allegations against Gallagher.

House Dems wrestle with White House over investigations

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The struggle between House Democrats and the Trump administration over investigations intensified as a former White House official defied a subpoena and the Treasury Department ignored a deadline for providing President Donald Trump's tax returns.

Rep. Elijah Cummings, the chairman of the House Oversight Committee, said the White House has adopted the "untenable" position that it can ignore requests from the Democratic majority in the House.

"It appears that the president believes that the Constitution does not apply to his White House, that he may order officials at will to violate their legal obligations, and that he may obstruct attempts by Congress to conduct oversight," Cummings, D-Md., said in a statement.

Cummings was referring to Carl Kline, a former White House personnel security director, who was subpoenaed by Democrats. Kline did not show up Tuesday for a scheduled deposition, and Cummings said he is consulting with other lawmakers and staff about scheduling a vote to hold Kline in contempt of Congress.

The committee subpoenaed Kline after one of his former subordinates told the panel that dozens of people in Trump's administration were granted security clearances despite "disqualifying issues" in their backgrounds.

Trump said he doesn't want former or current aides testifying in Congress, "where it's very partisan — obviously very partisan."

Meanwhile, the administration on Tuesday defied a demand from Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal, D-Mass., to turn over six years of Trump's tax returns by the close of business.

Study: AI tool can detect PTSD from a voice test

The Philadelphia Inquirer

A computer program can analyze the voices of war veterans and determine which of them has post-traumatic stress disorder with 89% accuracy, according to a study published this week in the journal *Depression and Anxiety*.

The results suggest voice could be a biomarker for PTSD, providing the basis for an objective test to diagnose the disease.

The preliminary study was conducted by researchers at the New York University School of Medicine and funded in part by the U.S. Army.

"This could really change the landscape of PTSD treatment," said Thea Gallagher, clinic director of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety. Gallagher was not involved in the study but often works with PTSD patients.

"Helping people begins with diagnosis," she said. "And it's hard to know how many people we're missing right now."

PTSD affects more than 24 million Americans, according to national statistics. Many are veterans or members of law enforcement, but the disease also affects people who have experienced assault or abuse, natural disasters, terrorist attacks or other traumatic events.

Currently, PTSD is diagnosed by a clinician interview in which a mental health professional determines if a patient is experiencing ongoing distress because of a triggering event. The accuracy of that diagnosis is largely dependent on how much information the patient shares.

But individuals with PTSD often repress traumatic memories and the associated emotions. Many patients hide their symp-

toms out of fear or shame, said Charles Marmar, co-author of the study and chair of the psychiatry department at the NYU School of Medicine.

"They may be having nightmares three times a week," Marmar said, "but do they want to tell you that?"

In the study, researchers recorded standard clinical interviews with 53 male veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who had PTSD, as well as 78 without the disease. The recordings were then fed into a voice software that recognized more than 40,000 speech features, such as tone and frequency of pauses. The content of the interviews was not analyzed.

An artificial intelligence tool was then used to identify 18 speech features that were most useful in determining if a person had PTSD. These included monotonous speech, slower speech, more pauses, and a lifeless, metallic tone — all features associated with numbing, said Marmar. Numbing, or the blunting of emotions, is often seen in patients with untreated PTSD as they try to avoid emotions that can feel overpowering. It can also be a symptom of depression.

To ensure the computer program was accurately identifying PTSD and not any other mental illness, the researchers excluded participants with a diagnosis of major depression. They also used statistical analysis to confirm the findings weren't influenced by traumatic brain injury or alcohol use disorder.

Researchers aren't sure why PTSD would change someone's voice. They theorize that traumatic events change brain circuits that process emotion and muscle tone, which in turn affect voice.

USS Preble joins Aussie ship for exercises in Philippine Sea

BY CHRISTIAN LOPEZ

Stars and Stripes

Naval vessels from the United States and Australia recently practiced military maneuvers together in the Philippine Sea.

The destroyer USS Preble and frigate HMAS Melbourne conducted 10 separate drills Friday, the second training operation for both ships in several days, according to a Navy statement.

