

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Trump to meet on Afghanistan pullout

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump planned to meet Friday with Cabinet officials and other senior national security advisers to begin making arrangements for a step-by-step U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, a person familiar with the president's plan said.

A second U.S. official said Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is among Cabinet officials who will meet with Trump and Vice President Mike Pence at Trump's New Jersey golf resort.

The session will review re-

sults of months of diplomatic outreach by Trump's special envoy, former U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, and military plans to begin a phased withdrawal of U.S. forces and end the longest U.S. war.

The Trump administration would withdraw thousands of troops from Afghanistan in exchange for concessions from the Taliban, including a ceasefire and a renunciation of al-Qaida, as part of an initial deal to end the nearly 18-year-old war.

The agreement would require the Taliban to begin negotiating a larger peace deal directly

with the Afghan government, a sticking point that has left the U.S.-allied Kabul government fearful that Trump is abandoning them.

Khalilzad has publicly assured Kabul that the U.S. will not "cut and run," but Trump alarmed the Afghans by saying last month that he could end the war "in a week" by dropping huge bombs, but would not do so.

The withdrawal U.S. officials plan to present to Trump could cut the number of American troops in the country from roughly 14,000 to between 8,000 and 9,000, said the officials,

who requested anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. That number would be nearly the same as when Trump took office.

The plan has taken shape after months of negotiations between the Taliban and Khalilzad, an Afghan-born American diplomat who was appointed by the Trump administration last year to jump-start talks. Officials said an agreement could be finalized ahead of the Afghan presidential election in September, though they cautioned that Taliban leaders could delay and that significant challenges remain.

## GAO: DOD processed \$1B in improper travel payments

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department's travel system processed more than \$965 million in improper payments in fiscal years 2016 through 2018, according to a government report released Thursday.

Improper payments, or payments that should not have been made or were made with an incorrect amount, has long been a significant problem in the federal government, according to the Government Accountability Office report.

Examples cited in the report of improper payments include a legitimate payment that lacks enough supporting documents, approvals and payments to an ineligible recipient, and duplicate payments.

"Since 2012, the DOD [Inspector General] has consistently found the DOD travel program to be noncompliant with statutory requirements to mitigate improper payments," the report states.

The DOD's Defense Travel

**'Since 2012, the DOD [Inspector General] has consistently found the DOD travel program to be noncompliant with statutory requirements to mitigate improper payments.'**

**Government Accountability Office**

Program's total payments for fiscal years 2016 through 2018 was \$18.3 billion, of which \$965.5 million was paid out for improper travel, according to the report. During that time, the department was averaging \$6.1 billion in travel payments and \$322 million in improper payments each year.

It was not until fiscal year 2017 that the Defense Department began estimating the monetary loss attributed to improper travel payments, according to the report. For fiscal years 2017 and 2018, the department estimated a total monetary loss of \$205 million out of \$549 million in improper travel payments.

The report stated the Defense Department established a remediation plan in 2016 to reduce improper travel payments and chose 10 military and defense agencies within the DOD. However, the report called out the Defense Department for choosing those agencies because they made up the majority of travel payments in fiscal year 2016 and not necessarily because they had the higher rates of improper travel payments.

"Thus, DOD lacks assurance that the components it selected for greater scrutiny were the ones most at risk for improper travel payments," the report states.

Also, only four of the nine military and defense agencies that responded to a GAO survey stated they had completed all of the remediation plan's requirements. This was due to the lack of goals for completing the requirements and monitoring of required actions, according to the report. Those components who completed the requirements were the Army, the Defense Logistics Agency, the Defense Information Systems Agency, and the Missile Defense Agency.

The report also found while the Defense Department has ways to identify errors that lead to improper travel payments, they must do more to understand and address the root causes of errors.

The GAO report made five recommendations, including the comptroller revise how DOD selects the military and defense agencies that implement the remediation plan and the comptroller pressure the remaining offices to complete their plan requirements.

# Flight operations begin out of Niger post

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — The Air Force has begun limited flying operations at a remote outpost in the southern Sahara Desert in Niger, where U.S. airmen recently built a 6,200-foot runway to support intelligence gathering in West Africa.

Air Force C-130s and other aircraft on resupply missions, in coordination with the Nigerien air force and the country's civil aviation authorities, began flying limited Visual Flight Rule operations into and out of Nigerien Air Base 201 on Aug. 1, U.S. Air Forces in Eu-

rope-Air Forces Africa said in a statement.

VFR operations are conducted without instruments to assess an airfield before full flight operations begin, including drone missions, a USAFE-AFAFRICA spokesman said.

Gen. Jeff Harrigian, USAFE-AFAFRICA commander, commended airmen for completing the largest-ever, airmen-led construction project in Air Force history.

"Air Base 201 gives Niger and the U.S. incredible capability in a challenging region of the world," Harrigian said in a statement. "This joint-use runway allows for a better response

to regional security requirements and provides strategic access and flexibility."

The \$110-million airfield is the most austere location from which the Air Force has attempted to operate, the Air Force has said. It was finished this summer, after delays caused in part by the challenges of working in a remote desert, including sandstorms, locust swarms and difficulties in transporting supplies to the base in central Niger.

