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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Mattis: More US troops heading to Afghanistan

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Thursday that he has signed orders to deploy more troops to Afghanistan as part of the new U.S. strategy to break the stalemate with Taliban in the nearly 16-year war there.

The bulk of the new forces ordered to deploy will bolster the U.S. mission to advise and assist Afghan security forces in their fight against the Taliban and other terrorist groups, Mattis told reporters at the Pentagon. Other units that he's signed orders for include artillery forces and logistical support teams.

"I have signed orders, but it is not complete," he said. "The fight will still be carried by the Afghan security forces ... by and large this is to enable the Afghan forces to fight effectively."

Mattis declined to identify what units he ordered to deploy, how many additional troops that he had approved or when they would arrive in Afghanistan. Defense officials said nearly 4,000 new American troops will be added to Afghanistan in the future, raising the U.S. force there to about 15,000.

It was not clear Thursday if the units had been officially notified of their upcoming deployments.

The new forces are expected to include elements of the Army's 82nd Airborne Division and 25th Infantry Division, The Washington Post reported Wednesday, citing unnamed U.S. officials.

Mattis also is expected to deploy Marine artillery detachments and to approve an increase in combat air support to include F-16 fighter jets, A-10 ground attack planes and B-52 bombers, according to The

Post.

Mattis said Thursday that he would provide more clarity on the new deployments in the near future, but he was not yet prepared to make the information public. He indicated that could occur when he briefs lawmakers on Capitol Hill on Wednesday.

President Donald Trump approved a new strategy to deal with south Asia — primarily Afghanistan but also Pakistan and India — on Aug. 21 and has provided the authority to Mattis to deploy new forces into the fight. More forces will allow the United States to advise Afghan units closer to the front lines as it battles the Taliban.

The Pentagon announced Wednesday that it had adjusted its troop counting system, acknowledging for the first time publicly that it has about 11,000 servicemembers serving in Afghanistan, some 2,600 more than it had previously reported. The Defense Department said troop caps installed by former President Barack Obama's administration failed to account for troops serving in the country on temporary deployments of less than 120 days.

At the height of the United States' involvement in the war in 2011, more than 100,000 American troops were on the ground in Afghanistan. More than 2,000 Americans have been killed in the war since the U.S. invasion about a month after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

In 2017, 10 U.S. servicemembers have been killed in action in Afghanistan, most of whom died in fights against Islamic State militants in the east.

In addition to its mission to train and advise Afghan forces, the U.S. maintains a unilateral mission to attack ISIS and other terrorist groups in the country, including al-Qaida.

Plant explosion adds to the Harvey threat

The Washington Post

CROSBY, Texas — The remnants of Hurricane Harvey carried its wrath up the Mississippi Delta on Thursday, but not before hammering the Gulf Coast with more punishing cloudbursts and growing threats that included reports of "pops" and "chemical reactions" at a crippled chemical plant and the collapse of the drinking water system in a Texas city.

Authorities still warned of the danger posed by the plant in Crosby, about 30 miles northeast of Houston. The company operating the plant warned that explosions were possible, while William "Brock" Long, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, called the potential for a chemical plume "incredibly dangerous."

Officials on Thursday had offered differing accounts regarding what occurred at the Crosby plant, which makes organic peroxides for use in items such as countertops and pipes. The plant's operators, who had earlier Thursday reported explosions, later said they believe at least one valve "popped" there, though they noted it was impossible to know for sure since all employees had left.

As attention focused on the chemical plant, which Thursday sat under about 6 feet of water following Harvey's relentless rains, other areas battered by the storm awoke to lingering flooding.

The storm's fury was far from over to the east and beyond, as flash flood watches were posted as far away as southern Ohio. The National Weather Service said 4 inches of rain was ex-

pected to soak parts of Arkansas, Kentucky and Tennessee with up to 10 inches possible in some isolated areas in western Tennessee.

In Crosby, two blasts rocked the chemical plant that had been left without power by floodwaters, according to the facility's French operators.

"We were notified by the Harris County Emergency Operations Center of two explosions and black smoke coming from the" plant, the company, Arkema, said in its initial statement.

The Harris County Fire Marshal's Office reported "a series of chemical reactions" and "intermittent smoke" at the facility. A county official said there weren't "massive explosions," and instead referred to the reactions as "pops" followed by fire.

Still, Arkema warned that blasts could come. "A threat of additional explosion remains," said the statement.

Authorities on Wednesday set up an evacuation zone in a 1.5-mile radius from the plant. But the risks could also be carried by the winds.

The Harris County Sheriff's Office said that one deputy was hospitalized after inhaling fumes from the plant, while several others sought medical care as a precaution. Some were still being evacuated at a local hospital, the Sheriff's Office said, while others had been released.

The Crosby plant manufactures organic peroxides, a family of compounds used in everything from pharmaceuticals to construction materials. The stores must remain cold, otherwise it can combust.

Navy helos scramble to keep up with Harvey

By DIANNA CAHN
Stars and Stripes

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — When he fired up the MH-60 Seahawk helicopter Wednesday morning, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Pat Dunn thought it was going to be an easier day over the floodwaters of Hurricane Harvey.

Monday had been intense. The pilot and his crewmembers, who came from Naval Station Norfolk, Va., for search-and-rescue duty, rescued 215 people and 12 animals on their first day flying into the devastation in the Houston area.

Tuesday had been much drier, and the crews that went out from this college town northwest of Houston did not perform a single rescue.

