

# STARS AND STRIPES®

Monday, July 17, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## UN: Afghan civilian casualties hit record high

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — The war in Afghanistan has claimed a record number of civilian lives in the first half of the year partly because of an increase in suicide attacks, the United Nations said Monday.

The U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan documented 1,662 civilian deaths between Jan. 1 and June 30, an increase of 2 percent over the same period last year. The number of civilians injured during that period fell 1 percent, to 3,581.

Deaths in the capital, Kabul, which has historically been one of the safest places in Afghanistan, accounted for some 20 percent of the total tally. That figure highlights the deteriorating security situation in the country, more than 15 years after the U.S.-led invasion that ousted the Taliban.

UNAMA said deaths and injuries from complex attacks killed 259 civilians and injured 892, a 15 percent increase over last year's figures.

The agency's latest report said anti-government groups, such as the Taliban and Islamic State, caused 67 percent of civilian casualties, up 12 percent from last year. Attacks by anti-government groups in which improvised explosives were used were responsible for at least 40 percent of all civilian casualties.

"The human cost of this ugly war in Afghanistan ... loss of life, destruction and immense suffering — is far too high," Tadamichi Yamamoto, the head of the UNAMA, said in a statement. "The continued use of indiscriminate, disproportionate and illegal improvised explosive devices is particularly appalling and must immediately stop."

The report said a massive truck bomb that detonated at the entrance of Kabul's Green Zone on May 31 was one of the "deadliest incidents documented" by the group since 2001. The blast, for which no one has yet claimed responsibility, killed at least 92 civilians and injured nearly 500 others.

UNAMA's report documents a rise in

the number of women and children killed and injured, reversing a decline recorded last year. The report said 174 women were killed and 462 injured in the first six months of 2017, an overall rise in casualty figures of 23 percent on the same period last year. Meanwhile, 436 children were killed and 1,141 others injured, marking a 9 percent increase in child deaths.

UNAMA commended the Afghan security forces for their efforts in reducing civilian casualties from ground engagements by 10 percent. However, it said ground engagements, which are still the second-leading cause of casualties, resulted in 434 confirmed deaths and 1,375 injuries.

The Taliban responded to the UNAMA's report by calling it "partial and in contrast with reality."

"It can be seen that UNAMA has again given preference to politics in this humanitarian issue and has tried to acquit the invaders and their hirelings," the group said in a statement.

## US, Australia focus on combat readiness at Talisman Saber

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
*Stars and Stripes*

SHOALWATER BAY TRAINING AREA, Australia — Australian Army Lt. Benjamin Sloane smiled as he contemplated the similarities — both cultural and tactical — he has with his U.S. military contemporaries taking part in Talisman Saber drills Down Under.

For one thing, he and an American platoon commander learned they both have messy cars and big trucks.

"But in terms of tactics, down to the soldier level, a lot of it is quite similar," said Sloane, a direct-fire weapons support platoon commander from 1st Battalion, 3rd Brigade.

Their differences complement each other nicely, he added.

That concept has been on sharp display since the monthlong joint warfighting exercise kicked off in late June.

Now in its seventh iteration, Talisman Saber takes place in Australia but is planned jointly by the two allies.

The imaginary foe — which enjoys

home-field advantage — has capabilities that mirror those of major military powers such as China and Russia.

The drills mostly take place in the air and at sea, though large portions are held at Queensland's rugged Shoalwater Bay Training Area. Field training will also take place at Mount Bundy Training Area, south of Darwin.

More than 33,000 Australian and American troops are participating in the exercise, which includes simulated cyberoperations, Special Forces, naval and air movements, bombardment, acts of deception, amphibious landings and assaults from the sea and air.

New Zealand, Canada and Japan are also participating this year.

Sloane said the U.S. Marines employ both an anti-armor-specific platoon and a machine-gun-specific platoon, while his soldiers must be well-versed in all organic tank-killing weapons.

"It makes it excellent that we can then augment each other and employ a really devastating effect to the target," he said Thursday at Williamson Airfield while

waiting for the exercise to kick off for his unit. He said they would be working closely with U.S. Marines.

Talisman Saber's substantial ground portion began in earnest with a division force-on-force fight at Shoalwater. The drill is dynamic and ever-changing to reflect real combat, complete with ambushes, roadside bombs and halted troop movements.

Enemy combatants slip in and out of uniform, set up next to hospitals and mosques, and pretend to be refugees as scenarios are thrown at commanders of all levels.

Entire bases have been constructed in the Australian bush to replicate the actual warfighting experience and to facilitate the medical and culinary needs of so many troops.

"This activity is the most advanced major military activity that will be conducted in the world this year," said Australian Army Maj. Gen. Gus McLachlan, controller of the exercise in Shoalwater Bay and the Australian commander of Forces Command. "We're really here to develop interoperability."

## S. Korea proposes talks with the North

BY KIM GAMEL  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea—South Korea's new government proposed talks with the North on easing border tensions and holding family reunions, offering an olive branch despite rising tensions over the communist state's nuclear weapons program.

Seoul wants to hold a meeting Friday at a North Korean building called Tongilgak in the truce village of Panmunjom aimed at halting "all acts of hostility" near the Military Demarcation Line that divides the peninsula, the Defense Ministry said Monday.

He did not specify agenda items nor say who would participate. But officials and experts suggested South Korea would likely raise complaints about propaganda broadcasts and leaflets, while the North could be expected to reiterate its demand for an end to joint U.S.-South Korean war games.