The drills included procedures for visit, board, search and seizure on vessels at sea; helicopter deck-landing qualifications; res-

cue and assistance drills; and naval tactics, the statement said.

Each naval crew operated alongside its allied counterparts for a better understanding of both ships' equipment and operating procedures, according to the statement.

"We appreciate the opportunity to operate and train with such high-caliber mariners and military professionals," Cmdr. Leonardo Giovannelli, of the Preble, said in the statement. "Because of the close relationship that our two countries share, we were able to execute an incredible amount of valuable training in a short amount of

time."

Prior to the Preble's arrival, the HMAS Melbourne conducted helicopter deck landings with Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 25 in the Philippine Sea. Aviators with the Guam-based Island Knights landed two MH-60S Knighthawk helicopters aboard the Melbourne, demonstrating both navies' ability to communicate and operate together, the Navy said in a statement April 16.

U.S. and Australian forces will meet again during the summer off the east coast of Australia for Talisman Sabre, a biennial U.S.-Australian exercise.

Boeing pulling 2019 forecast amid jet issues

Associated Press

Boeing is pulling its 2019 forecast over 737 Max uncertainty and says it's suspending its stock buybacks.

The aerospace giant also provided first quarter results on Wednesday that missed Wall Street's estimates.

Boeing Co. said its previously issued full-year guidance didn't account for 737 Max impacts. It plans to issue a new guidance at a future date.

Investors and consumers have been keeping a close eye on Boeing due to two deadly crashes involving the 737 Max. The crashes have damaged the company's reputation for safety, caused the worldwide grounding of about 370 Boeing 737 Max airliners and raised questions about the U.S. government's approval of the plane in 2017.

Boeing posted an adjusted profit of \$3.16 per share on revenue of \$22.92 billion. An-

alysts surveyed by FactSet expected Boeing to report adjusted earnings of \$3.19 per share on revenue of \$22.94 billion. Both of those figures have come down considerably in the past month.

The company provided few clues about the fate of its best-selling plane and when it might fly again.

It said Wednesday it is making steady progress on the path to final certification for a software update for the 737 Max, with more than 135 test and production flights of the software update complete.

Boeing's numbers come as the company faces investigations into the two crashes that have implicated an automated flight-control system that erroneously pushed the noses of the planes down in response to bad readings from sensors. Boeing began working on a software update to the system more than five months ago.

When the market closed Tuesday, Boeing Co. shares stood 4% higher than before

the October crash of a 737 Max operated by Indonesia's Lion Air. After a slump, they skyrocketed from late December until early March when another 737 Max crashed, this one operated by Ethiopian Airlines.

Even with a mild sell-off since the March crash, the shares are still up 16% in 2019, barely trailing the 17% gain in the Standard and Poor's 500.

In premarket trading, the stock edged up less than 1%.

Investors believe the market for jetliners will remain strong for many years and airlines don't have much choice for big planes — Boeing and Airbus form a duopoly, and both have huge order backlogs.

CEO Dennis Muilenburg said the company has conducted 120 test flights of the upgraded software, and only needs a final certification flight with FAA personnel on board.

That flight is expected any day.

\$768M Powerball winner 'pretty much felt lucky'

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — A 24-year-old Wisconsin man stepped forward Tuesday to claim a \$768 million Powerball prize, the nation's third-largest lottery jackpot, saying he "pretty much felt lucky" the day he bought his tickets and has been worried that people want to steal his ticket.

Manuel Franco, of West Allis, said he was sorting through \$10 worth of quick-pick tickets after the March 27 drawing and thought he had checked all his tickets. Then he saw one last ticket stuck to another one, and recounted to reporters the feeling as he matched the first two numbers, then glanced at the Powerball to see it matched too.

"I was going insane," Franco said. "I looked back at the three other numbers, they all matched. My heart started racing, my blood started pumping, I felt warm. I started screaming."

Franco declined to reveal much about himself at a news conference conducted by Wis-

consin Lottery officials, smiling often but deflecting questions such as what he did for a living and what kind of car he drives. Franco did say he quit work the second day after winning, saying he just couldn't continue.