Several militant groups operate in the region, including the Islamic State in West Africa, which has emerged as a priority for U.S. Africa Command in

the border area between Niger, Nigeria and Chad.

In 2018, Niger's government granted the U.S. authority to carry out armed drone flights in the country. The approval came soon after an October 2017 ambush in Niger, claimed by another Islamic State group, that left four U.S. soldiers dead.

Construction on Air Base 201 is ongoing, with full flying operations expected to begin later this year, the USAFE-AFAFRICA spokesman said.

Airmen are expected to do short-term assignments to support the mission when it's finally stood up.

## Documents shed light on Senate panel's Hyten decision

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — Newly obtained documents from a military investigation into sexual assault allegations against President Donald Trump's pick to be No. 2 officer at the Pentagon provide new insight into how a Senate committee decided to recommend the nominee for confirmation, as lawmakers prepare for a final vote early next month.

Democratic and Republican members of the Senate Armed Services Committee have said little publicly about their closed-door sessions with Air Force Gen. John Hyten, who was accused by an Army colonel of making unwanted sexual contact with her on several occasions in 2017.

The panel voted 20 to 7 last month to recommend Hyten be confirmed as vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with several lawmakers stating that he had been wrongly accused.

But hundreds of pages of documents obtained by The Washington Post, including a 59-page summary of the Air Force Office of Special Investigation's examination of the allegations, shed light on what

may have convinced the panel's members.

The materials, which also include a 367-page Army inspector general report about Hyten's accuser, Army Col. Kathryn Spletstoser, suggest that while serious questions about her credibility were raised by her former co-workers and other military officials, investigators did not reach a conclusion on whether Hyten had assaulted her — leaving it to lawmakers to make a judgment call.

Hyten, now in charge of the nation's nuclear arsenal at U.S. Strategic Command, has denied the allegations. But he also faced some tough questions about them.

In one issue raised in findings due to be released by the Air Force soon, a civilian witness told investigators that Hyten paid for and took a polygraph and that the inconclusive results "frustrated" him. Hyten declined to address questions about the polygraph in a second interview with investigators, according to the Air Force report.

For many senators, assessing Spletstoser's credibility came down to two key factors: an in-

ternal military assessment that she had created a "toxic work environment," which prompted her dismissal from Hyten's command, and questions about her mental state at the time of the firing.

Elements of both are detailed in the Air Force investigation's summary and the previously undisclosed Army inspector general investigation of whistleblower claims Spletstoser raised against Hyten's chief of staff after she was dismissed.

Investigators found that Hyten's top aide, Army Maj. Gen. Daniel Karbler, acted properly and within his authority.

Both reports detail claims by Spletstoser's colleagues that she was sharp-tongued, foul-mouthed and often combative, though reviews were mixed as to whether her style was "toxic." Their interviews also suggest that Hyten was either unaware of Spletstoser's behavior, or condoned it.

Hyten gave Spletstoser a glowing job performance review in mid-November 2017, just as his command was launching an initial workplace climate assessment that prompted the probe of Spletstoser in late December, and her eventual dis-

missal. Hyten's defenders have accused Spletstoser of fabricating the sexual assault charges in an effort to exact revenge for her termination.

But Spletstoser alleges that the focus on her "toxic leadership" was an attempt to get rid of her after the most egregious of the alleged sexual assaults, in which she said Hyten ejaculated after pinning her against him in her hotel room at the Reagan National Defense Forum in early December 2017.

Senators challenged Hyten during his public hearing last month to explain why he had supported Spletstoser when her conduct was so objectionable to others in his command. He testified that he was slow to realize Spletstoser was a toxic leader, but that once he did, "I moved quickly in order to deal with that."

The Air Force's report indicates that Hyten recommended her for employment to other senior leaders. Emails that Spletstoser provided to The Post suggest that Hyten continued to advocate on her behalf into January 2018, even as the Army was determining that her conduct was worthy of investigation.

# North Korea fires 6th missile test, rejects call for diplomacy

BY KIM GAMEL  
AND YOO KYONG CHANG  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea conducted its sixth missile test in less than a month on Friday as it stepped up criticism of South Korea's President Moon Jae-in for joint military exercises with the United States and bluntly rejected his pleas for diplomacy.

The North launched two projectiles presumed to be short-range missiles from an area north of Tongcheon, according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff. They flew about 143 miles and reached an altitude of nearly 20 miles at a speed of Mach 6.9 — more than 5,000 mph — before landing in the sea off the country's eastern coast, a JCS official told reporters.

The official said they appeared to be short-range missiles based on the distance, altitude and speed detected, but he stressed that South Korean and U.S. officials were still analyzing the details. The North also has tested a guided

multiple rocket launcher system since the recent spate of tests began on July 25.

South Korea's National Security Committee held an emergency meeting during which it urged the North to stop the launches, saying they could raise military tensions as the joint military drills are ongoing.

North Korea has said previous missile launches were meant to protest joint U.S.-South Korean military exercises being held this month. The unrelenting salvos also raise pressure on the United States as Pyongyang seeks to raise the price for concessions amid stalled talks over its nuclear weapons program.