As this storm has proved, however, no two days are alike.

Wednesday brought a fresh round of tropical storm winds and rain, this time farther southeast, in the cities of Beaumont and Port Arthur. Floodwaters rose quickly, and people were trapped. A voluntary evacuation was issued for 1,000 families in north Beaumont, where 24 inches of rain had fallen, according to The Weather Channel.

The weather was very rough, visibility was down to a quarter-mile at times and cloud cover was low, Dunn said. “There was lots of driving rain.”

Dunn’s Seahawk and a second helicopter were going to drop off six Air Force parascuers with Zodiac rafts at the Orange County Convention and Expo Center east of Beaumont. From there, the helicopters

Navy sending 2 ships to provide humanitarian aid

NORFOLK, Va. — The U.S. Navy is sending two ships to provide humanitarian aid to areas affected by Hurricane Harvey.

News media outlets report that the amphibious assault ship USS Kearsarge and the dock landing ship USS Oak Hill are scheduled to depart Virginia for the Gulf Coast area Thursday.

The ships can provide medical support and maritime security, among other things.

Harvey initially came ashore as a Category 4 hurricane in Texas on Friday, then went back out to sea and lingered off the coast as a tropical storm for days, inundating flood-prone Houston.

From The Associated Press

were supposed to return to the Houston area. But before the helicopters finished unloading, two of the parajumpers, as they are known, hopped back onto the aircraft.

There were people in trouble — trapped in their home, they said.

Dunn flew to the flooded area nearby. As the helicopter hovered, the crew chief lowered the rescue basket on a hoist, and one by one, they brought five people out of

the water.

Not 200 yards away, the second helicopter hovered, also hoisting five people stuck in the rising waters — mirror-image rescues in blinding rain.

“That’s how you start your day,” Dunn said.

The Navy’s Helicopter Sea Combat Squadrons 7 and 28 rescued 58 people Wednesday as the ravages from a storm that had caused the most damage in U.S. history continued to worsen.

“It’s almost like we are starting all over again,” said Cmdr. Dave Hecht, a spokesman for the mission. Six MH-60s flew in from Norfolk late Sunday with close to 100 personnel, including crew and maintenance.

The squadrons usually escort fighter jets off aircraft carriers, trained and ready to conduct search-and-rescue should the pilot or his wingman eject. The mission here is not that different, Hecht said, except off the carrier, the rescue swimmer knows that he is dropping into deep water. With the flooding, there’s no way to know whether a house’s roof or a telephone pole is right underneath the surface, he said.

The Navy is a small piece of the massive response effort by state and national forces. Texas activated all 12,000 of its National Guard troops Monday. The Guard said Wednesday that it has 30,000 members ready to assist in what it called a “long-term, sustained effort.” Since Harvey made landfall early Saturday morning, the Guard has rescued more than 3,500 people — most by boat and about 300 by hoist.

CNO: No evidence of hacking in ship collisions

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Navy investigators have found no evidence that cyberintrusions played a part in the serious collisions of two guided-missile destroyers in the past three months, the Navy’s chief of naval operations said Wednesday.

During a live-streaming Facebook all-hands call, Adm. John Richardson said he was aware of the “thread of conversation” that cyberattacks could be involved in the collisions of the USS John S. McCain on Aug. 21 and the USS Fitzgerald

on June 17.

“I will tell you that we have given that an amazing amount of attention,” Richardson said. “It is sort of a reality of our current situation that part of any kind of investigation or inspection is going to have to take a look at the computer, the cyber — you know, the informational warfare aspect — of our business.

“We’re doing that with these inspections as well. But to date, the inspections we’ve done show that there’s no evidence of any kind of a cyberintrusion.”

Speculation over cyberintrusions as the cause arises in

part from the real spate of successful hacks into U.S. government databases in recent years. Hackers in 2013 gained access to databases maintained by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, stealing personal information on 22 million people in two years.

Analysts often have tracked such intrusions back to hackers in Russia, China and North Korea.

But speculation also has arisen from disbelief that back-to-back collisions could happen, particularly after the 7th Fleet recently experienced a major disaster with the Fitzgerald, on

which seven sailors died when it collided with a container ship near Japan.

Two months later, 10 sailors died when the McCain collided with an oil tanker east of Singapore.

The commander of the 7th Fleet was relieved of duty soon after the second collision.

The Navy is now looking at systemic causes of the collisions through a comprehensive review of collisions and mishaps during the past decade, focusing on training, manning, leadership, operational tempo and the practical function of navigational equipment.

Osprey makes emergency landing

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — A Marine Corps MV-22B Osprey made an emergency landing at a Japanese commercial airport Tuesday, a Marine Corps spokesman said.

The tilt-rotor aircraft made the “precautionary emergency landing” at Oita Airfield in Kyushu Prefecture about 6.45 p.m., Marine 1st Lt. Joseph Butterfield said Thursday.

“There were no injuries or property damage,” he said.

“There are Marines (from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing) out there now inspecting it and they are going to do follow-on maintenance.”

Japanese broadcaster NHK reported that the Osprey was flying between Yamaguchi Prefecture and Okinawa. White smoke was seen rising from the aircraft on Monday, the broadcaster reported.

“Safety is a priority in all aviation training,” and the aircrew that flew the aircraft to Oita displayed safe, professional airmanship, the Marines said

in a statement.

Ospreys and CH-53E Sea Stallion helicopters had been training on Japan’s northern island of Hokkaido during Exercise Northern Viper, the statement said.