The \$768 million prize refers to an annuity option paid over 29 years. The winner also can choose a \$477 million cash option, which was the route Franco picked. The state will keep \$36.4 million in taxes and the federal government will keep \$114.6 million in taxes, leaving Franco with \$326 million.

Franco said his financial goal before winning the jackpot was getting his bank account to the \$1,000 mark. He said he hoped to make some charitable contributions and was prepared for people who might come asking for money.

"I'm ready and I know how to say no," Franco said.

Under Wisconsin law, winners cannot remain anonymous. Franco said as soon as he realized he had won he started feeling paranoid and put his winning ticket in a safe.

Justices seem ready to OK census query on citizenship

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Despite evidence that millions of Hispanics and immigrants could go uncounted, the Supreme Court's conservative majority seemed ready Tuesday to uphold the Trump administration's plan to inquire about U.S. citizenship on the 2020 census in a case that could affect American elections for the next decade.

There appeared to be a clear divide between the court's liberal and conservative justices in arguments in a case that could affect how many seats states have in the House of Representatives and their share of federal dollars over the next 10 years. States with a large number of immigrants tend to vote Democratic.

Three lower courts have so far blocked the plan to ask every U.S. resident about citizenship in the census, finding that the question would discourage many immigrants from being counted. Two of the three judges also ruled that asking if people are citizens

would violate the provision of the Constitution that calls for a count of the population, regardless of citizenship status, every 10 years.

The last time the question was included on the census form sent to every American household was 1950.

Three conservative justices, Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch and Clarence Thomas, had expressed skepticism about the challenge to the question in earlier stages of the case, but Chief Justice John Roberts and Brett Kavanaugh had been silent, possibly suggesting a willingness to disrupt the administration's plan. However, over 80 minutes in a packed courtroom, neither Roberts nor Kavanaugh appeared to share the concern of the lower court judges who ruled against the administration.

Kavanaugh, the court's newest member and an appointee of President Donald Trump, suggested Congress could change the law if it is so concerned that the accuracy of the once-a-decade population count will suffer.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Garbage truck spill covers road with trash

WV BARBOURSVILLE — A garbage truck spilled trash all over a West Virginia highway, backing up traffic ahead of rush hour.

Images from the scene show piles of garbage bags as well as loose cardboard and other trash littered across Interstate 64 West in the Barboursville area.

Traffic was backed up and funneled into a single lane while an entrance ramp for the Huntington Mall was closed.

WSAZ-TV reported highway workers were forced to close the entire westbound side to allow another dump truck to come in and haul away the garbage.

Fight involving ax, gun ends in shooting

CT WEST HARTFORD — Police in Connecticut said a fight between a man with a gun and another man with an ax ended in a shooting.

West Hartford officers responded to a reported shooting near the Hartford line and found a man who had been shot. The man was taken to a hospital.

Authorities are looking for the shooter.

Witnesses said the fight happened outside an apartment.

Bar owners refuse to paint over mural

ND MANDAN — The owners of a Mandan bar are preparing to take legal action to fight the city's demands that they paint over their Western-themed mural.

The Lonesome Dove is working with a libertarian legal group, the Institute for Justice, to defend its mural that depicts

the name of the bar along with a rearing horseman against brown hills at sunset, the Bismarck Tribune reported. The Mandan City Commission ordered the bar last month to remove its mural because the business doesn't have a permit for the outdoor artwork.

Co-owner Brian Berube said the owners didn't apply for a permit because they weren't aware of the requirement.

Fire destroys truck hauling soda products

ME KENNEBUNK — A tractor-trailer full of soda was destroyed but no one was injured in a fire on the Maine Turnpike.

State police said the truck loaded with Coca-Cola products was headed to Bangor when it caught fire in Kennebunk.

The driver pulled over, and all three northbound lanes were closed for a time while firefighters put out the flames.

'Traffic stop' turns into a proposal

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — A woman got an unexpected request when Miami Beach police pulled her and her boyfriend over.

Carolina Delgado and boyfriend Romain Zago were heading to lunch when they were stopped by Miami Beach police in front of the Miami Beach Marina for some type of traffic infraction.