If held, it would be the first high-level talks between the Koreas since December 2015, when the sides met in a failed effort to build on an agreement to end an armed border confrontation in the fall of that year.

Separately, South Korea asked the Red Cross to deliver a proposal to reopen talks on re-

suming reunions during a key fall holiday known as Chuseok for relatives separated by the 1950-53 Korean War.

The acting Red Cross chief, Kim Sun-hyang, said the talks would be held on Aug. 1 at Panmunjom, which is in the buffer zone between the countries.

So far, North Korea has rebuffed overtures from South Korea's new president, Moon Jae-in, with its leader vowing his nation would never put its weapons programs up for negotiations, a day after launching its first intercontinental ballistic missile on July 4.

The two Koreas have largely cut off contact since the latest crisis broke out in January 2016 when the North conducted its fourth nuclear test, which was followed by a fifth in September and dozens of missile tests in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions that ban its use of ballistic technology.

Moon, a liberal former human rights attorney, came to office following a snap election in May, promising a softer approach including restarting humanitarian aid and exchanges, which threatens to put his administration at odds with its U.S. ally.

Moon expressed willingness to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un "anytime, anywhere."

## Jordanian soldier convicted in killing of 3 US troops

*Associated Press*

AMMAN, Jordan — A military court convicted a Jordanian soldier Monday of killing three U.S. military trainers at a Jordanian air base and sentenced him to life in prison with hard labor.

The defendant, 1st Sgt. Marik al-Tuwayha, who pleaded "not guilty," has said he opened fire because he feared the base was coming under attack.

Relatives of two of the slain soldiers sat quietly as the judge announced his ruling to a crowded court.

Some of the relatives of the U.S. troops criticized Jordan's handling of the case and called for the death penalty, saying the maximum sentence in this case, life in prison, was not enough.

The three U.S. Army Green Berets were killed Nov. 4, as their convoy waited at the gate to the al-Jafr base in southern Jordan. Jordan initially said the Americans triggered the shooting by disobeying entry rules, a

claim that was later withdrawn.

The trial "confirmed that the deceased U.S. service members followed all established procedures when accessing the base the day of the incident, as we have noted before," the U.S. Embassy in Jordan said in a statement. "We are reassured to see the perpetrator brought to justice."

The victims were Staff Sgt. Matthew C. Lewellen, 27, of Kirksville, Mo.; Staff Sgt. Kevin J. McEnroe, 30, of Tucson, Ariz.; and Staff Sgt. James F. Moriarty, 27, of Kerrville, Texas.

The military court judge, Col. Mohammed al-Afeef, said at the start of the trial that the defendant had no known ties to militant groups.

The defendant and some of the gate guards testified that they heard what might have been a pistol shot coming from the direction of the U.S. convoy. The defendant said he opened fire because he feared the base was coming under attack.

## US soldier faces murder trial after death of infant son

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY  
*Stars and Stripes*

A staff sergeant with the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade faces trial this week in Germany on charges that he murdered his infant son in 2015.

Staff Sergeant Brian P. Johnston, 37, is accused of causing head trauma and the death of his 2-month-old son, Lukas, by shaking or slamming him down.

Prosecutors alleged in court records that Johnston's actions showed "a wanton disregard"

for the baby's life.

Johnston's civilian lawyer said the baby was likely fatally injured in an accident.

"They loved Lukas," defense counsel Aaron Meyer said of Johnston and his wife, Lauren, in a recent phone interview. "But when you have a child who's dead, someone needs blame."

The baby was in fragile health — diagnosed with Down syndrome, a hole in his heart, eye problems and "failure to thrive," or grow and gain weight, Meyer said.

On the night of his death, the child was being cared for by Johnston while his wife slept, Meyer said. Johnston put Lukas down on an ottoman while he used the bathroom. "Lukas rolled off the ottoman," Meyer said.

The court-martial at U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach is expected to be lengthy.

Prosecution experts will testify about shaken baby syndrome, now often called abusive head trauma, and its markers: brain swelling, bleeding on the surface of the brain and bleed-

ing behind the eyes.

For years, those symptoms have been generally accepted as evidence that a crime has been committed by a caregiver, often male, usually frustrated and angered by the inconsolable crying that infants go through.

An investigation in 2015 by The Washington Post and Northwestern University's Medill Justice Project found some 200 shaken baby cases since 2001 in which charges were dropped, defendants were acquitted or guilty verdicts were overturned on appeal.

# Cyber Command revamp in works

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — After a delay, the Trump administration is finalizing a plan to revamp the military command for cyberoperations in hopes of intensifying America's ability to wage cyberwar against Islamic State and other foes, according to U.S. officials.

Under the plan, U.S. Cyber Command would eventually be split off from the intelligence-focused National Security Agency.

Details are being worked out, but officials say they expect a decision and announcement in coming weeks. The officials weren't authorized to speak publicly on the matter so requested anonymity. The goal, they said, is to give U.S. Cyber Command more autonomy, freeing it from any constraints that stem from working alongside the NSA.

Making cyber an independent command will put the fight in digital space on the same footing as more traditional realms of battle. The move reflects the escalating threat of cyberattacks and intrusions from other nations, terrorist groups and hackers, and comes as the U.S. faces ever-widening fears about Russian hacking following Mos-

cow's efforts to meddle in the 2016 American election.

The U.S. has long operated quietly in cyberspace, using it to collect information, disrupt enemy networks and aid conventional military missions. But as other nations and foes expand their use of cyberspying and attacks, the U.S. is determined to improve its ability to incorporate cyberoperations into its everyday warfighting.