The Marines decided to move forward with a plan to involve Ospreys in the recent drills despite requests from Japanese officials to ground the controversial helicopter-plane hybrid in the wake of an Aug. 5 crash off Australia’s eastern coast that killed three Marines.

USS Wasp en route to Japan

BY TYLER HLAVAC

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The amphibious-assault ship USS Wasp departed Naval Station Norfolk on Wednesday for its new home at Sasebo Naval Base Japan.

The Wasp will join the Navy’s 7th Fleet as its forward-deployed amphibious-assault ship and will serve as the flagship of the 7th Fleet’s amphibious forces, the Navy said Wednesday.

The Wasp is replacing the USS Bonhomme Richard, which has been homeported in Sasebo since April 2012. The bulk of the ships in the 7th Fleet’s amphibious force are based in Sasebo.

The Navy has not provided a date for when the Wasp will arrive in Japan.

The Wasp brings new capabilities to the 7th Fleet and can support the next-generation F-35B Lightning II fighter, which is capable of short takeoffs and vertical landings. The aircraft are flown by Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121, which arrived in January at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni.

“This move ensures that our most technologically-advanced air warfare platforms are forward deployed,” Capt. Andrew Smith, the Wasp’s commander, said in a statement Wednesday. “Our capabilities, paired with the F-35B Joint Strike Fighter, increases our Navy’s precision strike capabilities within the 7th Fleet region. Wasp will help America’s commitment to the maritime security and stability in the Indo-Asia-Pacific.”

The Wasp completed a six-month deployment last year to certify it was ready to join the 7th Fleet, the Navy said. The ship’s aircraft conducted airstrikes against Islamic State targets in Libya between August and October.

The Wasp typically includes a crew of about 1,000 sailors and can embark more than 1,600 Marines.

US bombers, stealth jets fly over Korea

BY KIM GAMEL

Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Two U.S. supersonic bombers and four stealth jets soared over the Korean Peninsula on Thursday in a powerful display of military might after North Korea fired a missile over Japan and renewed a threat to target the waters near Guam.

The aircraft also conducted precision strike drills over the Pilsung range in a mountainous area of South Korea in an unprecedented combined maneuver.

Tensions over North Korea’s nuclear weapons program have spiked this summer as the communist state traded threats with President Donald Trump and test-fired several missiles, including one that flew over Japan on Tuesday.

The show of force came after Trump said Wednesday that “talking is not the answer” when it comes to North Korea, which has defiantly persisted with its efforts to develop a nuclear missile that could hit the U.S. mainland.

Washington and Seoul also wrapped up nearly two weeks of joint war games that always anger Pyongyang, which considers them a rehearsal for an invasion.

The pair of B-1B Lancers from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, and a squadron of F-35B stealth jets from Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, were joined by four South Korean fighter

jets, according to the U.S. Pacific Command.

It said the U.S. bombers flew with the Marines’ “newest and most advanced fighter” for the first time, adding the mission was “conducted in direct response” to North Korea’s latest missile test.

“Enhancing combined military readiness through integrated missions ensures national leaders of viable and ready military options,” it added in unusually direct language.

The 10-hour mission began with a joint flight with Japanese fighter jets over waters near Kyushu, Japan, in a bid to show solidarity with the two staunch U.S. allies.

“North Korea’s actions are a threat to our allies, partners and homeland, and their destabilizing actions will be met accordingly,” Gen. Terrence J. O’Shaughnessy said.

The Pacific Air Forces commander just returned from an unscheduled visit to Japan to meet with his counterparts.

The communist state has conducted dozens of missile tests, including 13 this year, with many of them fired at a lofted angle to avoid neighboring territories.

South Korea’s Defense Ministry said in a report to the National Assembly that Tuesday’s launch was conducted at a “normal” angle but at half-range.

That would mean it could have traveled up to 3,100 miles, which would put it in reach of Guam and

other regional targets.

North Korea said the missile was an intermediate-range Hwasong-12, which it had successfully tested in May and has threatened to launch into the ocean near Guam. Leader Kim Jong Un called it a “prelude” to containing U.S. military bases on the island and called for more launches targeting the Pacific, the state-run Korean Central News Agency reported on Wednesday.

South Korean officials said the missile traveled more than 1,677 miles and reached a maximum altitude of 342 miles as it flew over the Japanese island of Hokkaido. Japanese officials said it broke into three pieces before falling into the Pacific.

Vice Defense Minister Suh Choo-suk said it’s too early to tell if the missile succeeded in re-entering the atmosphere, and he declined to confirm reports that the missile broke into three pieces in a terminal phase failure.

“We have not reached a conclusion” on the issue yet,” he told lawmakers, according to the Yonhap News Agency. “Painstaking verification is necessary for this part.”

Experts are divided on how close North Korea is to reaching its stated goal of being able to hit the U.S. mainland with a nuclear missile since the communist state would need to miniaturize a warhead that could fit on the missile and master re-entry technology to enable it to hit its target.

Flood relief, wall funding pose a budget conflict

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is promising billions to help Texas rebuild from Harvey's epic flooding, but his Republican allies in the House are looking at cutting almost \$1 billion from disaster accounts to help finance a border wall.

The pending reduction to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's disaster relief account is part of a massive spending bill the House is scheduled to consider next week. The \$876 million cut, which is included in the 1,305-page measure's homeland security section, pays for roughly half the cost of Trump's down payment on the U.S.-Mexico

border wall Trump promised Mexico would finance.