One of the officers, Elpidio Garcia, told Zago that his license was suspended and he was going to be arrested. Garcia then told her that they were going to give her the opportunity to say goodbye to Zago.

That's when Zago got down on one knee and held out a box with a ring inside.

She said yes.

Semi spills human waste onto interstate

WA SEATTLE — Eastbound lanes of a highway in Washington state were closed after a semi-truck hauling human waste overturned.

KIRO-TV reported officials with the Washington State Department of Transportation closed all eastbound lanes just before noon.

Washington State Patrol Trooper Rick Johnson said it appears the driver fell asleep. The driver was rescued with minor injuries.

Drag performance by boy prompts action

OH COLUMBUS — The drag queen performance of a 9-year-old boy at a bar outside Ohio's capital city prompted a state legislator to propose a law aimed at closing what he says is a "loophole in child exploitation laws."

The Blade reported legislation proposed by Rep. Timothy Schaffer, a Lancaster Republican, would update child endangering laws to prevent performances by children that simulate sexual activity and appeal to "the prurient interest."

Jacob Measley's mother, Jerri, said her son is not allowed to dance to songs with sexual language and that his moves were learned in dance and gymnastics classes.

Restaurant closes over laxatives in food

TX FORT WORTH — A Springtown pizza restaurant was shut down for the weekend after an employee posted on social media that they put laxatives in some food, according to the Springtown Police Department.

Three employees are accused of putting Miralax on at least one pizza at Mr. Jim's Pizza, which was then unknowingly eaten by another employee. That employee got sick and was evaluated by medical personnel, police said.

The employees denied putting any Miralax on any pizzas purchased by the public, police said.

Bobcat that survived wildfire has 4 kittens

CA THOUSAND OAKS — A young bobcat that survived a massive and deadly wildfire in Southern California last year gave birth to four kittens, wildlife officials said.

Biologists recently found the bobcat's den in dense vegetation in a large residential backyard.

While their mother was away, the biologists weighed, measured and tagged one male and three female kittens. They also gave them a general health checkup.

Their mother, B-362, was tagged the day before the start of last year's Woolsey Fire, which destroyed 1,600 structures and left three people dead.

Footbridge built for World's Fair is closed

WA SPOKANE — The city of Spokane has closed a footbridge over the downtown waterfalls so its concrete deck can be repaired or replaced.

The popular bridge was built for the 1974 World's Fair in Riverfront Park.

The city said the 45-year-old pedestrian bridge is structurally sound, but age and weather conditions have led to chipping and holes in the concrete deck.

From wire reports

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Lillard finishes off Thunder

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — After Damian Lillard hit his walk-off three-pointer to send the Trail Blazers along in the playoffs, he waved goodbye to the Thunder bench.

“That was the last word,” he afterward. “That was having the last word.”

Lillard finished with a franchise playoff-record 50 points and Portland eliminated Oklahoma City from the postseason in five games with a 118-115 victory on Tuesday night.

With the game tied, Lillard dribbled just inside of halfcourt near the Blazers logo and then pulled up and hit the game-winner at the buzzer from 37-feet. After his wave, Lillard was mobbed by his teammates and the crowd chanted “MVP! MVP!”

Lillard finished with 10 three-pointers, second-most ever in an NBA playoff game.

“All of those things that we did to give ourselves a chance to win were huge,” Lillard said. “And my part in it, I think, was

probably my most important performance.”

Portland advances to the Western Conference semifinals to face the winner of the series between the Nuggets and San Antonio. Denver won 108-90 earlier in the night to take a 3-2 lead in that series.

It was the 12th straight road playoff loss for the Thunder, who have been eliminated in the opening round for three straight seasons.

Russell Westbrook had 29 points, 11 rebounds and 14 assists for his 10th career playoff triple-double and his second of the series. Paul George added 36 points.

“Very, very disappointing. It’s as simple as that,” George said. “We let this one slip away but it is what it is.”

Lillard had 34 points in the first half alone — more than Westbrook and George had combined (32) for the Thunder — but the Blazers had just a 61-60 edge going into the second half.