Experts said the command will need time to find its footing.

"Right now I think it's inevitable, but it's on a very slow glide path," said Jim Lewis, a cybersecurity expert with the Center for Strategic and International Studies. But, he added, "A new entity is not going to be able to duplicate NSA's capabilities."

The two highly secretive organizations, based at Fort Meade, Md., have been under the same four-star commander since Cyber Command's creation in 2009.

The Defense Department has been agitating for a separation, perceiving the NSA and intelligence community as resistant to more aggressive cyberwarfare, particularly after ISIS' transformation in recent years from an obscure insurgent force

into an organization holding significant territory across Iraq and Syria and with a worldwide network.

While the military wanted to attack ISIS networks, intelligence objectives prioritized gathering information from them, according to U.S. officials familiar with the debate. They weren't authorized to discuss internal deliberations publicly and requested anonymity.

Then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter sent a plan to President Barack Obama last year to make Cyber Command an independent military headquarters and break it away from the NSA, believing that the agency's desire to collect intelligence was at times preventing the military from eliminating ISIS' ability to raise money, inspire attacks and command its widely dispersed network of fighters.

Carter, at the time, also pushed for the ouster of Adm. Mike Rogers, who still heads both bodies. The Pentagon, he warned, was losing the war in the cyber domain, focusing on cyberthreats from nations such as Iran, Russia and China, rather than on countering the communications and propaganda campaigns of internet-savvy insurgents.

# Afghans retake a key district

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Afghan security forces backed by U.S. air power and Marine Corps advisers retook a key district from the Taliban in Afghanistan's restive Helmand province on Monday after a battle to push the insurgents away from the province's capital, U.S. and Afghan officials said.

Afghan government forces raised the national flag over the central building complex in Nawa district on Monday following a two-day offensive to reclaim the district just south of Lashkar Gah, the Helmand capital, said Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman. He said the district, among the larger towns in central Helmand, was critical to securing Lashkar Gah, a prized target for the Taliban.

The Taliban had held Nawa for about nine months, according to Long Wars Journal, which monitors the war on terrorism. Because of its location along a major north-south thoroughfare into Lashkar Gah, the Taliban used Nawa to stage regular attacks on the city.

Davis said the Afghan forces will now establish security checkpoints throughout the district in an attempt to keep the Taliban away from Lashkar Gah.

Some of the most brutal fighting of the nearly 16-year war in Afghanistan has happened in Helmand province. In recent years, the Taliban has been resurgent throughout the rural regions of the province, which it values largely for its vast opium production, the group's primary source of money. The Islamic group controls six of Helmand's 14 districts and has at least a small presence in six others, according to Long Wars Journal.

Hundreds of American troops have died fighting in Helmand since the post 9/11 invasion in late 2001.

# Foreign-born recruits fear deportation

The Washington Post

Frustrated by delayed promises from the U.S. military for citizenship, and in fear of Islamic State if he were deported to Iraq, Ranj Rafeeq has given up the American Dream.

Rafeeq, 29, was eager as a teenager to translate for U.S. troops stationed in his hometown of Kirkuk in 2005. He immigrated to Portland, Ore., to study seven years later, hoping to don an Army uniform after earning his graduate degree in civil engineering. He signed an enlistment contract in January 2016, with a training date set in September.

But Rafeeq's plans to serve imploded as the Pentagon's program, designed to leverage

medical and language skills of immigrants in exchange for fast-tracked citizenship, was log-jammed with additional security measures for recruits last fall, stressing an overburdened screening process.

The program was put on hold in September 2016, just as he was scheduled to report for training, sparking fear in Rafeeq and across the recruit population that their path to citizenship would end.

Rafeeq's student visa was set to expire Aug. 1. He faced a decision: Wait for the Pentagon's bureaucracy to untangle itself as the Trump administration seeks to expand deportation powers, or flee.

On June 11, Rafeeq went to Vancouver to apply for asylum

in Canada. His biggest fear with deportation is the chance that ISIS militants would prize his capture.

On June 26, the Post first reported on the Defense Department's internal recommendations to shutter the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest program and to cancel the contracts of 1,800 recruits.

About 1,000 of those recruits have waited so long that they have fallen out of legal immigration status. An internal Defense Department memo obtained by the Post acknowledges that canceling these contracts would expose the recruits to deportation. In response, lawmakers urged Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to honor the contracts of those recruits.

# US officials: UAE hacked Qatari news

*The Washington Post*

The United Arab Emirates orchestrated the hacking of Qatari government news and social media sites in order to post incendiary false quotes attributed to Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad al-Thani, in late May that sparked the ongoing upheaval between Qatar and its neighbors, according to U.S. intelligence officials.

Officials became aware last week that newly analyzed information gathered by U.S. intelligence agencies confirmed that on May 23, senior members of the UAE government discussed the plan and its implementation. The officials said it remains unclear whether the UAE carried out the hacks itself or contracted to have them done. The false reports said that the emir said among other

things that Iran is an "Islamic power" and praised Hamas.

The hacks and posting took place on May 24, shortly after President Donald Trump completed a lengthy counterterrorism meeting with Persian Gulf leaders in neighboring Saudi Arabia and declared them unified.

Citing the emir's reported comments, the Saudis, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt immediately banned all Qatari media. They then broke relations with Qatar and declared a trade and diplomatic boycott, sending the region into a political and diplomatic tailspin that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has warned could undermine U.S. counterterrorism efforts against Islamic State.

