

STARS AND STRIPES®

Friday, July 21, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

ISIS puts up stiff resistance in Raqqa

Associated Press

KOBANI, Syria — Advances against Islamic State in its stronghold in the Syrian city of Raqqa have slowed down amid stiff resistance from the militants, said the spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition fighting the group.

U.S. Army Col. Ryan Dillon estimates there are around 2,000 ISIS militants in the northern city, saying they are using civilians and children as human shields.

“We know this is not going to be an easy fight,” Dillon told The Associated Press in a phone interview on Thursday night.

The U.S. has partnered with the Kurdish-dominated coalition fighting force known as the Syrian Democratic Forces in its fight against ISIS in Syria.

In the seven weeks since they launched their offensive

for Raqqa, they have encircled the militants and breached the heavily fortified Old City, gaining a foothold inside.

Dillon said the Kurdish-led forces are still making steady advances, but acknowledged a slower pace than the first two weeks of the operation, which saw quick and immediate progress. He said the distance between the SDF forces on the eastern side of the city and on the western fronts is now 1.2 miles.

Dillon said ISIS militants are using many of the tactics employed in the Iraqi city of Mosul, including the use of tunnel networks, vehicle-borne IEDs and drones.

But he said that in Raqqa, more than in Mosul, the militant group relies more on using civilians, sometimes children, to prevent coalition forces from striking specific areas in the city.

“We know that it is not going to be an overnight success, but the coalition and the SDF will continue to push forward and will be victorious,” he said.

Dillon also said the coalition is concerned about Turkish shelling and threats to launch a cross-border operation into Afrin, a Kurdish-controlled enclave in western Syria near the border with Turkey, saying the SDF should remain focused on defeating ISIS in Raqqa.

He said, however, that the Raqqa campaign has so far not been affected. “As far as we know, the same amount of forces that were dedicated to defeating IS in Raqqa from the beginning has sustained and has stayed the same,” he said, using an alternate acronym for ISIS.

Also in Syria on Friday, in the rebel-held northwestern province of Idlib, fighting between two of Syria’s strongest

military groups spread, with al-Qaida-linked fighters trying to capture a main border crossing point with Turkey.

Friday’s fighting between the ultraconservative Ahrar al-Sham and al-Qaida-linked Hay’at Tahrir al Sham — Arabic for Levant Liberation Committee — which also is known as HTS, focused on the Bab al-Hawa crossing.

HTS, a coalition of several insurgent groups, suffered a blow a day earlier after the powerful Nour el-Din el-Zinki faction withdrew in protest against the fighting with Ahrar al-Sham.

Ahrar al-Sham’s top commander, Ali al-Omar, said in a video released Friday that attacks by HTS are “an aggression against the Syrian revolution,” warning that the hand that will try to harm the anti-government revolution “will be amputated.”

Members of Afghan forces killed in US airstrike

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The United States said Friday that an airstrike in Afghanistan’s southern Helmand province killed an unspecified number of Afghan security forces. The provincial governor confirmed the deaths, saying at least two commanders were among those killed, but the final death count was not immediately known.

The Department of Defense said the U.S. was supporting Afghan troops, who were carrying out an operation against the Taliban in the province’s Gereshk district, when the bombing took place.

“We would like to express our deepest condolences to the

families affected by this unfortunate incident,” the statement said. “During a U.S. supported ANDSF (Afghan National Defense Security Force) operation, aerial fires resulted in the deaths of the friendly Afghan forces who were gathered in a compound.”

Helmand provincial Gov. Hayatullah Hayat said the NATO airstrike hit on Friday and that at least two Afghan commanders died.

He added that the death toll was expected to rise further because several security force personnel were known to have been in the compound at the time.

Hayat also said many of the

security forces were not in uniform, which may have caused some confusion about their identities.

The incident was still under investigation, he said.

While much of Helmand province is under the control of the Taliban, the Afghan national security forces have been waging fierce battles to retake territory. NATO and U.S. troops are in Helmand to assist the Afghan troops.