The Thunder led 90-88 going into the final quarter. West-

brook hit a three-pointer to extend the lead while Lillard took a break on the bench.

Oklahoma City went up 105-90 with 7:45 left on Dennis Schroder’s pullup jumper as Portland struggled.

Lillard’s three-pointer pulled the Blazers within 108-103, but Westbrook answered with his own 3. CJ McCollum’s bank shot cut Oklahoma City’s lead to 113-109 with 1:39 left. Maurice Harkless added free throws to get the Blazers within two.

McCollum tied it with a jumper with just under a minute left, but George scored on the other end. Lillard’s layup re-tied it then Westbrook missed a layup with 18.3 seconds left to set up Lillard’s epic buzzer beater.

“I don’t care what anybody says that’s a bad shot,” George said about Lillard’s three. “But he made it and that story will be told, but it was a bad shot. You live with it.”

McCollum finished with 17 for the Blazers and Enes Kanter had 13 points and 13 rebounds.

Raptors rout Magic

Associated Press

TORONTO — The Toronto Raptors turned in another dominant defensive effort, extending their playoff winning streak to a team-record four and clinching a berth in the second round.

Kawhi Leonard scored 27 points, Pascal Siakam added 24 and the Raptors routed the Orlando Magic 115-96 on Tuesday night, winning their first-round playoff series in five games.

Kyle Lowry scored 14 points as the Raptors finished off the Magic with ease, bouncing back from a Game 1 defeat to win by double-digits in three of the next four. Toronto led by as many as 37 in the clincher, their biggest-ever margin in a playoff game.

“We kind of figured it out and made a good adjustment after Game 1,” Lowry said. “We were a little bit too soft in coverages and we figured it out really quickly, what we wanted to do, how we needed to help each other and how we needed to play. To figure it out that quick is a really good thing for us. We’ve just got to continue to build off it.”

Toronto will face Philadelphia in the second after the 76ers eliminated Brooklyn on Tuesday. It’s the fourth straight year the Raptors have reached the second round.

“Should be a great series, man,” Raptors coach Nick Nurse said of facing the Sixers. “Obviously, it’s a team with tremendous size, starting right off the bat with (Joel) Embiid inside. But they’re big all over.”

Leonard made 8 of 11 shots, including 5-for-5 from three-point range, as the Raptors jumped on Orlando early and never trailed. Leonard also made all six of his free throws. He checked out to cheers of “MVP, MVP” with 8:05 to play and Toronto up 105-75.

D.J. Augustin scored 15 points, Terrence Ross had 12 and Aaron Gordon 11 for the Magic, who won 104-101 on Augustin’s late three-pointer in Game 1 but never again topped 96 points.

Sixers advance to second round

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Joel Embiid showed no mercy. He buried a three-pointer that gave the 76ers a 24-point lead and waved his arms like a boss, exhorting an already jacked crowd to get louder.

Philly obeyed its most popular player and went wild — and the All-Star center believes the good times have only just started.

“We think we can win it all,” Embiid said.

Ben Simmons thumped his chest after a big dunk, Embiid pointed toward an overmatched defender on a slam of his own, and Philadelphia flexed its offensive muscle from the opening tip to beat the Brooklyn Nets 120-100 on Tuesday night and close out their Eastern Conference playoff series in five games.

Up next, a second round series against the Toronto Raptors, who dropped their playoff opener before winning four straight against Orlando — the same thing the Sixers did to Brooklyn.

“We still have more to do. A lot more to do,” coach Brett Brown said.

Any late arrivals missed the defining moments of the game from a jovial Sixers team that enjoyed toying with the sickly Nets.

The Sixers stunned the Nets with a 14-0 run in

front of the loudest and rowdiest packed house of the season.

Embiid again shook off a bad left knee and had six points and five rebounds in the first two minutes to chants of “MVP!” The Nets later trailed 20-2, and Simmons put an exclamation point on the stunning first quarter when he drove the paint and used a right-handed jam to make it 32-12 — with a thump of his chest for emphasis.

“They did whatever they wanted before we could even get on the board,” Nets All-Star guard D’Angelo Russell said.