In a statement released in Washington by its ambassador, Yousef al-Otaiba, the UAE said

the Post story was "false."

"The UAE had no role whatsoever in the alleged hacking described in the article," the statement said. "What is true is Qatar's behavior. Funding, supporting, and enabling extremists from the Taliban to Hamas and Qadafi. Inciting violence, encouraging radicalization, and undermining the stability of its neighbors."

The revelations come as emails purportedly hacked from Otaiba's private account have circulated to journalists over the past several months. That hack has been claimed by an apparently pro-Qatari organization calling itself GlobalLeaks. Many of the emails highlight the UAE's determination over the years to rally Washington thinkers and policymakers to its side on the issues at the center of its dispute

with Qatar.

All of the Persian Gulf nations are members of the U.S.-led counter-ISIS coalition. More than 10,000 U.S. troops are based at Qatar's Al Udeid Air Base, the U.S. Central Command's regional headquarters, and Bahrain is the home of the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet. All are purchasers of U.S. defense equipment and tied to American foreign policy priorities in numerous ways.

The conflict has exposed sharp differences between Trump—who has clearly taken the Saudi and UAE side in a series of tweets and statements—and Tillerson, who has urged compromise and spent most of last week in so far unsuccessful shuttle diplomacy among the regional capitals.

## Afghan robotics team reaches DC competition

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — With two words — "Team Afghanistan" — the crowd assembled in the stands at DAR Constitution Hall erupted into a deafening roar Sunday as the teenaged girls made their way onto a sprawling stage, waving their country's flag and donning head scarves in matching colors. Their triumphant entrance on the stage Sunday at the FIRST Global Robotics Challenge marked the end of a long and uncertain journey to the U.S. As of last week, their dream of traveling to what has been billed as the "Olympics of Robotics" had been shot down when their visas were denied, despite two grueling trips from their home in Herat to Kabul for interviews with the U.S. State Department.

After their plight made international headlines, President Donald Trump intervened at the last minute to grant the girls passage to the U.S., and

they arrived Saturday.

The three-day competition draws teams from 157 countries — and some multinational teams representing continents. One group — Team Hope — is composed of refugees. FIRST has long hosted competitions in the U.S., but this is the first year it is hosting an international competition. The team representing the U.S. is composed of three girls, who marched into the auditorium for the parade of nations to the Woody Guthrie song "This Land is Your Land."

The international nature of the competition came with complications. Besides the girls from Afghanistan, the team from Gambia also had issues with their visas, according to The Associated Press, before their applications were also ultimately approved. Because of sanctions, Global FIRST was unable to ship a robotics kit to Iran, where a group of teenagers was awaiting the parts to build a robot.

## Flash flooding kills 9 at Arizona swimming hole

*Associated Press*

TONTO NATIONAL FOREST, Ariz. — Adults, teens and children as young as 2 were enjoying a summer afternoon by cooling off in an Arizona creek when the gentle waters turned deadly.

The group from the Phoenix and Flagstaff areas had met Saturday for a day trip along a popular swimming hole near Payson, about 100 miles northeast of the capital. They set up lounge chairs not knowing an intense thunderstorm was dumping heavy rainfall just upstream in the Tonto National Forest.

The storm unleashed 6-foot-high floodwaters, dark with ash from a summer wildfire, onto the unsuspecting family and friends. The torrent carried away tree branches and other debris and left a wake of nine bodies.

Search-and-rescue crews, including 40 people on foot and others in a helicopter, recovered the bodies of five children

and four adults, some as far as 2 miles down the river. Authorities did not identify them.

A 13-year-old boy from the same group was still missing Sunday.

Disa Alexander was hiking to the swimming area where Ellison Creek and East Verde River converge when the water suddenly surged.

Video she posted to social media showed torrents of water surging through jagged canyons carved in Arizona's signature red rock.

"I could have just died!" Alexander exclaimed on the video.

She spotted a man holding a baby and clinging to a tree. Nearby, his wife was also in a tree. A boy Alexander described as the couple's son was on the rocks above the water.

Had they been swept downstream, they would have been sent over a 20-foot waterfall, Alexander said.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Police: Passenger in car slashed throat of driver

**ND** FARGO — Fargo police said a man is accused of slashing the throat of a driver who gave him a ride.

Sgt. Matt Ystebo told KFGO that as the victim and a passenger were leaving a bar early Saturday morning, they picked up a man who wanted a ride.

Police said the attack happened just two blocks away. An off-duty officer saw the car swerve, thinking it probably was an intoxicated driver.

Two officers arriving on scene found the injured driver and the passenger. Police said the suspect was in the backseat with a knife believed to have been used to attack the driver.

Police said the victim's injury is not life-threatening.

### Former grocery worker jailed in fraud case

**CT** HARTFORD — A former employee at a Connecticut grocery store has been sentenced to 2½ years in prison for his role in a \$3 million food stamp fraud scheme.

The Republican-American reported that Tallat Mahmood, of Waterbury, pleaded guilty to unlawful use of food stamp benefits in federal court. In addition to his prison term, he was ordered to pay \$1.5 million in restitution.

A federal agent, with help from an informant, went undercover for nearly two years to document Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program fraud at the W.B. Trade Fair Supermarket.

Authorities said store employees, including Mahmood, illegally allowed customers to swap their food stamps for cigarettes and glass smoking pipes.

### Agency says 103 geese rounded up, euthanized

**VA** VIRGINIA BEACH — Federal wildlife officials said more than 100 geese have been euthanized after a roundup in a Virginia city.