Elsewhere in Afghanistan, an insurgent attack in western Ghor province killed four police officers and wounded seven.

Mohammad Mustafa Moseni, Ghor’s provincial police chief, said Friday that the Taliban at-

tacked police compounds in the provincial districts of Taywara and Pasaband, considered key to the security of the provincial capital.

The attacks, which occurred overnight, resulted in a four-hour gunbattle in which 24 Taliban were killed, said Moseni.

In northern Baghlan province, fighting has raged for days on a key highway linking several northern provinces to the capital of Kabul. Hospital officials said eight local police and two civilians died earlier this week in one incident.

Deputy provincial police Chief Said Amir Gul Hussainkhil said the fighting is continuing but it is sporadic.

La.-based unit deploying to Iraq this year

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — About 2,100 soldiers from Fort Polk in Louisiana will deploy to Iraq later this year to take over the mission to train and advise Iraqi security forces fighting Islamic State militants following the fall of Mosul, the Army announced Thursday.

The soldiers with the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division will replace the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division in the fall in a regular rotation of troops, according to an Army news release. The 82nd Airborne's 2nd Brigade has spent

about seven months in Iraq, advising the Iraqi forces as they faced the toughest portion of the battle for Mosul, once ISIS' capital in Iraq.

The Iraqi government declared victory over ISIS in Mosul, the country's second largest city, on July 10, but reports of some fighting against remnants of the terrorist group there continued through Thursday. The U.S.-led Operation Inherent Resolve coalition reported a pair of airstrikes on ISIS targets around the city on Wednesday.

Once Mosul is fully cleared of ISIS, the Iraqi forces still have several battles left to eliminate the militants from their

country. The United States has pledged to leave its forces in Iraq and support the country's security forces throughout those fights.

That likely means 3rd Brigade soldiers could aid the Iraqis as they work to clear the ISIS-held towns of Tal Afar, about 40 miles west of Mosul; Hawijah in northern Iraq and al-Qaim, along the Euphrates River at the Syrian border.

The 3rd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division soldiers have been training for several months in preparation for the rotation, said Maj. Gen. Walter E. Piatt, the division's commander. The training included a monthlong operation at Fort Polk's Joint

Readiness Training Center.

The United States acknowledges having about 5,200 troops officially deployed to Iraq, but officials have said hundreds more are in the country at any given time on temporary assignments.

Army Gen. Stephen Townsend, the Operation Inherent Resolve coalition commander, said July 11 that he anticipates the United States will maintain its military footprint in Iraq through ISIS' defeat. He added the Pentagon is in talks with the Iraqi government about keeping some troops in the country after ISIS is eliminated.

Senate takes up bill on vets' education benefits

By NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — One week after a sweeping expansion of veterans' education benefits was introduced in the House and fast-tracked to a vote, an identical bill was introduced Thursday in the Senate.

The legislation eliminates the 15-year limit afforded veterans to use their education benefits after leaving military service. It also restores benefits to veterans whose schools abruptly close and boosts aid for dependents, Purple Heart recipients, technical education and members of the National Guard and Reserve.

The bill also fixes a Pentagon deployment authorization that has kept about 5,000 reservists and guardsmen from accumulating education benefits.

Altogether, it combines 18 bills and is expected to increase GI Bill costs by \$3 billion in 10 years.

The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs voted unanimously Wednesday to send the bill to the House floor. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., said he would schedule it for a vote next week, with the aim to pass it before a monthlong August recess.

The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee will vote on the legislation Wednesday and won't consider any amendments, committee staff said. If the committee approves

the bill, it would then have to be scheduled for a vote on the Senate floor.

Senators are leaving for their recess two weeks into August, a decision announced by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell on July 11.

Will Hubbard, vice president of government affairs for Student Veterans of America, said the Senate adopting the House's version of the legislation — instead of drafting their own, with deviations — signaled the potential for quick action on the bill in that chamber and the ability to get it to President Donald Trump to sign into law faster.

"It's exciting. This scenario being the case indicates that the Senate and the House are now both looking at swift passage," Hubbard said.

Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., and Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., the chairman and ranking Democrat on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, are the lead sponsors on the bill, S. 1598. Like in the House, a bipartisan group of lawmakers have signed onto it. As of Thursday afternoon, there were 38 cosponsors.

"We have worked closely with our partners in the veterans community and with our colleagues in the House to ensure this legislation makes the necessary changes to improve the GI Bill and helps veterans succeed in their desired career field," Isakson said in a prepared statement.

"I am proud to introduce this important legislation with Sen. Tester after the House introduced its companion legislation last week," he said.

Conversations about GI Bill improvements halted just three months ago, following a dispute among veterans organizations about how to pay for the expansion.

In the last several weeks, negotiations were reignited by veterans organizations.

During a hearing Monday on the House bill, Department of Veterans Affairs Undersecretary Curtis Coy said the VA was supportive of the legislation but had concerns about updating their automated systems to recognize the eligibility changes for education benefits.

Coy said it would likely take one year for the VA to update its information technology.

To offset costs, the legislation calls for decreasing living stipends to GI Bill recipients to fall in line with active-duty servicemembers' basic housing allowance. The change would not apply to people now using the GI Bill.

The legislation in both chambers is named the "Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017," after a past commander of the American Legion who authored the GI Bill of Rights in 1944.

Staff swaps amid widening Russia probe

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The chaos engulfing President Donald Trump and his orbit intensified Friday, as Trump moved to shake up his legal and White House communications teams in response to the widening special counsel probe into his campaign's possible collusion with Russian government election meddling and a stalled health care push that threatens his entire legislative agenda.

At the same time that the investigation appears to be broadening in scope, his longtime personal attorney, Marc Kasowitz, will step back from his central role in the president's defense. John Dowd, a seasoned Washington attorney with a focus on white-collar crime, will take on the lead role in Trump's defense. Mark Corallo, a longtime GOP operative who had served as a spokesman for Trump's legal team, resigned Thursday.

Meanwhile, at the White House, Trump installed an ally and wealthy financier, Anthony Scaramucci, as his communications director.

Scaramucci met with the president in the Oval Office at 10 a.m. on Friday, according to

Spicer resigns as Trump press secretary

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — White House press secretary Sean Spicer, President Donald Trump's spokesman during the first six months of his presidency, is resigning his position, according to two people with knowledge of the decision.

Spicer's decision appears to be linked to the appointment of a new White House communications director, New York financier Anthony Scaramucci. The people with knowledge of the decision spoke on condition of anonymity.

Spicer's daily press briefings had become must-see television until recent weeks when he took on a more behind-the-scenes role. Deputy press secretary Sarah Huckabee

Sanders has largely taken over the briefings, turning them into an off-camera event.

Spicer spent several years leading communications at the Republican National Committee before helping Trump's campaign in the general election. He is close to White House chief of staff Reince Priebus, the former RNC chairman, and several of the lower-ranking aides in the White House communications shop. One of the officials said Spicer objected to Trump's vision for the future of the press operation.

Spicer's fiery demeanor and tense on-camera exchanges were mocked on "Saturday Night Live," with the role of Spicer being played by actress Melissa McCarthy.

a senior White House official.

The move could touch off another round of intense backbiting and tension among his senior staff, especially with Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, with whom he has clashed in the past. The communications post has remained open since May.

The president has become agitated by the possibility that special counsel Robert Mueller might begin looking into Trump and his family's personal finances. In an interview

this week with The New York Times, the president issued a warning to Mueller that such a move would be a "violation."

"Let's go back to what the purpose of the investigation was: Russian interference in our election," said White House counselor Kellyanne Conway, speaking on Fox News on Friday morning. She added, "Where is this going and are Americans comfortable with that — with the taxpayers funding this, with this going off all

types of chutes and ladders?"

Trump's legal team has begun working to undermine the special counsel probe, including investigating ways to highlight conflicts of interest in the special investigator team, The Washington Post reported on Thursday. The president also has inquired about his pardon authority.