Brooklyn’s Jared Dudley was soundly booed during pregame introductions and each time he touched the ball in the first. Dudley had stirred trouble when he said Simmons was “average” in the half-court. Dudley bumped Embiid in Game 4, triggering a skirmish with Jimmy Butler that spilled into the stands. Dudley heard “Dudley sucks!” chants from opening tipoff and got a view of this rout from the bench in the second half. He flashed a few smiles in the waning moments, his time as a playoff name over.

The teams tangled again in the final two minutes, and the deep reserves had to be separated.

Embiid had 23 points and 13 rebounds, Simmons had 13 points and no starter played more than 27 minutes.

Sharks rally after major call

Associate Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — In San Jose, the game will always be remembered as the Pavelski Payback for the four goals scored on one power play after the Sharks' captain was knocked out cold, turning around a wild Game 7 that finally ended in overtime.

In Las Vegas, the Golden Knights will always lament the call that they believe was excessive and cost them a chance to advance to the second round.

The Sharks responded to the bloody injury to captain Joe Pavelski by scoring four goals on the ensuing power play and then bounced back after allowing the game-tying goal in the final minute of regulation to beat Vegas 5-4 on Barclay Goodrow's goal 18:19 into overtime on Tuesday night.

"He's the heart of this team, and to see him go down like that and suffer like that was heart-breaking for us," said center Joe Thornton, who rallied his teammates and implored them to score three goals on the power play to erase the 3-0 deficit. "That power-play unit, it won us the game. The boys got together and said this is for Pavs. We love him. It was just a matter of will, and we willed that one for him."

The penalty happened on a faceoff in San Jose's offensive zone when Cody Eakin cross-checked Pavelski in the chest with 10:47 to play. Paul Stastny then bumped Pavelski as he fell to the ice, his helmet slamming down. Pavelski was knocked out and bleeding on the ice.

"You see our leader go down, he's out cold on the ice and it was kind of like he was seizing up a little bit so tough to see," teammate Logan Couture said.

The officials huddled as a dazed Pavelski was helped to the locker room and gave Eakin a five-minute major for cross-checking and a game misconduct. Series supervisor Don VanMassenhoven said the major penalty was given because the cross-check caused a significant injury.

The Golden Knights disagreed.

"They called five minutes for that? Why don't you have hockey replay or something? It changed the whole outcome of the game," forward Jonathan Marchessault said. "Seriously. What is that? It's so disappointing. The game is not even close, it's 3-0. Call the two, OK, but a five? With something you don't even see? You just called the outcome. It's a joke, that's what it is. It's embarrassing."

The Sharks then rallied behind their captain after a plea from Thornton thanks to two goals from Couture, one from Tomas Hertl and then the tiebreaker from Kevin Labanc, who assisted on the first three goals. That scoring spree in 4:01 against Marc-Andre Fleury sent the fans at the Shark Tank so used to playoff disappointment into delirium. It marked just the second time a team had scored four goals on one major power play in a playoff game.

Nuggets top Spurs for series lead

Associated Press

DENVER — After a sputtering start to their postseason, the Denver Nuggets are starting to look like the team that ended a six-year playoff drought in such dramatic fashion.

Nikola Jokic has a lot to do with it.

Jokic had 16 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists and fed Jamal Murray (23 points) repeatedly in Denver's 108-90 romp of the San Antonio Spurs on Tuesday night.

"Their chemistry is almost romantic," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. "They care about each other, they love each other. They play for each other. That's when we're at our best."

"I mean, we're growing," Jokic said. "We're both really passionate about basketball. So when we have some good plays or whatever, we just want to express our feelings."

The surprising No. 2 seed in the West, the Nuggets are up 3-2 and can advance to the second round for the first time in a decade with a win in Game 6 Thursday night in San Antonio, where they won last weekend for the first time since 2012.

Two weeks ago, Jokic overcame suffocating double teams to become the fourth player in NBA history to record a triple-double in his playoff debut and the first since LeBron James in 2006. But he scored just 10 points to go with 14 assists and 14 rebounds that night.