The Virginian-Pilot reported the roundup earlier this month followed Virginia Beach waterfront residents' petition of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to remove the geese after nonlethal methods like "no feeding" signs failed to shrink the population.

U.S. Rep. Scott Taylor said in a statement Wednesday that both constituents and City of Virginia Beach officials have expressed concern over the lack of transparency and communication surrounding the incident.

USDA Wildlife Services assistant state director Jennifer Cromwell said the process is a last resort for areas dealing with overwhelming numbers of geese.

### Man accused of selling heroin from tattoo shop

**WA** OLYMPIA — A Lacey man has been accused of selling heroin from his downtown Olympia tattoo shop.

The Olympian reported Travis Jackson, 38, was arrested Thursday on suspicion of selling the drug from Forever Tattoo World.

Police said Jackson told officers that he used and sold narcotics from his business on a routine basis.

The Thurston County Narcotics Task Force began investigating Jackson in February after a confidential source reported that Jackson was selling heroin out of the business.

Court documents say that in late February, the confidential

source set up a time to purchase heroin from Jackson and bought it for \$100.

### Cow escapes after vet visit, runs through city

**MT** HELENA — A cow that escaped her owner after a visit to the veterinarian ambled through Helena on Thursday afternoon, startling golfers and disrupting late-afternoon traffic before disappearing west of town.

Police said the brown cow, named Goofy, escaped, along with three others near Capital High School. Three were corralled quickly, but Goofy made a break for the front nine of the Bill Roberts Golf Course. Course employees and Animal Control officers were unable to corral her.

She was pursued by people on golf carts through residential areas before she ended up on Euclid Avenue, causing some traffic concerns. Police Sgt. Jayson Zander said the cow continued west out of the city.

### Harvesting equipment falls on man, kills him

**MI** BRADY TOWNSHIP — A 67-year-old man died after being pinned beneath part of a harvesting combine in mid-Michigan.

MLive.com reported that the man was part of a group buying the farm equipment from a private seller Friday morning in Brady Township, southwest of Saginaw.

The victim went beneath the combine to help dismantle it for easier transport when the machine's detachable head fell onto him. A tractor was needed to lift the combine head so the man could be pulled free.

He was airlifted to a hospital, but he later died. His name has not been released.

### Stuntman for 'Walking Dead' dies after a fall

**GA** ATLANTA — A coroner said a stuntman for "The Walking Dead" died from injuries suffered in a fall on the Georgia set of the hit television show.

Coweta County Coroner Richard Hawk confirmed Friday that John Bernecker, 33, died about 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at an Atlanta hospital. Bernecker fell earlier Wednesday on the show's set in Senoia, about 35 miles south of Atlanta.

Hawk said Bernecker died from blunt force trauma and that his death is considered accidental.

"The Walking Dead," the AMC show that chronicles the lives of people fighting to survive a zombie apocalypse, is filming its eighth season.

### Tree crashes onto 250-year-old home

**MA** LONGMEADOW — A tree crashed onto the roof of a 250-year-old home after heavy storms in Massachusetts.

WGGB-TV reported the owner had just spent \$100,000 on renovations on the home in Longmeadow's historic Town Green area.

Melissa Ledoux said she wanted to get the tree removed, but it's on her neighbor's property. The neighbor's house is up for sale, and Ledoux said a real estate agent told her nothing could be done about the tree until that home was sold.

From wire reports

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# NBA stars clustering in West

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — As star after star headed West this summer either in free agency or via trade, Los Angeles Clippers coach Doc Rivers became more and more bewildered.

“I think Gordon Hayward’s the smartest one. He got out of town,” Rivers said, referring to the All-Star’s move from Utah to Boston. “He went to the East. I really don’t understand the logic of this. It is what it is. It’s just going to be a harder conference, if that’s possible.”

Paul George, Jimmy Butler and Paul Millsap were all All-Stars in the Eastern Conference last season who will play in the West next season. Chris Paul chose to leave the Clippers, but stayed in the West to join James Harden in Houston and important role players like Jeff Teague, P.J. Tucker and Patrick Patterson all left teams in the East to come West for a run at the Golden State Warriors.

Rather than running from the Warriors, who burned down the league last season and seemed poised to dominate with four All-Stars all in their prime, most teams out West are running right into the fire.

“The other way, that’s a defeatist attitude,” Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. “How long can you wait? I don’t know if Kevin Durant, Steph Curry, Klay and those guys are going anywhere for a while. You just can’t go into hibernation, wake up and say, ‘OK, it’s our time.’ We compete.”

One of the most common measurements of a single player’s impact on a team’s overall success is win shares — an analytic that estimates the number of wins a player produces for his team. Using that as a guide, calculated by the research site basketball-reference.com, the Western Conference has added 174.5 win shares to its roster this summer. That number takes into account free agent signings, like Millsap leaving Atlanta for Denver, the major trades of George from Indiana to Oklahoma City and Butler to Minnesota, and the re-signings

of players including Stephen Curry and Kevin Durant with Golden State.

The Eastern Conference, by contrast, added 127.6 win shares by Friday afternoon. Hayward was the lone bankable star to move from the West to the East, while Kyle Lowry re-signed with Toronto and Otto Porter stayed with Washington on a new four-year, \$110 million deal.

For more than two decades the Western Conference has lorded over the East in terms of talent disparity. Next year figures to be a bigger gap than ever before.

