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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Egypt retaliates after mass killings

The Associated Press

CAIRO — Egyptian warplanes struck Islamic State targets in Libya on Monday in swift retribution for the extremists' beheading of a group of Egyptian Christian hostages on a beach, shown in a grisly online video released hours earlier.

At the same time, Egypt called for international intervention in Libya against the Islamic State group. Loyalists of the Syria and Iraq-based group have risen to dominate several cities in the chaos-riven North African nation.

Italy, just across the Mediterranean Sea, said it is prepared to lead international action in Libya.

After the release of the beheading video Sunday night, the tiny Christian-majority home

village of more than half of the 21 Egyptians believed killed by the extremists was gutted by grief. Inside the village church, relatives wept and shouted the names of the dead in shock.

"What will be a relief to me is to take a hold of his murderer, tear him apart, eat up his flesh and liver," said Bushra Fawzi in el-Aour village, as he wept over the loss of his son, Shenouda, 22. "I want his body back. If they dumped it in the sea, I want it back. If they set fire to it, I want its dust."

The 21 — mainly young men from impoverished families — had traveled to Libya for work and were kidnapped in two groups in December and January from the coastal city of Sirte. In the video, the group is marched onto what is purport-

ed to be a Libyan beach before masked militants with knives carve off the head of each. The killing of at least a dozen of them is clearly visible, though it was not clear from the video whether all 21 hostages were killed.

Two rounds of Egyptian airstrikes, several hours apart on Monday, struck targets in the eastern Libyan city of Darna, according to Egyptian and Libyan security officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the press.

Egypt's military announced the strikes on state radio, marking the first time Cairo has publicly acknowledged military action in Libya. It said the strikes hit weapons caches and training camps "to avenge the

bloodshed and to seek retribution from the killers."

"Let those far and near know that Egyptians have a shield to protect and safeguard the security of the country and a sword that cuts off terrorism," it said.

Libya's air force commander, Saqr al-Joroushi, told Egyptian state TV that the airstrikes were coordinated with the Libyan side. Libya's air force said it also carried out strikes in Darna.

Libya has become home of the strongest presence of the Islamic State group outside its core territory in Syria and Iraq.

With almost no state control in much of Libya, extremists loyal to the Islamic State group have seized control of Darna and the central city of Sirte, and have built up a powerful presence in the capital, Tripoli, and the second-largest city, Benghazi.

US begins anti-terrorism drills in Africa

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. special operations forces kicked off three weeks of counterterrorism drills Monday in a series of western African states — including Niger and Chad — despite recent strikes by the insurgent group Boko Haram.

"We haven't canceled anything and our troops are fully prepared to handle anything," said Bardha Azari, a spokeswoman for Special Operations Command Africa.

The U.S. military on Monday commenced its annual Operation Flintlock, U.S. Africa Command's premier special operations exercise on the continent. The war games, which are intended to help a range of African militaries bolster their

counterterrorism skills, come at a time of crises for several countries in the region.

In the past year, Nigeria-based Boko Haram has steadily increased the intensity of its assaults, both within northern Nigeria and now stretching into border areas with neighboring states such as Chad and Niger. This year, Chad is serving as the main host for the event, which includes stations in several other countries, including Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and Tunisia. The exercise runs through March 9.

Last week, Boko Haram launched strikes inside Chad, marking possibly the first time Chad has been a direct target for the Islamic militants, whose aim is to overthrow Nigeria's secular government and install

a strict form of Sharia law.

Niger also has been targeted by militants in recent weeks. The government in Niger's Diffa region has gone so far as to declare a state of emergency there.

For AFRICOM, exercises such as Flintlock are a key part of a strategy that aims to strengthen the capabilities of local forces to deal with regional threats such as Boko Haram. Chad, Niger and Cameroon are among the countries that have pledged to increase their operations against Boko Haram as part of a regional response.

As Boko Haram's attacks have increased, refugees have been flooding into neighboring states. The continuing violence and a resulting refugee crisis — about 1 million Nigerians have been displaced by Boko

Haram — have heightened concerns about the future stability of Nigeria and of impoverished neighboring states.