It seems sure that GOP leaders will move to reverse it as floodwaters cover Houston and tens of thousands of Texans have sought refuge in shelters. There's only \$2.3 billion remaining in disaster coffers.

The disaster relief cut was proposed before Harvey, and the bad optics are sure to lead lawmakers to do an about-face.

The FEMA cut is the handiwork of House Appropriations Committee Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-N.J. — the major force behind a \$50 billion-plus 2013 Superstorm Sandy recovery package — and GOP Rep. John Carter, of Texas.

Harvey aid is a fresh addition

to an agenda already packed with must-do tasks and multiple legislative deadlines: passing a spending bill to avert a government shutdown; increasing the government's borrowing authority to prevent a market-quaking default on U.S. obligations; and paving the way for a GOP rewrite of the tax code.

Trump is slated to meet with congressional leaders Wednesday. The meeting follows a recess that has seen Trump lambast several top Republicans, especially Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., after the collapse of the GOP health care bill in his chamber. That has wounded the president's relationship with his own party.

"You're not going to bully United States senators; this isn't 'The Apprentice,'" said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., referring to Trump's reality television show. "You can't look at them and say 'You're fired.' You're going to need their vote, and you oughtta remember that they're going to be at the table in every major deal you need for the next three years."

McConnell is scheduled to attend Wednesday morning's White House meeting, according to congressional aides. Also going are House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis.; Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.; and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., the aides said.

Trial over sale of military gear starts

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — More than \$1 million in weapons parts and sensitive military equipment was stolen out of Fort Campbell, Ky., and sold in a vast black market, some of it to foreign buyers through eBay, according to testimony at a federal trial this week.

The equipment — some of it re-sold to buyers in Russia, China, Mexico, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan and Ukraine — included machine-gun and rifle parts, body armor, helmets, gun sights, generators, medical equipment and more.

John Roberts, of Clarksville, Tenn., is being tried in Nashville on charges of wire fraud, conspiracy to steal and sell government property, and violating the Arms Export Control Act. Six soldiers and his civilian business partner made plea deals in exchange for their testimony.

Roberts, 27, testified Wednesday that he did not know the soldiers were bringing him stolen equipment, and said the military items he bought and sold were commonly found in surplus stores, on eBay and in gun stores.

"I didn't try to hide anything," Roberts said Wednesday.

"That's why I filed taxes on everything I sold on eBay. I thought it was OK."

Roberts said the soldiers told him the equipment was legally purchased from other soldiers or that the Army was discarding the equipment. He also said he didn't know that he needed to have a license to export certain items overseas.

But a former business partner, Cory Wilson, testified that he and Roberts would find soldiers selling military items through classified ads or on Facebook, and then ask them for more expensive and harder-to-find items. It was "fast easy money," Wilson said. Wilson pleaded guilty to buying and selling stolen military equipment, wire fraud and violating the Arms Export Control Act.

The soldiers they targeted were often young and broke or needed money for drugs, Wilson said, so "there were a lot of items and good money to be made."

Wilson and Roberts shared a warehouse in Clarksville, but Roberts said they were not sharing funds. Roberts said the two just had a shared interest in selling things on eBay.

Wilson said Roberts set up multiple accounts to sell the equipment on eBay. They re-

moved packaging that identified it as government property and used fake descriptions on shipping labels to avoid suspicion, he said. Under questioning from Roberts' defense attorney, David Cooper, Wilson acknowledged that he initially lied to investigators about knowing the equipment wasn't allowed to be shipped overseas.

In 2014, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency notified Roberts that it had seized a military flight helmet he tried to ship overseas.

The Customs letter noted that he was required to have a license to export that item. Roberts said he didn't remember reading that paragraph.

Michael Barlow, a former Fort Campbell platoon sergeant who pleaded guilty to theft of government property and conspiracy, testified that they started small but eventually escalated to truckloads of military equipment. He said Roberts even gave him a "Christmas list" of items he wanted the soldiers to steal in Afghanistan and bring back to the United States.

One noncommissioned officer was even charging civilian buyers \$500 to come onto Fort Campbell to select items for purchase, Barlow said.

Trump begins tax reform push

Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. — President Donald Trump launched his push to overhaul the tax system by pledging Wednesday that the details-to-come plan would "bring back Main Street" by reducing the tax burden on middle-class Americans, making a populist appeal for a proposal expected to benefit corporate America.

Trump promised his vision for rewriting the tax system would strengthen economic growth and benefit companies and workers.

Trump dangled the prospect of the "biggest ever" tax cut and warned that without it, "jobs in our country cannot take off the way they should. And it could be much worse than that."

Trump debuted his tax overhaul pitch before employees at a manufacturing plant in Springfield, Mo.

While the White House has been designing a tax plan aimed at appealing to Republicans, Trump sought to cast the effort in bipartisan terms. He called on both parties to work on a "once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver real tax reform for everyday hard-working Americans."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Mom: Son's Cub Scout lessons saved her life

NE GRETNA — An eastern Nebraska woman said lessons her son learned in Cub Scouts saved her life.

Rebecca Campbell said she and her three children had just begun to eat supper Wednesday at their Gretna home when a piece of chicken lodged in her throat. She got up but then collapsed, unable to talk or catch a breath.