“You would think with all the picks that the East has had over the last 15 years, but they draft a great guy and he comes West,” Rivers said. “So I don’t know what’s going on. Growing up it was the exact opposite. It was the East and the Lakers when I was a kid. Now it’s the West and a couple of teams. It’s just a period we’re going through I guess. I hope it stops.”

Two years ago, the league explored the idea of changing the playoff format to seed teams 1-16 regardless of conference. But concerns about excessive travel and the fact that the team records were often skewed by the level of competition they most often faced in the regular season led the NBA to stick with the status quo.

On Wednesday, NBA commissioner Adam Silver did not rule out revisiting the issue again down the road.

“I think many of us felt a 1-16 playoff made more sense,” Silver said, referring to the committee discussions two years ago. “And maybe there’s also the potential, it’s in some ways a separate issue, should you reseed after every round as some leagues do? I think those are the things we’ll continue to look at, but it’s not at the top of the agenda right now.”

Rockets GM Daryl Morey joked on Twitter that his front office full of deep thinkers were combing the Collective Bargaining Agreement for a clause that would allow them to relocate to the Eastern Confer-

ence. But rather than lament their geography, the Rockets, Timberwolves, Nuggets and Thunder all made major moves to try to catch the Warriors.

“It’s a weapons race in the NBA and you’re either in the weapons race or on the sidelines,” Morey said in June after acquiring Paul from the Clippers.

Rivers and GM Lawrence Frank could have shifted into rebuilding mode after losing Paul in hopes of resurfacing when the Warriors started to decline.

Instead, they landed versatile forward Danilo Gallinari from Denver, re-signed Blake Griffin and turned Paul’s decision to join the Rockets into an opportunity for a sign-and-trade with Houston that netted them Patrick Beverley, Lou Williams, Montrezl Harrell and Sam Dekker. They also signed flashy European point guard Milos Teodosic to try to prevent bottoming out.

J.J. Redick surveyed the landscape before making his decision to move from the Clippers to the emerging Philadelphia 76ers. And while he said he did not want to make any knee-jerk reactions to what he called “a drastic change in the talent pool of each conference,” seeing an easier path to the playoffs out East did play a small role in taking a one-year, \$23 million deal.

The East is not barren, of course. The best player in the world still resides in Cleveland. Hayward joins a talented Celtics team that made the Eastern Conference finals last season and also added No. 3 overall pick Jayson Tatum in the draft, Toronto returns its proud core for another run, Washington has one of the best backcourts in the league with John Wall and Bradley Beal and Milwaukee’s Giannis Antetokounmpo gets better every season.

“The East has definitely changed a lot since the end of the season,” Sixers president of basketball operations Bryan Colangelo said. “I think what’s on the horizon is a lot of unknowns right now.”

## Summer league LA reaches title game; Ball injured

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Lonzo Ball’s bid for a third straight triple-double was short-circuited by a calf injury. The lead he helped the Los Angeles Lakers build while he was in the game proved to be just enough to top Dennis Smith Jr. and the Dallas Mavericks.

Ball had 16 points and 10 assists in 21 minutes before leaving with a strained right calf, and the Lakers held on for a 108-98 victory in the Las Vegas Summer League semifinals on Sunday night.

Kyle Kuzma scored 24 points, Matt Thomas had 20 and Vander Blue added 17 to help the Lakers reach the championship game. They will face the Portland Trail Blazers, who beat Memphis 87-82 in the other semifinal, on Monday night.

Smith scored 21 points on 7-for-13 shooting for the Mavericks, who trailed by as many as 26 points in the second half before mounting a huge comeback in the fourth quarter. Yogi Ferrell added 15 points and Dorian Finney-Smith and Brandon Ashley each had 13.

Ball’s injury took a little of the edge away from an anticipated matchup of two rookie point guards who have excelled in Vegas. Ball was drafted second overall and Dennis Smith was taken ninth. Both have been cast as the future faces of their respective franchises, and both have made strong first impressions in summer league play.

**Trail Blazers 87, Grizzlies 82:** Jarnell Stokes had 22 points and 15 rebounds to lead Portland over Memphis in the first semifinal on Sunday night.

Caleb Swanigan continued his strong summer league with 15 points and 11 rebounds for the Blazers, who trailed by 16 points in the first half before rallying to overtake the Grizzlies in the second half.

# Quintana shines in Cubs debut

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Jose Quintana is well aware of the lofty expectations that came with his trade to the Chicago Cubs.

He certainly dazzled his new teammates in his debut.

Quintana struck out a season-high 12 in seven sharp innings and the Cubs beat the Baltimore Orioles 8-0 Sunday for a three-game sweep.

“It was my first outing with the Cubs, but after the first inning, I felt really good,” Quintana said. “I threw everything in the first inning and just focused on making quick outs.”

Acquired by the defending World Series champions during the All-Star break from the Chicago White Sox for a playoff push, Quintana gave the Cubs exactly the kind of boost they hoped to get.

“It could really be a big boon to us, there’s no question,” Chicago manager Joe Maddon said. “Everybody else saw it.”

The lefty ace allowed three hits, walked none and joined Matt Garza as the only pitchers in

Cubs history to fan 12 in their debut.

Kris Bryant and Anthony Rizzo homered to help the Cubs move over .500 for the first time since June 29. The Cubs hit 10 home runs during the sweep at Camden Yards.

Chicago took advantage of another wild start by Ubaldo Jimenez (4-5) and opened a 4-0 lead in the second. Willson Contreras added a career-high four hits.

The Cubs traded their top two prospects, outfielder Eloy Jimenez and right-hander Dylan Cease, along with infielders Matt Rose and Bryant Flete, to get Quintana. He was 4-8 with a 4.49 ERA for the White Sox.