Last April, Boko Haram came to the world's attention after kidnapping 200 schoolgirls, which prompted a viral, grass-roots push for action in response through the "Bring Back our Girls" social media campaign. That effort also led the U.S. to send in military advisers and surveillance drones to assist in an international manhunt for the missing girls.

However, Boko Haram has steadily increased its attacks and gained in strength. Estimates vary, but some experts believe the group could occupy as much as 20 percent of the country.

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US denies claims of civilian deaths in strikes

Los Angeles Times

The sun was setting over the desert at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, as Lt. Col. Jose “Ed” Sumangil, commander of a B-1 bomber squadron known as “The Bats,” stepped into a room crowded with pilots and crews for a final briefing before the night’s combat mission.

Sumangil, a U.S. Air Force weapons systems officer with a graying mustache and a ramrod bearing, could recite part of the briefing word for word because he has heard it before every bombing run.

“Savor the moment,” the PowerPoint slides read. “Be lethal and accurate.” And above all, avoid “civcas,” military jargon for civilian casualties.

“It’s our mantra,” Sumangil

said before donning his survival suit and helmet, strapping on a semi-automatic pistol and heading out to the flight line. “We do everything we can, every step of the way, to mitigate against civilian deaths.”

U.S. and coalition warplanes have dropped more than 8,200 guided bombs and missiles on Islamic State targets in Iraq and Syria since last summer. With the latest surveillance and guidance systems, commanders say, they do more than ever before to prevent bombs from hitting a hospital or causing any sort of unintended fatalities that could bolster support for the Sunni Muslim extremists.

“We can lose this war with one bomb,” said Air Force Col. Lynn “Woody” Peitz, deputy commander of the air opera-

tions center at Al Udeid. “The strategic mistake is what I fear the most.”

How well they’re doing is a matter of dispute.

The Pentagon says it has seen no proof that civilians have been killed in more than 2,300 airstrikes on vehicles, gun emplacements, weapons depots and other military targets, including some in urban areas such as Raqqa and Aleppo in Syria.

But a gulf of suspicion has opened between the military and critics in human rights groups, who say dozens of civilians have died as a result of flawed intelligence, errant bombs or poor targeting by the U.S. or its allies.

The issue echoed across the United States this month when

the Islamic State said a Jordanian airstrike had killed American hostage Kayla Mueller in a building in Syria. The White House ultimately confirmed Mueller’s death, as well as an airstrike on the building cited by the militant group, but said U.S. officials could not validate, and would not investigate, precisely how or where she had died.

U.S. Central Command said last month that it had examined 18 claims of civilian deaths, nine each from Iraq and Syria, and had dismissed 13 as “not credible.” It is still reviewing the other five, and has launched formal investigations of three — two in Syria, one in Iraq — that officials found were based on credible evidence.

5 Marines exposed to fire retardant released

TWENTYNINE PALMS, Calif. — A military hospital on Friday released the last five of 22 Marines accidentally exposed to a fire retardant gas during a training exercise at a Southern California base, a Marine Corps spokesman said.

The Marines were treated for exposure to halon after an extinguishing system accidentally activated in an amphibious assault vehicle during an exercise Thursday at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms.

Another major snowstorm slams Northeast

BOSTON — Another weekend, another major snowstorm. The latest system to sweep the Northeast brought another foot to Boston — on top of 6 feet that has fallen over the last month — and tested New Englanders who say the winter is beginning to feel like one without end.

Even after the storm, forecasters warned of exceptionally cold air, perhaps the coldest in years.

From The Associated Press

Analysts give Hagel high marks

By JON HARPER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Chuck Hagel’s tenure as secretary of defense comes to a close Tuesday. During two turbulent years at the helm of the Pentagon, he won kudos for managing the Defense Department bureaucracy during a period of downsizing but may have been scapegoated for the policy disarray following the rise of the Islamic State in the Middle East.

Defense analysts give the former Nebraska Republican senator high marks for managing the withdrawal of combat forces from Afghanistan, setting in motion the shift in military resources to the Pacific, and coping with the deep, congressionally mandated budget cuts known as “sequestration.”

All those achievements, however, were overshadowed by the Obama administration’s muddled response to the rise of the Islamic State group after the militants seized about a third of Syria and Iraq and routed the U.S.-trained Iraqi army last year.