After the story was published, one of Trump's attorneys, Dowd, said it was "not true" and "nonsense."

O.J. Simpson to be paroled after 9 years at Nev. prison

Associated Press

LOVELOCK, Nev. — Barring any last-minute snafus, O.J. Simpson will walk out of prison a free man in about three months, having persuaded a Nevada parole board the bungled hotel-room heist he pulled nearly 10 years ago was a monumental error in judgment and one he will never repeat.

Although he still adamantly maintains he was trying to retrieve his personal property when he barged into a hotel room with five other men in September 2007, he acknowledged repeatedly Thursday that it was something he never should have done.

"I thought I was glad to get my stuff back, but it just wasn't

worth it," he told the board. "It wasn't worth it, and I'm sorry."

After a nationally televised hearing that clearly confirmed the public's fascination with Simpson continues, four parole commissioners voted unanimously to release him.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," he said quietly as he buried his head on his chest with relief.

Then, as he was led down a hall and back to prison, the Hall of Fame athlete and 1995 murder defendant raised his hands over his head in a victory gesture and said: "Oh, God, oh!"

Some two hours earlier, Simpson, gray-haired but looking trimmer than he has in recent years, had walked stiffly into a small hearing room of

the Lovelock Correctional Center in rural Nevada dressed in jeans, a light-blue prison-issue shirt and sneakers. He chuckled as parole board Chairwoman Connie Bisbee began the hearing by mistakenly giving his age as 90 before quickly correcting herself.

"Feels like it, though," Simpson, 70, said as laughter erupted.

Bisbee and three other parole board commissioners were gathered in a hearing room in Carson City. They questioned Simpson via video.

Several major TV networks and cable channels — including ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox, MSNBC and ESPN — carried the proceedings live, just as some of them did two decades

ago during a famous Ford Bronco chase over Southern California freeways that ended in Simpson's arrest, and again when a jury in his murder trial returned with its not guilty verdict.

At one point during Thursday's hearing, he set off a storm of sarcasm and mockery on social media when, assuring commissioners he would stay out of trouble, he said: "I've basically spent a conflict-free life, you know."

He also insisted he never meant to hurt anyone during the 2007 confrontation, never pointed a gun and didn't make any threats during the holdup of two sports memorabilia dealers.

Lead singer of Linkin Park found dead; suicide suspected

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Linkin Park lead singer Chester Bennington, whose screeching vocals helped the rock-rap band become one of the most commercially successful acts in the 2000s, was found dead in his home near Los Angeles on Thursday, the Los Angeles County coroner said. He was 41.

Coroner spokesman Brian Elias said authorities are investigating Bennington's death as an apparent suicide.

Band co-founder and producer Mike Shinoda said on Twitter he was "shocked and saddened."

"Chester Bennington was an artist of extraordinary talent and charisma, and a human being with a huge heart and a caring soul. Our thoughts and prayers are with his beautiful family, his bandmates and his many friends," Warner Bros. Records CEO and Chairman Cameron Strang said in a

statement.

The Grammy Award-winning group sold more than 10 million copies of their 2000 debut, "Hybrid Theory," which featured the megahit, "In the End." They sold another 6 million with 2003's multiplatinum "Meteora." Both albums explored feelings of frustration and fury.

The success helped Linkin Park become Billboard's No. 1 act of the decade for rock songs and alternative songs.

Bennington's voice could soar with strength or descend to a whisper. Rolling Stone once called it a "shrapnel-laced howl that sounds like it comes from someone twice his size."

The band also sold millions with its remix album, "Reanimation," and its mash-up record with Jay-Z, "Collision Course." They won Grammys for best hard rock performance in 2001 for "Crawling" and best rap/sung collaboration for "Numb/Encore" in 2005.

Bennington struggled with drug and alcohol addictions at

various times during his life. He said he had been sexually abused as a child and was homeless for months before the band found fame.

Linkin Park released their most recent album, "One More Light," in May. It was a CD that divided critics and fans alike for its embrace of moody pop. One song on the album, "Heavy," opens with the words: "I don't like my mind right now."