Chicago began the day 5½ games behind in the races for the NL Central and second wildcard spot.

“We’re playing a world champion team that everyone knew was going to get going at some point,” Orioles manager Buck Showalter said. “Unfortunately, they started here. They’re on the top of their game. They have a lot of good pieces. We were not up to the challenge.”

# BoSox, Yanks split DH

Associated Press

BOSTON — Major league home run leader Aaron Judge hit a towering fly ball toward the triangle in Fenway Park’s center field, and Jackie Bradley Jr. began drifting over toward the bullpen wall.

That’s when Red Sox right fielder Mookie Betts knew.

“Jackie does this little thing where, midway, while the ball is in the air, he starts timing it,” said Betts, who hit a two-run homer and also scored Boston’s third run on Sunday night to help the Red Sox win 3-0 and split their doubleheader with the New York Yankees.

“Once I saw him start timing it, I figured he had a chance to catch it. He made it look easy,” said Betts, who had three hits in the night game. “It made the hair stand up on my arms.”

David Price (5-2) struck out eight in eight innings, and Bradley went over the bullpen wall to rob Judge and send the Yankees to their first shutout of the season.

A day after the teams played 16 innings over 5 hours, 50 minutes, they spent another long day at Fenway Park and ended the four-game series the way they started: with the Yankees trailing the first-place Red Sox by 3½ games in the AL East.

CC Sabathia allowed two hits over six innings in the opener, and Didi Gregorius hit a solo home run to give New York a 3-0 victory.

It was also 3-0 in the nightcap when Judge came up with a runner on first and launched one toward the 420-foot marker in center. Bradley stalked it, and at the last moment leaped against the wall that juts out from right-center to pull the ball in.

“I just hit it to the wrong part of the park and the wrong center fielder,” said Judge, who failed to reach base for the first time in 43 games. “Jackie’s been making plays like that for a long time.”

## Roundup

# Streaking Dodgers edge Marlins

Associated Press

MIAMI — The Los Angeles Dodgers had all three Miami Marlins outfielders leaping for the ball at the wall, and only Justin Turner managed to clear it.

Turner homered and also singled to increase his batting average to .374, and the Dodgers extended their winning streak to nine games Sunday by beating Miami 3-2.

It was the Dodgers’ fourth one-run win of their streak.

**Nationals 14, Reds 4:** Daniel Murphy hit two of visiting Washington’s five home runs and had five RBIs.

**Tigers 6, Blue Jays 5:** Miguel Cabrera walked with the bases loaded in the 11th inning Sunday, giving host Detroit a victory.

**Rockies 13, Mets 4:** Ian Desmond provided instant spark for slumping Colorado in his return from the disabled list, and Nolan Arenado hit one of the visiting Rockies’ three homers.

**Braves 7, Diamondbacks 1:** Matt Kemp hit a three-run homer and Brandon Phillips

doubled three times as host Atlanta completed a three-game sweep and sent Arizona to its season-high fifth straight loss.

**Pirates 4, Cardinals 3:** Adam Frazier’s game-ending single capped a two-run rally for host Pittsburgh in the ninth against Brett Cecil (1-3), who also gave up Jordy Mercer’s RBI double.

**Mariners 7, White Sox 6:** Nelson Cruz homered on a 3-0 pitch from Chris Beck (1-1) leading off the 10th inning, his 19th home run this season, as Seattle overcame a 5-0 deficit and won its fourth straight. Host Chicago has lost four in a row.

**Astros 5, Twins 3:** Mike Fiers (6-4) struck out a season-high 11 over seven innings, while allowing two runs and four hits. Nori Aoki had two hits and two RBIs for host Houston.

Kyle Gibson (5-8) yielded four runs and six hits.

**Phillies 5, Brewers 2:** At Milwaukee, rookie Nick Williams hit his first career grand slam — on lefty reliever Tyler Webb’s first pitch since he was acquired Thursday from the Yankees for minor league first

baseman Garrett Cooper. Williams homered off Webb last month in the minors.

**Royals 4, Rangers 3:** Texas right fielder Shin-Soo Choo lost Lorenzo Cain’s routine fly in the sun, and the ball glanced off his glove for a tiebreaking RBI single with two outs in the ninth as host Kansas City stopped a five-game losing streak overall and a 12-game skid against Texas.

**Angels 4, Rays 3:** Pinch-hitter C.J. Cron connected for a tiebreaking, two-run homer in the eighth off Adam Kolarek after Andrelton Simmons singled against Jumbo Diaz (1-4) to lead host Los Angeles.

**Athletics 7, Indians 3:** Cleveland starter Trevor Bauer got just two outs in a four-run first inning and matched the shortest start of his big league career as host Oakland completed a surprising three-game sweep.

**Padres 7, Giants 1:** Hector Sanchez and Corey Spangenberg each hit a three-run home run off Jeff Samardzija (4-11), who allowed seven runs and nine hits in six innings for visiting San Francisco.

# Hamlin ends Gibbs' rut with NH win

Associated Press

LOUDON, N.H. — Joe Gibbs Racing has undergone an unexpected upheaval that forced the organization into a youth movement.

The biggest surprise, though, was going 0 for 2017.

Denny Hamlin ended that rut with the kind of finish down the stretch that showed that — yes, the new generation may be on the way — but the JGR lynchpin still knows how to win.

Hamlin held off Kyle Larson over the final laps Sunday at New Hampshire Motor Speedway to send Gibbs to its first victory of the season.