The Associated Press reported this month that foreign fighters are streaming into Syria and Iraq in unprecedented numbers, including at least 3,400 from Western nations among the 20,000 from around the world.

In Iraq, efforts to retrain the Iraqi army are moving slowly, and the Islamic State is now threatening one of the air bases where U.S. troops are training Iraqi forces. Meanwhile, the Pentagon program to recruit and train moderate forces to fight the Islamic State in Syria has barely gotten off the ground.

President Barack Obama has ruled out sending U.S. ground forces into combat in Iraq or Syria, which makes training local forces to retake terrain controlled by the Islamic State group all the more critical.

The White House has alluded to differences with Hagel over the Middle East, while at the same time denying he was pressured into resigning.

“The priorities of the department ... have changed (since Hagel took over), given chang-

es in the international community,” Earnest said on Nov. 24, the day Hagel’s resignation was announced. “As we consider the next remaining two years of the president’s time in office, [we believe] that another secretary might be better suited to meet those challenges.”

Hagel’s personality might have contributed to the perception that he was not skilled at articulating policy. In unscripted remarks, he often rambled or delivered muddled responses to questions. During his Senate confirmation hearings, Hagel appeared ill-prepared to answer questions about his record and views.

“I think it did damage him in the eyes of the (Pentagon) bureaucracy ... but most of all the White House,” said MacKenzie Eaglen, a defense analyst at the American Enterprise Institute. Eaglen said Hagel’s tenure started off “with a whimper and an embarrassing one that contributed to the perception of him as a sort of weak and inarticulate Pentagon leader.”

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OKC's Westbrook steals All-Star show

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Mixing Broadway and basketball, this NBA All-Star Game was a West Side Story.

Russell Westbrook scored 41 points, one shy of the All-Star record, and the Western Conference beat the East 163-158 on Sunday night in the highest-scoring All-Star Game ever.

The Oklahoma City speedster had a record 27 points by halftime and closed out the scoring with two free throws, falling one point shy of Wilt Chamberlain's 42 points in the 1962 game. He was voted the game's MVP at Madison Square Garden.

The NBA's return to New York showed off everything about the Big Apple, and by the time Frank Sinatra's "New York, New York" played after the game, it was clear Westbrook was king of the hill.

"It's amazing. It's a blessing to be here in New York City," Westbrook said during the MVP ceremony.

James Harden added 29 points, eight rebounds and eight assists for the West, which built a 20-point lead in the first half and then pulled away after it was tied at 148 with a little more than 4 minutes remaining.

The combined 321 points surpassed the

318 scored last season, and the 48 three-pointers smashed last year's record of 30.

LeBron James finished with 30 points, but couldn't lead the East to the victory in his favorite NBA arena.

"Don't get no better, man. You play in the Garden in front of these fans," James said.

Harden's three-pointer snapped the final tie with 4:02 to play and Chris Paul followed with consecutive baskets. Westbrook's fifth three-pointer put it away at 158-149 with 2:22 to go.

"We just talk about having fun all game long and then at a certain point in the fourth quarter it's time to win," Paul said.

Atlanta's Kyle Korver made seven three-pointers and scored 21 points for the East, while Washington's John Wall had 19.

But right from the start, the players were sharing the stage.

Christina Aguilera appeared from behind a giant big apple, and belted out some New York-inspired numbers to start the show, joined by the Rockettes.

Entertainment's elite were all over the arena, with players hobnobbing with Jay-Z and Floyd Mayweather near their court-side seats at halftime. But the biggest

roar came for a star from another sport — politics.

President Bill Clinton, who had a big night of his own at Madison Square Garden when he was nominated here during the 1992 Democratic National Convention, got a pair of loud ovations when he was shown during Queen Latifah's performance of the national anthem.

Players were quizzed during comedic skits on New York talk and terms, and fuhgeddaboutit, Pau Gasol had no idea what a stoop was. (Stephen Curry knew it was a porch in the front of a building).

Pau won the jump ball against little brother Marc to begin the first All-Star Game featuring two sibling starters, but for a while it looked as if that would be the East's only win of the night.

The West shot out to a 20-point lead, but the East chipped away and cut it to 83-82 before halftime.