Eager to restart negotiations, President Donald Trump has played down the weapons, as the North has not violated its promise to suspend long-range missile and nuclear tests.

But experts say the launches are helping the North Koreans perfect weapons that could target the South and some 28,500 U.S. troops stationed there.

On Thursday, Moon urged the North to return to dialogue as he vowed to “solidify denuclearization and peace” on the Korean Peninsula before his term ends in 2022. He also predicted that unification could be achieved by 2045 with the two countries maintaining two political systems.

The North mocked his appeal, calling Moon “an impudent guy rare to be found,” and said it had no intention of returning to talks with South Korea.

Moon and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un held three summits last year and agreed to a series of inter-Korean initiatives, but the North has since largely ignored the South in what is seen as a bid to pressure Seoul to take its side in stalled nuclear talks with the United States.

The South Korean government expressed “deep regret” over the North's criticism of Moon but insisted it will continue efforts to resume working-level talks between Washington and Pyongyang as well as inter-Korean dialogue.

## Army IMCOM leader fired in Texas; ‘loss of trust’ cited

*Associated Press*

SAN ANTONIO — A general who oversaw day-to-day operations at Army installations worldwide has been relieved of his Texas-based command due to “loss of trust and confidence.”

An Army spokeswoman said in a statement Thursday that Gen. Gustavo Perna, commanding general of Army Materiel Command, relieved Lt. Gen. Brad Becker as head of the Installation Management Command.

The San Antonio Express-News reported that Becker was replaced by his deputy commander, Maj. Gen. Timothy McGuire.

Becker has been ordered to Washington, where he will serve as a special assistant to the director of the Army staff.

The Army didn't explain its decision to fire Becker.

Installation Management Command is based at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston.

## Administration's plan to sell F-16s to Taiwan irks China

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration is moving ahead with an \$8 billion sale of F-16 fighter jets to Taiwan despite strong objections from China, a U.S. official and others familiar with the deal said Thursday.

The administration notified Congress late Thursday that it would submit the package for informal review, said the people familiar with the sale. It would be the largest and most significant sale of weaponry to the self-governing island in years, and comes amid stalled trade talks and a deteriorating relationship with China.

Lawmakers from both parties had questioned whether

the White House would scuttle the sale to soften the ground for a U.S.-China trade deal, or otherwise use the fighter jets as a bargaining chip in deadlocked negotiations.

The State Department told Congress to expect the arms package to be informally submitted to them by Friday evening, according to a U.S. official and another person familiar with the matter.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee would review the package. They are not expected to raise objections.

The people familiar with the proposed sale requested anonymity to discuss a sensitive pending deal.

China claims Taiwan as a

breakaway province, and last month accused the United States of a “vain plot” to arm the island. The Trump administration approved more than \$2 billion in lower-level arms sales to Taiwan last month, and allowed Taiwan's leader to visit New York.

Taiwan requested 66 American-made fighter jets, which lawmakers have said is a test of U.S. resolve.

Sen. Robert Menendez, of New Jersey, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is among lawmakers who have warned the administration not to link the jet sales to President Donald Trump's effort to broker a new bilateral trade agreement. Trump accuses China of foot-

dragging and bad faith, and the talks have remained stalled for months.

The Chinese government accused the Trump administration of “playing the ‘Taiwan card’” last month when Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen visited New York.

The People's Daily newspaper, the mouthpiece of the Communist Party of China, wrote that Washington “should immediately cancel the planned arms sale to Taiwan and terminate military contact with Taiwan, and exercise caution and prudence when handling Taiwan-related issues to avoid serious damage to China-U.S. relations and cross-strait peace and stability.”

# Trump ties economic success to 2nd term

Associated Press

MANCHESTER, N.H. — President Donald Trump sought to reassure his supporters about the state of the U.S. economy despite the stock market volatility and told rallygoers in New Hampshire, a state that he hopes to capture in 2020, that their financial security depends on his reelection.

“Whether you love me or hate me, you have to vote for me,” Trump said.

Speaking to a boisterous crowd at Southern New Hampshire University Arena, Trump dismissed the heightened fears about the U.S. economy and a 3% drop Wednesday in the Dow Jones Industrial Average, which was fueled by a slowing global economy and a development in the bond market that has predicted previous recessions. Avoiding an economic slump is

critical to Trump’s reelection hopes.

“The United States right now has the hottest economy anywhere in the world,” Trump said.

Trump, who reached the White House by promising to bring about a historic economic boom, claimed, as he often does, that the markets would have crashed if he had lost his 2016 bid for the presidency. And he warned that if he is defeated in 2020, Americans’ 401(k) retirement accounts will go “down the tubes.”

The Republican president also defended his tactics on trade with China. He has imposed 25% tariffs on \$250 billion of imports from China and has threatened to hit the remaining \$300 billion worth of Chinese imports with 10% tariffs. He has delayed that increase on about half of those items to

avoid raising prices for U.S. holiday shoppers. He said China wants to make a trade deal with the U.S. because it’s costing the country millions of jobs, but he claimed that the U.S. doesn’t need to be in a hurry.

“I don’t think we’re ready to make a deal,” Trump said.

Trump’s rally was the first since mass shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, killed 31 people and wounded dozens more. The shootings have reignited calls for Congress to take immediate action to reduce gun violence.