One of the top organizations in NASCAR, JGR had yet to have any of its four drivers win until Hamlin took the lead with 33 laps left and held off the hard-charging Larson on the final lap.

Hamlin needed his 30th career Cup victory to secure a berth in NASCAR's version of the postseason and end a winless streak that stretched to last September at Richmond.

"Definitely needed a win for the organization, for myself," Hamlin said.

He'll take the checkered flag — just hold the nutcracker.

Hamlin, who has a Cup win in each of his 12 seasons, gave

everyone a laugh when he scampered away from the lobster traditionally awarded to the winner in Victory Lane.

"I have a lobster phobia," he said.

Larson had a sensational run from the rear of the field, where he was forced to start because he failed inspection after he won the pole. Larson lost his points lead last week and his crew chief was suspended after failing a post-race inspection at Kentucky.

Hamlin crashed the No. 11 Toyota in practice and was forced to race in a backup car. It seemed to suit him just fine at New Hampshire.

Martin Truex Jr., was third, followed by Matt Kenseth and Kevin Harvick.

JGR won seven of the first 12 races last season and Carl Edwards was 10 laps away from a possible championship when he crashed out in the finale. Daniel Suarez replaced Edwards this season, and Hamlin, Kenseth and Kyle Busch have made strong runs at the checkered flag, they just couldn't find the winning formula until New Hampshire.

"It's not from a lack of trying," Hamlin said.

JGR also announced this week that Erik Jones would replace two-time Daytona 500

champion Kenseth in the No. 20 next season. With Hamlin sending the crowd into a frenzy by burning the tires down, Sunday was simply a reason for the organization to celebrate.

Jones and Suarez will soon be expected to carry the load into the next decade once Busch and the 36-year-old Hamlin finish their careers.

"They're going to be there long after I'm gone," Hamlin said. "They'll be the team leaders. You just try and set an example for them. Show the work ethic that it takes to be a winner on a weekly basis. Hopefully, that infectious-type atmosphere bleeds into them and they lead the team after we're gone."

Larson was second and nearly caught Hamlin — after a trying week where NASCAR caught Larson's Chip Ganassi team trying to tinker a bit too much outside the rule book on the No. 42 Chevrolet.

Larson's team was penalized 35 points this week, erasing what had been a one-point advantage over Truex in the driver standings. Truex, who led 137 laps, leads the standings by 38 points over Larson.

Larson's pole-winning time was disallowed because of an unapproved rear deck fin lid.

"NASCAR's kept a closer eye

on our team, in particular," Larson said. "Had to go to the back. I don't think that really affected us which I think is a good thing. The little stuff we got in trouble for so far hasn't affected our performance. We've got to keep working hard on the areas on our race car that are legal and find more speed that way."

Here are other items of note from New Hampshire:

**Logano out:** Joey Logano's miserable stretch continued on his home track. Logano, who needs a win or a string of strong finishes to make NASCAR's playoffs, was forced off the track on the third stage because of a suspension issue. NASCAR seized a rear suspension part with the No. 22 Ford in the garage. He finished 37th.

The Connecticut driver reeled off six top-five finishes in the first nine races that included a win at Richmond. The win did not count toward the playoffs because of rules violations. Logano has posted just two top-10 finishes over the last 10 races and this was the fifth time he finished 25th or worse.

**Almirola's return:** Aric Almirola finished 24th in his first race since he suffered a fractured vertebra during a fiery multi-car wreck May 13 at Kanas Speedway.

## Newgarden earns another victory in Toronto

Associated Press

TORONTO—Josef Newgarden had some fun at hometown star James Hinchcliffe's expense in the Honda Indy Toronto.

"I love beating Hinch in Canada," Newgarden said.

Newgarden raced to his second Toronto victory in three years Sunday, dominating on the streets surrounding Exhibition Place. Hinchcliffe was third behind Alexander Rossi.

"I love Hinch. He's a great representative, but this is so good," Newgarden said.

Newgarden came out in front on Lap 25 after a crash by Tony Kanaan caused a caution and maintained an advantage of over two seconds for the majority of the rest of the race. The 26-year-old Tennessee driver has five career victories, also winning in

Alabama in April. He gave Team Penske its 193rd victory, the most of any team.

"I think that is twice I have had good calls and got into the pits at the right time," Newgarden said. "Thank you to the guys and thank you to Tim (Cindric) for making that call. We got it right, but it was all about managing the race after that. I thought we had a very fast car, we got a pretty good start, and stayed out of the mayhem. Very, very happy for all of Team Penske."

Rossi had his first podium finish of the year and best result since winning the 2016 Indianapolis 500.

"It's been a long time coming, looking for that first podium and hopefully it can be a foundation to go into more wins," Rossi said. "At least we finally kind of got the monkey off our back. It was a huge turn around overnight by Andretti Autosport to

get this car to where it needed to be."

Hinchcliffe was third for the second straight year.

"We were catching Alex and Josef in that last stint," Hinchcliffe said. "The car really came alive on the blacks so big thanks to Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, all the guys — great stops — and all the fans in Toronto. I mean the support that we feel each and every year is amazing."

Marco Andretti was fourth, followed by Simon Pagenaud, Ryan Hunter-Reay, Max Chilton, Helio Castroneves, Graham Rahal and series leader Scott Dixon.

Kanaan had his brakes lock up while leaving the pits and connected with the protective tires in Turn 1. The caution caused the top-three cars of Castroneves, Pagenaud and Rahal to fall back.