Since then, he's averaged 22 points, 11 boards and eight assists. Three times he's come up a pair of assists shy of a triple double.

"I mean, every great player is a challenge. And he can do a little bit of everything, and he does all of those things well," Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said. "He's the consummate team player who has great skills, but he's also competitive, does a great job, has got a very high basketball IQ."

Bruins get past Leafs in Game 7

Associated Press

BOSTON — Another Game 7 matchup between Boston and Toronto, another victory for the Bruins.

Joakim Nordstrom and Sean Kuraly each had a goal and assist, Tuukka Rask stopped 32 shots and the Bruins beat the Maple Leafs 5-1 in Game 7 on Tuesday night to wrap up their first-round Eastern Conference playoff series.

Marcus Johansson added his first goal of the postseason for Boston and Charlie Coyle scored on an empty netter late in the third. Patrice Bergeron also had a late goal.

It is the Bruins' second straight Game 7 win over the Maple Leafs and third in three playoff matchups between the teams. Boston previously knocked Toronto out of the postseason with Game 7 vic-

tories in 2018 and 2013. The Maple Leafs have now lost six straight road Game 7s.

The teams had alternated wins in this series until the Bruins won the last two games.

"I just think the last two games the character of this group shone," Johansson said. "We earned our way to Game 7 in Toronto and to a win tonight. That's a good feeling."

Boston advances to the Eastern Conference semifinals against the Columbus Blue Jackets, starting with Game 1 at home on Thursday night.

Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said his team benefited from contributions up and down their roster but said Rask may have come up the biggest.

"Generally speaking you need your goaltender to hold you in there," Cassidy said. "He was outstanding."

John Tavares had Toron-

to's goal on an assist by Tyler Ennis. Frederik Andersen finished with 27 saves.

"It's disappointing. I thought our series this year compared to last year, we were a way better hockey club. In the end, we weren't rewarded," Toronto coach Mike Babcock said.

The Bruins led 2-1 after two periods and needed just 2:40 of the third to add to it.

Toronto got into Boston's zone before the puck was poked out near the center of the ice and controlled by Kuraly. He promptly split between Tavares and Ron Hainsey, crossed in front of Morgan Rielly and fired a shot past Andersen to give the Bruins a two-goal edge.

Boston came up empty on multiple early shot attempts before its fourth line broke through with the game's first goal.

Wheeler homers, fans 11 to top Philly

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Power pitching, that's what the New York Mets hope to get from Zack Wheeler.

But power hitting?

Wheeler connected for his first major league home run and struck out 11 in seven sharp innings as the Mets handed the Philadelphia Phillies their fifth loss in six games, 9-0 on Tuesday night.

"Pitching's obviously first, but we work a lot on our hitting and we take pride in it," Wheeler said.

"We want to go up there and do well as a staff and not give them an easy out. Luckily, I wasn't an easy out tonight," he said.

For the Phillies, it was another quiet day. Until two outs in the ninth, that is.

That's when Mets reliever Jacob Rhame sailed two fastballs over Rhys Hoskins'

head. The benches started to clear after the first time, and Hoskins angrily slung his bat after the next one, which was ball four.

"I understand baseball. They got hit a couple times yesterday," Hoskins said.

But that didn't make it any easier to accept, not after high heat buzzed his helmet. Mets catcher Travis d'Arnaud "just said they were trying to go inside and I laughed," the Philadelphia cleanup man said.

No doubt, it could make for tense times in the series finale Wednesday night.

Before the late shenanigans, it was the Wheeler show.

Wheeler also doubled and drove in three runs and Todd Frazier connected for a grand slam that made it 8-0 in the fifth.

"I was like, God, he makes it look easy and I'm trying to get an extra-base hit or get on base," Frazier said. "It was nice to

have him supply the RBIs, give himself a little breathing room and I came in at the end."

Wheeler (2-2) became the majors' first 100-100 player this season — he hit and pitched a ball at least 100 mph, according to Statcast.

"First pitcher ever to do that," Mets manager Mickey Callaway said. "That put him over the top, it seems like. And that's a real stat, by the way, I'm not making that up. He did everything right."