It was New York's first time hosting the weekend since 1998 and a rare journey to the north for the NBA, which has preferred to stage the festivities in the warmth of the South and West. Of course, next year might be even colder, when the game heads north of the border to Toronto.

Carmelo Anthony struggled to 14 points

on 6 of 20 shooting for the East in what may have been his final game of the season. The Knicks star has been battling a sore knee for much of the season and may opt for surgery with the team owning the NBA's worst record.

But even the Knicks' misery couldn't dampen the spirits for this basketball-rich city. Players on the floor were surrounded by some of New York's hoops royalty, such as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Julius Erving. There was even time to celebrate the Knicks: Willis Reed, Walt Frazier, Bill Bradley, Phil Jackson, Earl Monroe and Bernard King were honored during a break in the action.

Tim Duncan had one basket in his 15th All-Star Game, second only to Abdul-Jabbar's 18. Duncan's first was here in 1998, as was Kobe Bryant's.

East coach Mike Budenholzer played his four Atlanta Hawks together in the first quarter, Al Horford joining Jeff Teague, Paul Millsap and Korver.

"I thought we would all be out there together quite a bit. We were kind of hand signaling to run a few plays, but you weren't really running plays," Korver said. "It was just up and down. But it was great for the Hawks and for the city of Atlanta. It was really cool."

Gordon claims pole at his final Daytona 500

The Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — The qualifying session for NASCAR's biggest race of the year was lambasted by Tony Stewart as "a complete embarrassment" and called a "cute show" by Clint Bowyer.

The frenetic knockout format ended with Jeff Gordon on the pole for the final Daytona 500 of his career.

And as NASCAR executive vice president Steve O'Donnell tried to answer to the wave of displeasure from the drivers after Sunday's session, he was reminded by Gordon himself what a predicament the series is in regarding qualifying for "The Great American Race."

"Great format, Steve!" Gordon shouted to O'Donnell from the back of a news conference room.

Indeed, Gordon had no qualms with qualifying after he and Hendrick Motorsports teammate Jimmie Johnson outsmarted the field Sunday to sweep the front row for the Daytona 500. They were among only a handful of drivers who were pleased with the format, and their opinion was most certainly based on the end result.

"This format is crazy and chaotic," Gordon said. "It can be extremely rewarding when you have a day like we had."

NASCAR abandoned single-car qualifying runs, the format used for 56 years at Daytona International Speedway, for the knockout group sessions it adopted last season. The format was not tried at the Daytona 500 last year, but was used at the speedway in July.

The group qualifying works fine at most racetracks, but has been proven tricky at Daytona and Talladega, where drivers must draft and the leader is not the

fastest car. It's led to strategies that have drivers sitting on pit road watching the clock, and jockeying for position when it's time to go.

After a five-car accident in the first group of 25 drivers, Bowyer railed against using knockouts to set the Daytona 500 field. Reigning champion Kevin Harvick and Stewart both vented via Twitter, while Ryan Newman was among the drivers critical of NASCAR.

"It's hard to stand behind NASCAR when everybody I talk to up and down pit road doesn't understand why we're doing this," Newman said. "Maybe I need to be sat down and educated a little bit."

O'Donnell, who acknowledged the driver complaints, said NASCAR is trying to create a more entertaining format for fans than the snooze-inducing single-car runs.

"We don't want to see wrecks of any kind. Not lost on us how much work goes into these cars by the teams, the efforts for our biggest race of the year," he said. "We've got a really good track record of making adjustments where we need to, so we'll certainly evaluate what took place."

But the 12 drivers who made it into the final round weren't really complaining, especially Gordon, who announced last month this will be his final full-time season as driver of the famed No. 24 Chevrolet.

He's been adamant next Sunday's season-opening Daytona 500 will be the last of his storied career. The four-time NASCAR champion is a three-time 500 winner, and he'll lead the field to green in his 23rd and final start.

"I can't think of anything cooler than to start this season, the Daytona 500, my

final Daytona 500, final full season, on the pole," Gordon said. "It's going to be pretty important for me to be on that pole when it all starts."

Gordon was the first pole winner to eclipse 200 mph since 1987. His pole-winning speed was 201.293, but gained because he was being pushed by Johnson rather than running a lap around the speedway alone.