Soon her son, Caden, 8, was at her side while his younger sister, Lilly, pulled away the family dog and his older brother, Colton, stood ready with a tissue to grab the chicken. Caden then employed the Heimlich maneuver, thrusting his fists upward on her abdomen several times until the meat loosened and his mom could cough and breathe.

Police: Woman branded with horseshoe, fork

WV BLUEFIELD — Police said a West Virginia man is accused of branding a woman with a horseshoe and a fork.

News outlets reported Ervin Harold, of Bluefield, was charged with malicious wounding and domestic assault.

Bluefield Police Detective J.B. Fox said Harold is accused of holding the woman against a wall last week and branding her twice with a horseshoe and once with a fork. The woman sought treatment at a hospital.

Harold was being held in the Bluefield City Jail.

High school player left behind at away game

NC JACKSONVILLE — A high school football player in North Carolina didn't

make it on the bus after an away game and was left behind.

Onslow County School System spokeswoman Suzie Ulbrich said in a statement the student, a senior football player at Northside High School in Jacksonville, wasn't transported back to Jacksonville with the team after a Friday game in Wilmington. She said the situation is being investigated and that it appears "appropriate school protocols were not followed."

Normal procedure is for student athletes to ride the bus from games with the team, unless a parent gives the coach notification they want to take their child home with them.

The Daily News of Jacksonville reported head coach Kendrick Pollock was alleged to have had an altercation with the player following the game.

Tires shot with AK-47 in dispute over horses

NM PAJARITO MESA — A New Mexico man is facing aggravated assault charges after authorities say he used an AK-47 to shoot out the tires of a man he accused of stealing his horses.

Court records show that David Derringer was arrested last weekend shortly following a bizarre chain of events involving free-ranging horses in a rural area near Albuquerque.

According to a criminal complaint, Derringer spotted two horses he claimed to have owned on the property of Isidro Ruiz. Derringer told Bernalillo County deputies he cut Ruiz's fence line and freed his horses.

The complaint said Ruiz returned and tried to block Derringer from leaving. The complaint said that's when Derringer pulled out his assault rifle and shot out two of Ruiz's tires.

Triceratops skeleton, skull dug up by workers

CO THORNTON — A dinosaur fossil has been discovered in Colorado by construction workers.

The bones and skull of a triceratops were found in Thornton at the construction site of a new public safety building.

Denver Museum of Nature and Science curator of dinosaurs Joe Sertich said the find is one of three triceratops skulls found along the Colorado Front Range and has likely been lying there for at least 66 million years.

A horn and shoulder blade has been unearthed by crews working to uncover the fossil.

Sertich said most fossils found in the Denver area are from the Ice Age roughly 10,000-12,000 years ago and are bones of mammoths and camels.

Next Philly Naked Bike Ride coming soon

PA PHILADELPHIA — The wheels are in motion for Philadelphia's next gathering of naked bicyclists.

Organizers of the Philly Naked Bike Ride said Tuesday the ninth annual event will take place throughout the city's streets Sept. 9.

Around 3,000 riders are expected to pass by sites including Independence Hall and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where Sylvester Stallone ran up the steps while training as Rocky.

Ride organizers say participants can go as bare as they dare.

The ride is to protest dependence on fossil fuels, advocate for the safety of cyclists and promote positive body image.

Heavily tattooed inmate sought after escape

NH CONCORD — Authorities in New Hampshire are seeking the public's help in finding an escaped inmate with tattoos covering his shaved head, face, neck, chest, arm and hands.

The U.S. Marshals' New Hampshire Joint Fugitive Task Force said Eric Judkins, 42, was an inmate at a halfway house in Manchester. He failed to return to the facility Monday night.

Judkins was serving a 27-month sentence for assault on a fellow inmate in federal prison.

Police warned about patronizing adult clubs

MA SPRINGFIELD — A Massachusetts police department has warned its officers about the "negative public perception" of patronizing the city's adult entertainment clubs following a brawl between several off-duty officers and a known gang member.

Masslive.com reported in a story Tuesday that no one was arrested following the brief melee in the Mardi Grad Gentleman's Club in Springfield last December that involved an off-duty officer exchanging punches with another man. The gang member and his associates were thrown out of the bar, and the officers called in a report about the fight.

A lawyer for the club said the city did not punish the bar in any way.

After an internal investigation, the officers were retrained in proper notification procedures and warned about public perception of police frequenting strip clubs.

From wire reports

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Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Top-ranked 'Bama opens with No. 3 FSU

Associated Press

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — Jalen Hurts is already accustomed to these kinds of games.

The marquee games. The biggest matchups on the largest stage.

This one pits top-ranked Alabama against No. 3 Florida State in the first-ever opening matchup of preseason Top-3 teams since the Associated Press started selecting them in 1950. The teams will square off in the fully loaded new Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta under the bright lights of the national spotlight.

Hurts sounded unimpressed by all those trappings when the sophomore quarterback was asked Monday if he's used to these kinds of games.

"I played in the national championship," he said, "so I guess so."

Historic opening matchup or not, these teams are well acquainted with big games, thank you very much.

They've each won a national title in the last five years, and Alabama has collected four in a decade under coach Nick Saban. The Tide have made a habit of playing teams from other Power Five conferences in the first or second game each season since 2008, winning all of them by double digits, including three top-10 matchups.

Last year's 52-6 romp over then-No. 20 USC set the table for an undefeated run into

the national title game against Clemson.

As much as anybody, the Seminoles have done their part to disprove the notion that the Southeastern Conference is college football's top league. Florida State is 9-1 against SEC teams under coach Jimbo Fisher, who will be facing Alabama and former boss Saban for the first time.