Trump said the U.S. can’t make it more difficult for law-abiding citizens to protect themselves, but he advocated for expanding the number of facilities to house the mentally ill, without saying how he would pay for it.

# Trump asked about purchasing Greenland

The Washington Post

President Donald Trump has pushed top aides to investigate whether the U.S. government can purchase the giant, ice-smothered island of Greenland, two people with direct knowledge of the directive said.

The presidential request has bewildered aides, some of whom continue to believe it isn’t serious, but Trump has mentioned it for weeks. The two people with knowledge of the presidential demand spoke on the condition of anonymity because they weren’t authorized to reveal such White House planning.

As with many of Trump’s internal musings, aides are waiting for more direction before they decide how seriously they should look into it. Among the things that have been discussed is whether it is even legal, what the process would be for acquiring an island that has its own government and population and where the money to purchase a giant landmass would originate.

Trump’s interest in acquiring Greenland was first reported by the Wall Street Journal.

According to the Central Intelligence Agency’s World Factbook, Greenland is

about 1.37 million square miles, with about 1.05 million of that covered in ice. It has considerable natural resources, such as coal and uranium, but only 0.6 percent of the land is used for agriculture. It has about 58,000 residents, making it one of the world’s smallest countries by population.

It is a self-governing country that is part of the kingdom of Denmark. Trump is scheduled to visit Denmark in two weeks.

It was unclear why Trump might want the United States to buy Greenland, though his administration has identified the Arctic as an area of growing importance to U.S. national security interests.

# IG probe finds possible political payback at State Dept.

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The State Department’s internal watchdog has found significant evidence of leadership and management problems, including possible political retribution against career employees, in the bureau that deals with international organizations.

In a report released on Thursday, the department’s inspector general said a review of thousands of emails and dozens of interviews with current and former employees of the Bureau of International Organizations revealed a “negative and vindictive” work environment. The review found employees complained about being frequently berated in public or otherwise mistreated by two senior Trump administration politi-

cal appointees at the top of the bureau.

“Nearly every employee interviewed ... raised concerns” about the bureau’s leadership and “the treatment of staff,” the report said.

Among the complaints documented in the 34-page report were allegations from career employees that Assistant Secretary of State Kevin Moley and his former senior adviser Marie Stull retaliated or tried to retaliate against them because they had served in the previous administration.

“Several career employees reported that throughout her tenure at the Department, Ms. Stull referred to them or to other career employees as ‘Obama holdovers,’ ‘traitors,’ or ‘disloyal,’” the report said. “Other career employees told (the inspector gen-

eral) that Ms. Stull accused them of being part of the ‘Deep State’ and that the assistant secretary accused them of ‘undermining the president’s agenda.’”

In addition, the report says employees reported that Stull made positive comments about some of their colleagues because she believed they had contributed to Republican political candidates. It says there was no evidence that any formal personnel decisions were made as a result but “the mere discussion of them raises significant concerns as to whether Ms. Stull was engaging in political activity while on duty.” Such activity would be illegal under federal law.

Stull has since left the State Department and did not respond to the allegations.

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Man arrested for threats with nunchucks

**FL** DAYTONA BEACH — Police said they've arrested a Florida man who's accused of threatening his neighbors with nunchucks and bug spray before cutting his own head when he accidentally hit himself with the weapon.

Daytona Beach police spokesman Messod Bendayan said Larry Adams, 61, complained about his neighbor's loud music coming from a car in the parking lot of their Daytona Beach apartment complex.

Police said Adams sprayed four of his neighbors with roach spray and swung his nunchucks in a threatening manner and hit himself.

Adams is charged with aggravated assault and battery with a deadly weapon.

## Man dies after being in taco-eating contest

**CA** FRESNO — A man died shortly after competing in a taco-eating contest at a minor league baseball game in Fresno.

Fresno Sheriff spokesman Tony Botti said Dana Hutchings, 41, of Fresno, died Tuesday night shortly after arriving at a hospital.

The Fresno County sheriff-coroner's office said Hutchings choked to death after the contest at the Fresno Grizzlies game.

Witness Matthew Boylan told the Fresno Bee he noticed Hutchings was eating much more quickly than the two other contestants and did not appear to be chewing his food.

He said Hutchings collapsed and hit his face on a table about seven minutes into the contest, then fell to the ground. The eating contest ended immediately.

Botti says emergency room staff at the hospital tried to

clear food from Hutchings' airway.

## Rare Amur leopard cubs go on view at zoo

**NY** SYRACUSE — Visitors may now get a look at two rare leopard cubs at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo in Syracuse.

Onondaga County Executive Ryan McMahon announced that the little Amur leopards made their public debut Wednesday.

The male and female cubs gradually ventured out from private quarters into their exhibit. It's a temporary one while the zoo works toward a new, more complex \$400,000 outdoor space for the leopard family.

The cubs, born June 19 to parents Tria and Rafferty, don't yet have names. The zoo plans a vote soon.

Amur leopards are considered critically endangered. They are found in far eastern Russia, where an estimated 84 remain in the wild, up from about 30 in 2012.