Wheeler did it in his 100th career start, too. He fanned seven straight in the early innings, and gave himself a cushion at the plate.

A career .129 hitter, Wheeler lined a two-run double in the second off Zach Eflin (2-3). The next time up, Wheeler did even better, launching a drive over the wall in left-center.

MLB roundup

Yankees' replacement players stepping up

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Yankees slugger Luke Voit showed last season what an unproven player can gain when injuries create opportunities for playing time.

With New York depleted almost beyond recognition, Mike Ford and the rest of this year's injury replacements are seizing their moment.

Voit homered twice and Ford went deep for the first time in the majors to lead New York over the Los Angeles Angels 7-5 Tuesday night. The Yankees have won five straight and seven of their last eight despite having 13 players on the injured list.

"It's fun. Guys are stepping up in big-time roles," said Voit, who got his third multihomer game and extended his hitting streak to 10. "A lot of guys are going to be coming back and players are going to be going up and down, but there's always a chance to make a name for yourself now."

Voit has reached base in 34 straight games and has 20 home runs in 55 games dating back to Aug. 24, which leads the Amer-

ican League. He was stuck with St. Louis' Triple-A affiliate last season before being traded to the Yankees, who needed a big bat with injuries to slugger Aaron Judge and others.

He opened the scoring with a solo shot in the first inning for the second straight game, and then added another in the eighth to make it 7-1.

Ford, called up for the first time last week, hit a two-run shot in the fifth off starter Chris Stratton (0-2). Brett Gardner had four hits, his second game with three or more, and was a home run shy of hitting for the cycle.

Tigers 7, 4; Red Sox 4, 2: Chris Sale remained winless after five starts but struck out a season-high 10 in five innings as visiting Detroit started its first doubleheader sweep at Fenway Park since August 1965.

In the second game, Shane Greene struck out two in a one-hit ninth for his 11th save in as many tries.

Rays 5, Royals 2: Jalen Beeks took over from opener Ryne Stanek in the second and struck out seven in 4²/₃ shutout innings, Mike Zunino homered for the second straight game

and host Tampa Bay sent Kansas City to its fifth straight loss.

Cardinals 4, Brewers 3: Paul DeJong hit a tiebreaking, leadoff homer in the eighth inning, Yadier Molina had three hits and two RBIs, and host St. Louis beat Milwaukee.

Cubs 7, Dodgers 2: Jose Quintana pitched seven crisp innings in his third straight win, and host Chicago used a fast start to beat Los Angeles.

Astros 10, Twins 4: Jose Altuve hit a three-run homer and Alex Bregman added three RBIs as host Houston rallied to snap a three-game skid.

Athletics 11, Rangers 5: Matt Chapman homered and walked three times, and Marcus Semien had a two-run double as part of a six-run fourth inning for host Oakland.

Padres 6, Mariners 3: Austin Hedges' two-run homer bounced out of center fielder Malle Smith's glove and over the fence, and Franmil Reyes homered twice and had three RBIs for host San Diego.

Nationals 6, Rockies 3: Patrick Corbin pitched six strong innings, Victor Robles hit a three-run double, and Washington beat host Colorado.

Marlins 3, Indians 1: Pablo Lopez allowed just two hits in his longest start this season (6 1/3 innings) and Jorge Alfaro homered on reliever Neil Ramirez's first pitch, moments after host Cleveland's starter Carlos Carrasco left with another injury.

Reds 7, Braves 6: Yasiel Puig hit a two-run homer in the first inning off the facade of the second deck in left-center field, and host Cincinnati wasted an early lead and then rallied.

Diamondbacks 2, Pirates 1: Jarrod Dyson dived around catcher Francisco Cervelli but was only credited with the go-ahead run in the sixth inning after a replay review in Pittsburgh.

Orioles 9, White Sox 1: Dwight Smith Jr. hit a three-run homer, one of four long balls off Ivan Nova (0-3), and host Baltimore overpowered Chicago.

Giants 7, Blue Jays 6: Pablo Sandoval went 3-for-4 and homered for the first time this year, one of a season-high four home runs for visiting San Francisco.