They're also the only programs to carry a streak of at least five straight BCS or New Year's Six games into the season.

Fisher believes some of the surplus of hype comes from the fact that there's been an entire offseason to think and talk about it.

"If you're here at Florida State playing in these games, you're going to be in hyped games," Fisher said. "Every year we play Clemson, Miami, Florida, Louisville — whoever we play, what conference, what big bowl ... that's part of being at Florida State."

He and Saban are among 11 active head coaches with a winning record against teams ranked in the Top 25.

Something has to give: Neither head coach has lost an opener in their current job.

This really is nothing new to Alabama, which will have played No. 4 Washington, No. 2 Clemson and now No. 3 Florida State in college football's version of Murderer's Row.

This will be the 51st game of the last 117 that 'Bama was ranked No. 1. The Tide are favored by a touchdown.

Such a challenging opener, Saban said, helps the players focus during the offseason. It also gives a clearer gauge of where the team stands than a blowout win over an obviously overmatched team.

But both teams, win or lose, will face several more marquee matchups as the season progresses. Saban — and apparently Hurts — just choose not to buy into the hype.

"If your goal is going to be the best that you can be individually, personally, or as a team, or as a unit, then why is the guy you're playing against determine the level that you play?" Saban said.

Then again, in this case, that would mean ratcheting up their play. It's only the fourth top-5 matchup in an opening game, after all.

Fisher could have just as well been describing his own team in praising Alabama.

"Outstanding players that play very hard, very physical, very well-coached," he said. "Have big guys, dynamic guys and play-makers across the board. They can throw it, they can catch it, they can run with it, they can defend, they can cover."

"They do all the things that you have to do to be successful."

Arizona State unveils Pat Tillman statue

Associated Press

TEMPE, Ariz. — The walls around Sun Devil Stadium and the new football complex are lined with photos of Pat Tillman. Images of the former player and Army Ranger can be found across the campus and around town, too.

Now there's a bronze likeness of perhaps the greatest Sun Devil in school history.

Arizona State unveiled a bronze statue of Tillman during a ceremony at Sun Devil Stadium on Wednesday, a monument designed as a tribute to the man who gave so much and as inspiration to the players trying to follow his footsteps.

"Pat spent his whole life trying to be the best person he could possibly be," Tillman's brother, Kevin, said before the drape was dropped. "He didn't

focus on money, he didn't focus on fame, he didn't focus on a pretty statue. It was, 'How can I make myself a better person in all these different facets of my life?' And ASU gave him an opportunity to do that."

The ceremony, held in the redesigned football facilities in the north end zone, drew several hundred people, including Tillman's family, former and current ASU players and university officials.

Tillman played at Arizona State from 1994-97 and went on to play for the NFL's Arizona Cardinals before walking away from a multimillion contract to serve his country in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Tillman became an Army Ranger in 2003 and served until being killed by friendly fire in Afghanistan in 2004.

Current Sun Devils coach Todd Graham has embraced Tillman's spirit and his family during his six years at Arizona State, making sure every player knew the impact he had. He also made sure every wall in the redesigned football complex included at least one photo of the man who never backed down from a challenge.

The players see an image of Tillman at the end of the tunnel where they enter the field and said the Sun Devils will now start a tradition of touching the statue before taking the field.

"One of the reasons Pat is on every wall is he earned to be on every wall," Graham said. "He embodied what we are about. We're trying to teach guys to win and be a champion in life, and that's what we're here to celebrate. That's what Pat's life was all about."

Tillman touched the lives of everyone he came in contact with, a free-spirited deep thinker who challenged himself and others to always strive for greatness.

His impact while he was alive and after his death was evident during the ceremony, when many of his former teammates showed up and dozens of current ASU players came to watch the unveiling of his likeness.

"What's really cool now, is at 43, I can look back to 19, 20 and my mind is able to fully appreciate that I literally was in the presence of somebody who had qualities of greatness inside," said Barry Alford, Tillman's friend and former teammate. "I got to watch those qualities of greatness unfold in front of my eyes."

Sharapova wins again; Zverev, Tsonga bow out

Associated Press

NEW YORK — No one, not even Maria Sharapova herself, knew quite what to expect from her return to Grand Slam tennis at the U.S. Open.

It had been 19 months since she had entered a major tournament. She played only nine times anywhere since a 15-month doping suspension ended in April. Two three-set tussles into her stay at Flushing Meadows, it's clear that Sharapova's game might be patchy, but she is as capable as ever of coming up with big strokes in big moments — and maybe, just maybe, could stick around for a while in a depleted draw that's already missing four of the top seven seeded women.

Sharapova became the first woman into the third round at the U.S. Open by using 12 aces to help set aside a poor start and coming back to beat Timea Babos of Hungary 6-7 (4), 6-4, 6-1 on Wednesday in Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"Look, I certainly have expectations, just because I know I've been in these stages before and I've been able to execute. There's a certain level of 'I know I can do this. I've done it before. I want to have that feeling again,'" Sharapova said. "But there's also the realistic understanding of, 'OK, you haven't been in this situation for a while. It's going to take a little time.' Of course, managing expectations is part of it, learning as you play the matches, which is something I haven't done for a long time."