## Seat belt stop turns into drug arrest

**LA** HOUMA — Louisiana State Police said a man stopped for not using his seat belt turned out to have guns and several illegal drugs in his pickup truck.

They said he also drove away from the traffic stop, hit another vehicle during a chase, and finally jumped into Bayou Lafourche.

A news release said Byron Nevis, 32, of Houma, was arrested Monday on charges including three drug counts, hit-and-run driving, possessing a firearm after a felony conviction and driving without a seat belt. The release said Nevis had two guns, 361 grams of ec-

stasy, 165 grams of heroin, 3.4 pounds of marijuana, 3 grams of cocaine, 8 packages of edible THC, two containers of THC lip balm, and more than \$39,000 cash.

## Police: Church member shot would-be thief

**OK** TULSA — Police in Tulsa said a man apparently trying to steal copper from a north Tulsa church was shot and wounded by a church member.

Police said there have been several copper thefts from North Sheridan Church of Christ in recent weeks and officers were called to an apparent theft Wednesday night, but found no one.

Police said some members remained at the church overnight and told officers they heard someone on the roof about 4 a.m. Thursday then confronted the man before one member shot him in the stomach.

The man's name and his condition was not released, but police say he was talking with officers before he was taken to a hospital.

## Weather forces closure of sled dog camps

**AK** JUNEAU — An Alaska company has closed its sled dog camps early due to warm weather that has caused poor snow conditions, a report said.

An unusually small amount of remaining winter snow prompted Coastal Helicopters to close the camps, The Juneau Empire reported Tuesday.

A high rate of snowmelt on the Mendenhall Glacier has made the surface unsafe and caused the possibility of crevasses opening, the company said.

"You can't run the dogs on the ice. It's unsafe when the

crevasses open," said Coastal Helicopters General Manager Mike Wilson.

## Officials: Items stolen from veterans museum

**MI** MUSKEGON — Officials said a man has stolen artifacts from a western Michigan museum housed on a World War II-era warship.

The Muskegon Chronicle reported Wednesday the man stole about a dozen items from the USS LST 393 Veterans Museum in Muskegon. Museum officials said the theft of medals, a shoulder patch, lapel pins and other items occurred Aug. 3.

Police said they have a surveillance image of a middle-aged man they seek to identify and interview.

Museum board member John Stephenson said some of the stolen items are "not worth much, but they're priceless."

## Man who fell 15 feet says dog saved him

**OH** PORTSMOUTH — A man in Ohio is crediting his dog for saving him after the man suffered a bad fall.

WSAZ-TV reported Jimmy Hale fell off a flood wall in Portsmouth last week while walking his dog Taco. Hale ended up passing out after falling 15 feet and didn't wake up until the next day.

Hale said he screamed for help but no one answered. That's when Hale said he heard a lawnmower and then footsteps. Portsmouth city worker Mark Puckett said he only noticed Hale because of Taco, who stayed on the wall until someone showed up.

Hale was flown to St. Mary's Medical Center where he was still recovering Wednesday from pelvic and wrist injuries.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

# Earnhardt Jr. survives Tennessee plane crash

Associated Press

ELIZABETHTON, Tenn. — Dale Earnhardt Jr. is safe and in a hospital for evaluation after his plane crashed in east Tennessee, the NASCAR television analyst and retired driver's sister tweeted.

Earnhardt's sister, Kelley Earnhardt Miller, tweeted that the driver's wife, Amy, and 15-month-old daughter, Isla, also were on the plane along with two pilots.

"Everyone is safe and has been taken to the hospital for further evaluation," she tweeted. "We will have no further information at this time."

Federal Aviation Administration officials said a Cessna Citation rolled off the end of a runway and caught fire after landing at Elizabethton Municipal Airport at 3:40 p.m. Thursday. FAA officials said the preliminary indication is that two pilots and three passengers were aboard.

The National Transportation Safety Board tweeted that it's sending two representatives to Elizabethton to begin investi-

gating the crash.

Carter County Sheriff's Office spokesman Thomas Gray confirmed Earnhardt was aboard but said he wasn't one of the pilots.

Earnhardt retired as a full-time driver in 2017 and has been working as an analyst for NBC. He is part of the scheduled broadcast team for Saturday night's Cup Series event in Bristol, Tenn.

This incident comes 26 years after former driver and 1992 Cup champion Alan Kulwicki died in a plane crash while on his way to the spring race at Bristol from a promotional appearance in Knoxville, Tenn. That crash at Tri-City Regional Airport in Blountville, Tenn., killed a total of four people.

Earnhardt was part of Rick Hendrick's racing team in 2011 when Hendrick broke a rib and a collarbone while on a small jet that lost its brakes and crash landed in an airport at Key West, Fla. Hendrick's son, brother and twin nieces were among 10 people killed in a 2004 crash of a plane traveling to a race in Virginia.

## Moffitt wins Truck playoffs race

Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Brett Moffitt pulled away on a restart with three laps to go and won the NASCAR Gander Outdoors Truck Series' playoff opener Thursday night at Bristol Motor Speedway to earn a spot in the Round of 6.

Moffitt finished 0.743 seconds ahead of 17-year-old Chandler Smith for his 10th series victory and first at Bristol. The top seed and defending series champion won the pole and led 65 laps on the 0.533 oval.