The group qualifying was messy from the start, when the first 25 drivers all jockeyed for position before they even left pit road. Some even drove through the grass to get through the traffic jam.

It stuck Bowyer behind Reed Sorenson, a driver who needed a big run Sunday to lock himself into the field.

So Sorenson tried to block Bowyer in a desperation attempt to advance through the knockout rounds and it triggered a five-car pileup.

Both Bowyer and Sorenson ended up with a pair of wrecked Toyotas. It was Sorenson's only car of Speedweeks, and he wasn't sure if he'd be able to locate another car before Thursday's qualifying races.

"I didn't mean to wreck anybody or anything like that," Sorenson said. "Just a product of this qualifying, trying to get that one lap. I didn't want it to end that way, that's for sure."

Bowyer was seething. He placed the blame squarely on NASCAR for scrapping single-car qualifying runs in favor of the more exciting knockout rounds.

"It's NASCAR's fault for putting us out in the middle of this for nothing," Bowyer said. "We used to come down here and worry about who would sit on the front row in the biggest race of the year. Now

all we do is come down here and worry about how a start-and-park like this out of desperation is going to knock us out of the Daytona 500.

"We've been in meetings for 45 minutes just trying to figure out what in the hell everybody is going to do just so we can make the race. It's stupid."

The knockout rounds whittled it down to one final 12-car session in which the drivers had five minutes to make a qualifying run.

Only all 12 idled on pit road, as none of them wanted to be first out on the track.

Finally, Martin Truex Jr. pulled onto the track and the others slowly followed. It was apparent as they raced to cross the starting line in the allotted time that they'd all been timing their move to make their lap just under the wire.

It worked to perfection for Gordon and Johnson, who gave Hendrick Motorsports a sweep of the front row for the fourth time in history.

"This is one of the more gratifying poles here at Daytona that I've ever had, not just because it's my final Daytona 500, but because you've got to try and plan it out and play that chess match and play it really really well," Gordon said.

Gordon called the three rounds "nerve-racking" and said it wasn't his plan to sit that long on pit road.

"I really wanted to go sooner than that," he said.

Also locking themselves into the field based on qualifying speed: Aric Almirola, Ricky Stenhouse Jr., Jamie McMurray and Carl Edwards. It was a huge relief for Edwards, who moved to Joe Gibbs Racing in the offseason, and his new fourth car was not guaranteed a spot in the field.



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Kaminsky, No. 5 Wisconsin rout Illinois

The Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Frank Kaminsky scored 23 points, Bronson Koenig added 15, and No. 5 Wisconsin beat Illinois 68-49 on Sunday.

Nigel Hayes had 14 points for the Badgers, who are now off to their best start in school history at 23-2. Wisconsin leads the Big Ten at 11-1 in conference play.

The Illini (17-9, 7-6) had a four-game winning streak snapped. Malcolm Hill scored 15 points, while Rayvonte Rice added 10.

The Badgers took control of the game with a 15-2 run sandwiched around half-time and then prevented Illinois from getting any closer than nine points the rest of the way.

No. 7 Arizona 86, Washington State 59: Brandon Ashley, Rondae Hollis-Jefferson and Kaleb Tarczewski each scored 17 points as Arizona routed host Washington State.

T.J. McConnell added 14 points for Arizona (22-3, 10-2 Pacific 12), which plays WSU only once this season. The Wildcats led by 34 points after the first half.

Dexter Kernick-Drew scored 20 points and DaVonte Lacy scored 18 for Washington State (11-14, 5-8), which was coming off a win over Arizona State on Thursday. The Cougars were done in by woeful shooting in the first half.

No. 11 Utah 76, California 61: Jakob Poeltl had 18 points and eight rebounds, and host Utah beat California for the Utes' 17th straight home victory.

Trailing 32-26 with five minutes left before halftime, Utah closed the half on a 14-2 run and didn't trail after the break.

Delon Wright added 16 points for the Utes (20-4, 10-2 Pac-12), while Brandon Taylor had 13.

Tyrone Wallace led Cal (16-10, 6-7) with 26 points and Jabari Bird scored 21.

No. 13 Northern Iowa 68, Missouri State 57: Seth Tuttle

scored 22 points and visiting Northern Iowa matched its season-high with 12 three-pointers to beat Missouri State.