Her victory was the highlight of a busy day that featured 87 singles matches on the schedule after rain washed out most play a day earlier. With so many matches going on, there were plenty of names to keep tabs on — and quite a few surprises. The most noteworthy second-round departures came at night: No. 4 Alexander Zverev and No. 8 Jo-Wilfried Tsonga in the men's bracket,

and No. 5 Caroline Wozniacki in the women's.

Zverev, never past the fourth round at a major, was beaten 3-6, 7-5, 7-6 (1), 7-6 (4) by fellow 20-year-old Borna Coric, and 2008 Australian Open finalist Tsonga put up little resistance while losing 6-4, 6-4, 7-6 (3) to 18-year-old Canadian qualifier Denis Shapovalov. Two-time U.S. Open runner-up Wozniacki's 6-2, 6-7 (5), 6-1 exit against 40th-ranked Ekaterina Makarova followed first-round losses by No. 2 Simona Halep, No. 6 Angelique Kerber and No. 7 Johanna Konta.

"It's upsetting. Today was upsetting," Zverev said, perhaps summing up others' feelings, too. "The way I played was upsetting."

Past U.S. Open champions advancing included Venus Williams and Marin Cilic into the third round, and Juan Martin del Potro and Svetlana Kuznetsova — who saved three match points — into the second. No. 14 Nick Kyrgios, No. 22 Fabio Fognini, No. 26 Richard Gasquet and No. 27 Pablo Cuevas all lost their openers.

In the early going, it looked as if Sharapova might join them on the way out.

She made 19 unforced errors in the first set, which ended with her missing twice on forehands to give the 59th-ranked Babos the lead. But as the match went on, Sharapova looked more and more like someone who used to be ranked No. 1 and owns five major titles — including the 2006 U.S. Open — than someone who needed a wild-card invitation from the U.S. Tennis Association because she is now 146th, on account of her ban and lack of play.

Sharapova last participated in a major tournament at the 2016 Australian Open, where she tested positive for the newly banned heart drug meldonium. She declined to answer a reporter's question about how frequently she's been drug-tested this year.

Cavaliers, Celtics finally complete trade for Irving

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The blockbuster trade, delayed and in jeopardy of dying, is done: Kyrie Irving is headed to the Celtics, Isaiah Thomas is coming to the Cavaliers and the NBA can take a well-earned, late-summer break.

For a minute.

Concerned with medical findings after looking at Thomas' injured right hip, the Cavs have negotiated another draft pick from Boston to complete the mega-deal that stalled, the teams announced in a joint statement early Thursday.

The teams modified the original deal and Cleveland will also get a second-round pick in 2020 from the Celtics, a pick it acquired from Miami.

"The trade is now complete," the teams said in their statement.

After days of uncertainty, both sides can move forward toward a 2017 season that will start with the Cavs hosting the Celtics on Oct. 17.

The teams had a deadline of 10 a.m. Thursday to agree on the trade, which was prompted by Irving demanding to be dealt in July. New Cavs general manager Koby Altman pulled it off by sending the team's second-best player to the Celtics for Thomas, forward Jae Crowder, center Ante Zizic and an unconditional first-round pick next year.

The Cavs had balked at pushing the Aug. 22 trade through last week after Thomas underwent a physical. He tore a labrum last season in the playoffs against Cleveland, and it's possible he might not be ready for the start of the season.

On Tuesday, Thomas told ESPN he is "not damaged" and believes he will return to All-Star form.

"There's never been an indication that I wouldn't be back, and there's never been an indication that this is something messing up my career," Thomas said. "Maybe I am not going to be back as soon this season as everyone wants me to be,

but I'm going to be back, and I'm going to be the same player again. No doctor has told me anything different than that."

Thomas decided not to have surgery and has been rehabbing his hip this summer.

After the teams finalize the deal with the league, the Cavs are expected to formally announce a trade that officially ends Irving's star-crossed tenure in Cleveland.

The former No. 1 overall pick grew into one of the NBA's biggest stars with the Cavs, and he'll always be remembered for making the go-ahead three-pointer over Golden State's Stephen Curry in Game 7 of the 2016 NBA Finals when Cleveland won the title — the city's first major pro sports championship since 1964.

But while he was adored by Cleveland fans, Irving struggled playing in the shadow of LeBron James, and shortly after the Cavs were beaten in this year's Finals by the Warriors, a disgruntled Irving demanded a trade.

He's joining a Boston team that has been chasing Cleveland in recent years, and he'll play alongside Gordon Hayward, signed as a free agent by the Celtics this summer.

Thomas' future is not as certain. The 5-foot-8 playmaker was beloved in Boston, but he'll have to share the stage in Cleveland in a supporting role to James. Thomas is in the final year of his contract and could end up sharing playing time with newly signed Cavs guard Derrick Rose.

And, of course, there's always drama surrounding James, who will try to make his eighth straight Finals before possibly opting out of his contract next summer and hitting the free-agent market again.

If he leaves, the Cavs have the first-round pick — maybe even the top pick overall — they got from Boston to help them rebuild.

But that's next summer. For the moment, this chaotic one has finally calmed down.

Angels use grand slam to rally past A's

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Mike Trout went 4-for-4 with a homer and scored four times in his return to the lineup, Albert Pujols connected twice and Cliff Pennington hit a go-ahead grand slam in the seventh inning to rally the Los Angeles Angels past the Oakland Athletics 10-8 on Wednesday night.

Pujols drove in four runs and scored three. His two homers moved him into a tie with Jim Thome for seventh place on the career list at 612.