"We're playing on house money now," Moffitt said. "I mean we still want to go get points and ultimately win races and get playoff points to set ourselves up a little safety net for

the next round. But now we'll just go and race to win and the pressure is off."

Moffitt has three victories this year in the GMS Racing Chevrolet, also winning in June at Iowa and Chicagoland.

"It was tough," Moffitt said. "Our Silverado was strong on long runs, but it was hard to get fired off. So it was really tough just getting the first couple of laps under our belt after a restart."

Ross Chastain took the first stage, and Moffitt drove around the outside of Chastain to win the second.

Moffitt and Chastain combined to lead the first 110 laps before Grant Enfinger led 57 in the final stage.

# Nationals turned season around after slow start

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Right now, 19-31 is just a distant memory for the Washington Nationals.

Even without Max Scherzer for all but one game over the past month-plus, even with recurring bullpen issues, even though they dug themselves quite a hole, the Nationals are suddenly 65-55 — 10 games over .500 for the first time in 14 months.

What's more, they're leading the NL wild-card standings as they head into Friday's opener of a three-game series against one of the clubs chasing them for a playoff berth: reigning league MVP Christian Yelich and the Milwaukee Brewers.

Winning the NL East presents more of a challenge, because Washington entered Thursday trailing the first-place Atlanta Braves by six games. The rivals play each other seven more times, though: four games at Atlanta on Sept. 5-8, and three at Washington on Sept. 13-15.

"Still a lot of work to be done. We need to keep our foot on the accelerator," right fielder Adam Eaton said after hitting one of Washington's three homers during a 10-run fifth inning Wednesday that propelled it to a 17-7 victory over the Cincinnati Reds, completing a three-game sweep.

"Milwaukee's no slouch coming in here," Eaton said. "So we have to play good baseball and continue it this weekend."

And guess who might be able to provide some help? Scherzer, a three-time Cy Young Award winner, who declared himself "good to go" after dealing with a back problem that landed him on the injured list for most of the past five weeks.

Lefty Patrick Corbin (9-5, 3.41 ERA) is scheduled to start the series opener, but otherwise, Washington hasn't announced who its pitchers will be Saturday or Sunday.

Could one of those games go to Scherzer, who said he doesn't want any sort of rehab start in the minors? Manager

Dave Martinez wouldn't rule it out.

Since Scherzer's last pre-IL start on July 6, Washington has managed to go 19-13. Lately, that success has been thanks in part to the work provided by back-of-the-rotation fill-in righties Erick Fedde and Joe Ross.

Ross, in particular, has really turned things around after toggling between the Nationals' bullpen and the minors, going 3-0 with a 0.50 ERA.

In Fedde's past two starts, meanwhile, he's 2-0 with a 1.50 ERA.

"We asked these guys to step up," Martinez said.

Another bit of good news for Washington is that Thursday's day off gave weary closer Sean Doolittle a third consecutive day to rest.

He pitched five times in a stretch of seven games, then spoke after a shaky save in Monday's 7-6 victory over the Reds about feeling the effects of that much use. Then Doolittle was able to take off Tuesday — when Daniel Hudson got the final four outs to save a 3-1 win — and Wednesday — when Javy Guerra worked the last three innings of the rout for a save.

"It's mid-August. Everybody's gassed. It's a marathon, for sure. The good teams find a way. The good players find a way to catch that second wind. You really want to be playing your best baseball in September and peaking at the right time. There's still every opportunity to do that," Doolittle said.

"I've hit a couple of speed bumps here, recently. It hasn't been as smooth as I wanted it to be. But I can still accomplish everything. The team can still accomplish everything we set out to at the beginning of the season. So we're going to keep our heads down. We're going to keep working. We want to make sure we're playing our best baseball down the stretch in September."

# Harper's grand slam lifts Phils over Cubs

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Bryce Harper knows everyone in the dugout and ballpark expects him to get clutch hits in moments just like this.

Boy, he crushed it.

Harper blasted a grand slam with one out in the ninth inning, capping a six-run rally that sent the Philadelphia Phillies over the Chicago Cubs 7-5 Thursday night for a three-game sweep.

Harper delivered his biggest hit yet in his first season after signing a \$330 million, 13-year contract with the Phillies, celebrating while running around the bases and then getting mobbed by teammates at the plate.

"I go up there and each at-bat is the same. I don't think about bases loaded. I try to get a pitch

I can drive and hopefully good things happen. I love those moments. I love those opportunities," Harper said. "I just love it. It's a lot of fun. These fans do expect that and I expect to do that for them on a nightly basis and if I don't, they'll let me know and I like that, too."

Cubs starter Yu Darvish struck out 10, silencing Philadelphia's bats for seven innings a night after the Phillies scored 11 runs in former manager Charlie Manuel's debut as hitting coach.

But the Phillies rallied against Chicago's bullpen and moved within one game of the Cubs for the second wild-card spot in the NL.

Pinch-hitter Brad Miller chased Rowan Wick with an RBI single in the ninth that cut it to 5-2 and Roman Quinn

greeted Pedro Strop with an RBI single to make it a two-run game. Strop (2-5) hit Rhys Hoskins to load the bases with one out.