Jeremy Morgan and Deon Mitchell added 11 points apiece in the win for the Panthers (24-2, 13-1 Missouri Valley Conference).

Camryn Boone scored 14 points for Missouri State (9-17, 3-11 MVC), which lost for the 10th time in its last 11 games.

Indiana 90, Minnesota 71: James Blackmon, Jr. had 24 points and seven rebounds to lead host Indiana over Minnesota.

Blackmon was 9-for-14 from the floor, including six three-pointers, tying a career high. Troy Williams and Robert Johnson added 19 points apiece for the Hoosiers (18-8, 8-5 Big Ten).

Andre Hollins finished with 23 points, while Maurice Walker and DeAndre Mathieu scored 12 points apiece for the Gophers (16-10, 5-8), who had a three-game win streak snapped.

Bucknell 78, Army 75: Chris Hass sank five three-pointers and finished with 26 points on 9-for-13 shooting to lift Bucknell over host Army.

Zach Thomas also went 5 of 7 from behind the arc to contribute 17 points and Nana Foulland added 16 points.

Tanner Plomb led the Black Knights with 19 points, Kyle Wilson added 18 and Dylan Cox 15.

Northwestern 66, Iowa 61 (OT): Bryant McIntosh scored 18 points and host Northwestern ended a 10-game losing streak with an overtime victory over Iowa after the Hawkeyes' Jarrod Uthoff nailed a three at the end of regulation.

Tre Demps scored 16 and Alex Olah had 11 points, 13 rebounds and five blocks for the Wildcats (11-14, 2-10).

Uthoff scored a career-high 25 points for Iowa (15-10, 6-6 Big Ten).

Grange rallies for gold in men's slalom

The Associated Press

BEAVER CREEK, Colo. — For the longest time, Jean-Baptiste Grange, of France, absolutely loved this course. Then, he wrecked his knee here.

Now his feelings have flip-flopped again. Funny how a win — a big win at that — can change perceptions.

Skiing into heavy snowfall, Grange won the slalom title Sunday at the world championships after first-run leader Marcel Hirscher of Austria straddled a gate in the deteriorating conditions.

Trailing by 0.88 seconds heading into the final run of the last race, Grange had no trouble with the low visibility and snow sticking to goggles as he finished in a combined time of 1 minute, 57.47 seconds. Fritz Dopfer of Germany was second, 0.35 seconds behind, and teammate Felix Neureuther earned bronze.

Grange finished second in a super-combined race at Beaver Creek in 2007. But in 2009, he injured his right knee, which kept him out of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. Didn't like this course so much anymore.

Just about the time he was returning to his winning ways, taking the 2011 world slalom title in Germany, chronic back pain began to constantly plague him.

So much so that he was actually contemplating retirement as recently as three weeks ago.

Even with Hirscher going out, the Austrians easily won the medal race with nine, which was four more than the Americans.

After Dopfer took over the lead, a local choir group began practicing the German national anthem in a nearby building. In mid tune, though, they impressively switched to the French anthem as Grange took over the top spot with a nearly flawless run.

The 25-year-old Hirscher leaves Beaver Creek with gold in the Alpine combined and team event, along with a silver in the giant slalom.

"In general, it was a super good world championships for me," Hirscher said. "Way more than we were expecting before worlds."

American Ted Ligety wound up 21st, 3.84

seconds behind Grange, as he struggled with the snowy conditions.

"I'm not very psyched on it," Ligety said of his final run. "Came down way out (of the lead) — pretty obvious I'm not going to be happy with that kind of performance."

Still, he finished the championships with gold in the giant slalom and a bronze in Alpine combined.

Entering the race, Dopfer was dealing with back pain. So bad, he couldn't even imagine competing, let alone earning a medal.

"It's a victory just to stand here without any pain," Dopfer said. "To have the silver medal, I cannot believe it at the moment."

Neureuther felt the same way about the bronze. He thought for sure Hirscher would bump him from the podium.

After all, it happened in the giant slalom, when Neureuther fell to fourth.

"You want to win or want to beat the others normally, not when they go out," Neureuther said. "But I'm very happy with a medal today."