Trout had a triple and two singles for the Angels, who erased a five-run deficit and won their third straight. They

remained a game behind Minnesota for the second AL wild card.

Trout snapped an 0-for-17 slump that marked the second-longest hitless skid of his career. He missed the previous two games as a precaution with a stiff neck after crashing into the outfield wall Sunday trying to make a catch.

Matt Olson and Bruce Maxwell homered as Oakland put up a season-high eight runs in the fourth to build an 8-3 lead. But the Angels scored two in the fifth and five in the seventh, capped by Pennington's first career slam.

Chris Hatcher (0-2) walked

Luis Valbuena to load the bases with two outs. Pennington then connected on a 2-2 pitch for his third home run of the season.

Cam Bedrosian (4-3) worked a scoreless inning and Blake Parker got four outs for his fourth save.

Olson hit a three-run homer in the fourth and Maxwell added a two-run drive to chase starter Parker Bridwell with no outs.

Trout hit a solo home run in his first at-bat, his 27th of the season, and put an exclamation mark on it with a big fist pump.

Pujols had a two-run shot to right field in the third to give

the Angels a 3-0 run lead that soon evaporated. He connected for a two-run drive in the fifth to pull them back within three.

Bridwell had his worst outing of the season, allowing seven runs and six hits in three-plus innings. He walked three, all in the fourth.

Oakland starter Kendall Graveman gave up five runs and six hits in five innings.

Too hot to trot: The Angels didn't take batting practice for the third straight day because of the heat in Anaheim. They hit in the indoor cages. Oakland did the same thing and did not take batting practice for the second consecutive day.

MLB roundup

Bauer, Merrit lead Indians to sweep of doubleheader

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Cleveland went ahead for good nine pitches into the opener when a fastball just below the knees deflected off the mitt of catcher Gary Sanchez for a run-scoring passed ball.

Sixteen pitches into the second game, the Indians burst in front to stay when Edwin Encarnacion singled off Yankees rookie Jordan Montgomery.

A doubleheader sweep Wednesday by scores of 2-1 and 9-4 dropped New York 5½ games behind AL East-leading Boston heading into a four-game series against the Red Sox at Yankee Stadium starting Thursday night. While the Baby Bombers lead the wild-card race, eight teams still have realistic chances to make the one-game playoff, and 24 of New York's remaining 30 games are against those contenders.

"It's impossible not to look at the scoreboard. It's right there," Yankees manager Joe Girardi said. "I'd have to really have my head in the sand not to see the scores of games."

Trevor Bauer won his ca-

reer-best seventh straight decision, Jose Ramirez tied his big league high with four hits and the Indians took advantage of an unearned run to grab a 2-0 first-inning lead in the opener.

Carlos Santana followed Encarnacion with an RBI double and Yandy Diaz hit a two-run single as the Indians sent 10 batters to the plate in a 43-pitch first inning against Montgomery in the second game.

Encarnacion, Yan Gomes and Francisco Lindor added home runs for Cleveland, which took a 9-1 lead, completed a three-game series sweep and extended its winning streak to seven games.

Diamondbacks 6, Dodgers 4: Paul Goldschmidt homered for the third straight game and Robbie Ray struck out 10 in 6 2/3 innings as host Arizona handed Los Angeles its first four-game losing streak of the season.

Orioles 8, Mariners 7: Wellington Castillo went 4-for-4 with a homer and three RBIs and Jonathan Schoop singled in the go-ahead run in the eighth inning as host Baltimore beat Seattle for its season-high sev-

enth straight win.

Rangers 8, Astros 1: At St. Petersburg, Fla., Andrew Cashner pitched eight strong innings, Mike Napoli hit a three-run homer and Texas beat Houston in a game relocated because of Hurricane Harvey.

Nationals 4, Marlins 0: Stephen Strasburg tossed a complete-game, six-hitter and also homered, Wilmer Difo added a home run and host Washington beat Miami to complete a three-game sweep.

Red Sox 7, Blue Jays 1: Mitch Moreland had a pinch-hit homer and drove in four runs, Hanley Ramirez added a solo blast and visiting Boston beat Toronto to complete a three-game sweep.

Brewers 6, Cardinals 5: At Milwaukee, Domingo Santana and Jonathan Villar homered in the sixth inning, and center fielder Keon Broxton made a leaping catch over the wall for the final out.

Cubs 17, Pirates 3: Kyle Schwarber hit two home runs, Ian Happ and Anthony Rizzo also went deep and host Chicago pounded Pittsburgh.

Twins 11, White Sox 1: Jose

Berrios pitched seven scoreless innings, Brian Dozier had four hits and Eddie Rosario homered twice as host Minnesota defeated Chicago.

Mets 2, Reds 0: Rafael Montero took a one-hitter into the ninth inning, and visiting New York held on for a victory that extended its dominance over Cincinnati.

Tigers 6, Rockies 2: At Denver, Justin Verlander struck out nine over six commanding innings and aided his own cause by driving in his first career run.

Rays 5, Royals 3: Logan Morrison, Steven Souza Jr. and Adeiny Hechavarria homered to help Tampa Bay beat host Kansas City for its latest series victory.

Padres 5, Giants 0: Travis Wood homered and pitched into the fifth inning, Jose Pirela also went deep and San Diego blanked visiting San Francisco.

Braves 9-5 Phillies 1-2: David Freitas lined a go-ahead RBI double for his first career hit, Ender Inciarte had three hits and Atlanta beat host Philadelphia to complete a doubleheader sweep.