Derek Holland entered to face Harper and got ahead 0-2 in the count. Harper fouled off a 2-2 pitch before launching his 25th homer way out to right.

"I think everyone who watches baseball expects him to do that every time he's up," Phillies starter Drew Smyly said. "He's fun to watch."

Harper has seven homers and 15 RBIs in the last 12 games.

Ranger Suarez (4-1) tossed two scoreless innings to earn the win.

Anthony Rizzo, batting lead-off after the original lineup had him in his usual cleanup spot, gave the Cubs a 1-0 lead in

the third when he hit his 22nd homer.

Ian Happ led off the fourth with a triple and scored on David Bote's double. Albert Almora Jr. hit an RBI single with two outs, went to second on the throw home and advanced to third on shortstop Jean Segura's fielding error. Rizzo's single made it 4-0.

Kyle Schwarber slammed his 100th career homer and team-high 28th this season into the bushes in center field to put the Cubs ahead 5-0 in the fifth.

Corey Dickerson hit an RBI single with two outs in the eighth off Wick, but right fielder Nicholas Castellanos threw out Hoskins trying to score from second on the play to end the inning.

## MLB roundup

# Ramirez, Santana power Indians to rout of Yankees

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jose Ramirez hit two early homers, including his first career grand slam in a seven-run opening inning, and Cleveland cruised to a 19-5 win over New York.

Carlos Santana also launched two home runs as the Yankees matched a franchise record by serving up seven. Greg Allen and Santana went back-to-back in a five-run eighth against rookie designated hitter Mike Ford, a former Ivy League pitcher and player of the year at Princeton.

Ramirez and Jason Kipnis smacked consecutive homers off ineffective opener Chad Green (2-4).

Every starter for Cleveland finished with at least two of the team's 24 hits.

**Reds 2, Cardinals 1:** Sonny Gray struck out 10 while pitching five scoreless innings, and host Cincinnati held off St. Louis.

St. Louis had won five in a row to move into a virtual

tie with Chicago for the NL Central lead. The Cubs had a chance to move in front again, but they lost 7-5 at Philadelphia on Bryce Harper's game-ending grand slam.

**Marlins 13, Dodgers 7:** Miami turned the tables on visiting Los Angeles, winning despite giving up four home runs, including Cody Bellinger's 40th.

Brian Anderson, Starlin Castro, Jorge Alfaro and Lewis Brinson each had three RBIs for Miami, and Jon Berti scored three times. The last time the Marlins had four players with three or more RBIs was in 2006.

**Mariners 7, Tigers 2:** Dylan Moore homered and Kyle Seager drove in three runs in Seattle's win over host Detroit.

Mallex Smith stole two bases, giving him 34, the most in the majors. The Mariners won two of three after losing eight of their previous nine.

**Twins 13, Rangers 6:** Luis Arraez hit the first of three

more homers by visiting Minnesota in a win over Texas.

Miguel Sano and Eddie Rosario also went deep for Minnesota (73-48), which maintained a half-game lead over Cleveland for the AL Central lead. Marwin Gonzalez had a pair of RBI singles among his four hits.

**Angels 8, White Sox 7:** Mike Trout went 4-for-4, scored four runs and hit his AL-leading 40th homer, and Andrew Heaney pitched seven innings of four-hit ball in host Los Angeles' victory over Chicago.

Trout put a solo shot off Reynaldo Lopez (7-10) into the fake rock pile beyond center field in the third inning, keeping pace with the Dodgers' Cody Bellinger for the overall major league homers lead and reaching another franchise milestone.

**Mets 10, Braves 8:** Pete Alonso drove in six runs with five hits, including a three-run homer that helped lead to Julio Teheran's shortest career start, and visiting New York held on to beat Atlanta.

Alonso's 39th homer tied Cody Bellinger for the National League rookie record.

**Giants 7, Diamondbacks 0:** Evan Longoria had a 412-foot homer among his three hits and four RBIs, Dereck Rodriguez pitched seven strong innings in his first day back in the majors and visiting San Francisco beat Arizona.

Longoria had a two-run single off Alex Young (4-3) in the first inning and hit a two-run homer off Young to cap a three-run fifth as the Giants pulled even with Arizona in the chase for an NL wild-card spot.

**Athletics 7, Astros 6:** Matt Chapman hit two home runs for the second straight day, connecting for the tiebreaking shot in the eighth inning to lead host Oakland past Houston.

The teams combined for a Coliseum record 10 home runs, five by each team. Four players hit two home runs: Chapman and teammate Matt Olson along with Houston's Michael Brantley and Carlos Correa.

# Darnold, Ryan look ready for season

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Matt Ryan and Sam Darnold both appear ready for the regular season.

Ryan looked sharp in his preseason debut for the Atlanta Falcons, completing nine straight passes, and Darnold led New York on another scoring drive in the Jets' 22-10 victory Thursday night.

After sitting out the first two exhibition games, Ryan played most of the first half. He completed 10 of 14 passes for 118 yards, a performance that was even more impressive considering Brian Hill and Justin Hardy dropped back-to-back passes in the back of the end zone that should have been touchdowns, sparking boos

from the meager crowd at Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

"It's always exciting to get those first few series under your belt," Ryan said. "Knock the rust off and get your feel back."