Chicago tops Pens in SO

The Associated Press

CHICAGO — Patrick Sharp scored the decisive goal in the shootout as the Chicago Blackhawks beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 2-1 on Sunday.

Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane also scored in the tiebreaker as the Blackhawks earned their second straight win. They have captured six of a possible eight points through the first half of a season-high eight-game homestand.

Nick Spaling scored in the third period for Pittsburgh, which had won four of five. Marc-Andre Fleury made 31 saves through overtime, but was unable to stop any of Chicago's shootout attempts.

Capitals 5, Ducks 3: Alex Ovechkin scored twice in the first period to take over the NHL lead in goals and send visiting Washington to a victory over Anaheim.

Ovechkin also set up two goals by Andre Burakovsky. Marcus Johansson got the go-ahead goal at 3:27 of the second period, and Justin Peters made 30 saves in his ninth start of the season.

Lightning 5, Sharks 2: Steven Stamkos scored his 30th goal of the season in Tampa Bay's win over host San Jose.

Alex Killorn, Ondrej Palat, Cedric Paquette and Ryan Callahan also scored for the Lightning.

Blues 2, Panthers 1 (SO): Jori Lehtera scored the winning goal in the fifth round of a shootout to lift visiting St. Louis over Florida.

Vladimir Tarasenko also scored for St. Louis in the shootout, and Brad Boyes converted for Florida. Lehtera beat Roberto Luongo with a shot between the pads.

Flyers 2, Sabres 1: Michael Raffl and Matt Read scored for Philadelphia against host Buffalo.

Ray Emery made 21 saves as the Flyers ended their two-game skid in the finale of a four-game road trip.

Snedeker tops own record, wins Pebble Beach

The Associated Press

PEBBLE BEACH, Calif. — Coming off the worst season of his career, Brandt Snedeker's mission was to become relevant again. He was eligible for only one major and none of the World Golf Championships, and he hated the idea of the world's best players competing without him.

That's what made Sunday at Pebble Beach so sweet. The view walking up the 18th fairway was spectacular for so many reasons.

Snedeker polished off a week that was close to perfect on the Monterey Peninsula by closing with 5-under 67 for a three-shot victory over Nick Watney. With only one bogey all week — yes, that still gnaws at him — Snedeker broke his own scoring record in the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am.

Once he took the lead for good on the par-5 sixth hole after Watney's worst swing of the week — a 4-iron into Stillwater cover — Snedeker pulled away by leaving the mistakes to everyone else. He finished at 22-under 265, breaking by

two shots the record he set two years ago at Pebble Beach, and by two shots the winning score under par held by Phil Mickelson (2007) and Mark O'Meara (1997).

It was the seventh win of his career, his second title in three years at Pebble Beach, and the timing could not have been better for Snedeker.

He's back in the Masters. The victory moved him to No. 31 in the world, which should put him in all the WGC events, starting with Doral in three weeks.

Jim Furyk, the 54-hole leader, didn't make his first birdie until the 11th hole. He missed three birdie putts inside 10 feet on the front nine, went out in 38, and was out of the hunt halfway through the final round.

Champions Tour: Lee Janzen had a good feeling about his 8-foot putt on the No. 18 hole.

Janzen made the putt, then topped Bart Bryant in a playoff to win the ACE Group Classic on Sunday at TwinEagles Golf Club.

Bryant fought his way back into contention when he shot a 10-under 62 Sunday, tying a course record while Janzen had a 5-under 67.

Both were 16 under in regulation play. However, Bryant struggled in the playoff. After a short drive, he had 178 yards to go on the first playoff hole, No. 18. His second shot hit the railroad ties before bouncing back into the water.

Janzen, with 164 yards to go, put his approach shot on the green. He then two-putted for the victory.

European Tour: Australian Andre Dodt won his second European Tour title by beating countryman Scott Hend and local favorite Thongchai Jaidee by one shot at the Black Mountain Golf Club on Sunday in Hua Hin, Thailand.

With overnight leader Hend, who started the round with a one-stroke lead, and Thongchai struggling on the greens, Dodt produced a bogey-free 67 to seal the victory with a 16-under-par 272.

It was the 29-year-old's second European Tour win after he won in Great Noida, India five years ago.