The Jets (1-1) are certainly pleased with Darnold, who followed up a marvelous drive in the preseason opener by completing 5 of 7 passes for 46 yards. He guided New York on a 66-yard touchdown drive to start the game, capped by Ty Montgomery's 1-yard scoring run.

"It looks right," coach Adam Gase said of Darnold's performance. "He doesn't seem to have any complications."

Le'Veon Bell sat out again

for the Jets. He could make his New York debut next week.

Atlanta's backup quarterback, Matt Schaub, took over for Ryan and led the Falcons (0-3) on their lone touchdown drive to close out the first half. Running the two-minute offense to perfection, Schaub went 8-for-10 for 76 yards to set up Ito Smith's 4-yard touchdown run with 33 seconds remaining.

It was a tougher night for the kickers.

New York's Taylor Bertolet, who was signed last weekend after Chandler Catanzaro missed two extra points in the preseason opener and surprisingly retired, botched a pair of PATs to raise more concerns. Bertolet did connect on

a 49-yard field goal in the third quarter.

Giorgio Tavecchio, taking over in Atlanta after the release of longtime kicker Matt Bryant, missed a pair of 52-yard field-goal attempts. One appeared to be deflected at the line, the other sailed wide left.

Atlanta's third-string quarterback, Matt Simms, had the ball knocked away for a fumble that led to New York's winning score. The Jets' fourth quarterback of the night, Luke Falk, connected with Deontay Burnett on a 9-yard touchdown pass with 11:38 remaining.

James Burgess finished off the Falcons by intercepting a pass from Simms and returning it 28 yards for a touchdown.

## NFL preseason roundup

# Jackson solid, Rodgers sits as Ravens down Packers

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Lamar Jackson directed two scoring drives during a limited appearance, had an impressive touchdown run erased by a penalty and sparked the Baltimore Ravens to a 26-13 victory over the Green Bay Packers, who played Thursday night without quarterback Aaron Rodgers.

Rodgers developed back stiffness and was a late scratch, a move the team labeled as a "precaution." After being held out of Green Bay's first preseason game against Houston, the seven-time Pro Bowl star was slated to start for the first time under rookie head coach Matt LaFleur.

Instead, DeShone Kizer, Tim Boyle and Manny Wilkins struggled against a defense that last year was ranked No. 1 in the NFL.

Coming off a rookie season in which he didn't start until mid-November, Jackson is seeking to master a new playbook devised by first-year coordinator Greg Roman. Jackson started and played three series last

week in a 29-0 rout of Jacksonville. This time, the 2016 Heisman Trophy winner stuck around for two possessions, both of which ended with field goals.

**Eagles 24, Jaguars 10:** Visiting Philadelphia third-string quarterback Cody Kessler was knocked out of the team's win on the opening drive. Defensive end Datone Jones came unblocked off the edge and walloped Kessler in the back.

Kessler was escorted to the sideline, evaluated for a head injury in the locker room and then placed in the concussion protocol. The team already was without backup Nate Sudfeld, who broke his left wrist in the team's preseason opener against Tennessee. Starter Carson Wentz rested for the second straight game. He watched from the sideline in uniform, but without pads and a helmet.

Rookie Clayton Thorson, the only other QB on the roster, played three-plus quarters and completed a 38-yard touchdown pass to former college quarterback and Alliance of American

Football receiver Greg Ward on fourth down in the second quarter.

**Bengals 23, Redskins 13:** Washington first-round pick Dwayne Haskins made strong throws and his share of mistakes, and fellow rookie Ryan Finley continued to make his case to be visiting Cincinnati's backup quarterback.

Haskins threw a 55-yard TD pass to camp standout Robert Davis and was 7-for-14 for 114 yards with a fumble. The 15th overall pick took two sacks but showed poise under pressure and was more effective than veteran Case Keenum, who played the first three drives and was 3-for-7 for 52 yards.

Keenum, Haskins and long-time backup Colt McCoy are competing to be the Redskins' Week 1 starter. McCoy has yet to play in the preseason while he deals with lingering pain from a broken leg last year.

After already passing Jeff Driskell on Cincinnati's depth chart, Finley again showed why he's now the favorite to back up Andy Dalton. The fourth-round

pick out of N.C. State completed his first nine passes and was 20-for-26 for 150 yards with two TD passes.

**Raiders 33, Cardinals 26:** Kyler Murray's second outing as an NFL quarterback didn't go nearly as well as his first, and visiting Oakland moved the ball with ease on Arizona's top defensive units.

Murray, the first overall pick in this year's NFL Draft who looked sharp in his debut last Thursday against the Los Angeles Chargers, finished 3-for-8 for 12 yards. He also ran once for 4 yards, and the Cardinals went three-and-out on two of his four series.

Raiders backup Mike Glennon completed 11 of 14 passes for 175 yards and a pair of touchdowns, and the Oakland defense tackled Murray in the end zone for a safety to lead the Raiders to their second preseason win.

Derek Carr, the Raiders' No. 1 quarterback, played one series and led a touchdown drive, going 2-for-2 for 40 yards in his preseason debut.