Although the band always had experimented with different sounds, some claimed Linkin Park had sold out, which Bennington denied. "One More Light" became the band's fifth No. 1 album debut on the Billboard 200.

"If you like the music, fantastic. If you don't like it, that's your opinion, too. Fantastic. If you're saying we're doing what we're doing for a commercial or monetary reason, trying to make success out of some formula, then stab yourself in the face!" Bennington told NME magazine.

Protests turn violent in Jerusalem, West Bank

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — An escalating dispute over metal detectors at a contested Jerusalem shrine turned violent on Friday, setting off widespread clashes between Palestinian stone-throwers and Israeli troops. Three Palestinians were killed and several dozen injured by live rounds, rubber bullets and beatings, medics said.

The confrontations in Jerusalem and the West Bank erupted after midday Friday prayers. Thousands performed the prayers in the streets to protest Israel's decision earlier in the week to install metal detectors at the gates to the walled compound.

Muslim leaders had urged the faithful not to enter the Muslim-administered site until Israel removes the metal detectors.

Israel had installed the metal detectors after three Palestinians, all Israeli citizens, launched an attack from the shrine a week ago, killing two Israeli policemen. Police said the metal detectors are needed to prevent further attacks.

After the prayers, confrontations erupted in several areas around Jerusalem's Old City and at West Bank flashpoints.

In Jerusalem, two Palestinians, aged 17 and 24, were killed by live fire, said Bayan Baidoun, a spokeswoman for Mukassed Hospital in an Arab neighborhood.

A third Palestinian was killed in clashes in the West Bank, the Palestinian Health Ministry said.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said 41 Palestinians were taken to hospitals or clinics with injuries from live fire, rubber bullets and beatings. About 150 Palestinians were treated for tear gas inhalation.

The raised 37-acre platform in Jerusalem houses the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa mosques. The compound, once home to biblical Temples, is Judaism's holiest site.

Utah park may require reservations

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — It would be a first for a U.S. national park: requiring reservations to get in. But it's an option that Utah's Zion National Park is considering to manage a surge of visitors to its sweeping red-rock vistas and canyons.

Zion, which welcomed 4.3 million people last year, is weighing online reservations for those who want to explore its main canyon. National Park Service rangers struggle to cope with overcrowded tour buses and to alleviate damage — such as soil erosion and human waste near trails — to Zion's natural wonders.

People without reservations could pay an entrance fee and drive through the park, but they couldn't stop to hike or picnic.

Zion isn't the only U.S. national park with swelling numbers of tourists, and at least two national parks, in California and Hawaii, are testing more limited reservation systems for parking.

Overall, more than 330 million people visited U.S. national parks in 2016, a record. Visits were bolstered by the improving economy, cheap gas and marketing campaigns for the National Park

Service's 2016 centennial.

Zion is the fifth most-visited park in the National Park system. It's particularly susceptible to overcrowding because many of its iconic cliffs and trails are located in the narrow, 6-mile-long Zion Canyon.

After a series of public meetings, Zion rangers are proposing an online reservation system, similar to the way campsites are reserved now. While certain hikes and activities require permits or reservations, the new system would apply to the entire main corridor of the park.

The number of reservations would be based on capacity, would vary by season and could fall somewhere between a manageable 10,000 people a day and an overpowering 30,000 people a day, Marciano said.

One option would require a single reservation to enter and explore the park. A second would allow tourists to enter the park at a specific time and visit specific trails.

A third option would be to make no changes. But the park says that would allow degradation of the environment and the hourslong lines.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Fugitive arrested after flagging down deputy

LA RACELAND — A fugitive who, according to authorities, evaded capture since 2013, has been arrested after he flagged down a deputy.

The Lafourche Parish Sheriff's Office said in a news release that Jansen Simon, 30, was walking down Highway 182 on Sunday when he flagged down a deputy. Simon told the deputy he was traveling with his friends, but they had left him on the side of the road.

News outlets reported the officer verified Simon's identity and took him into custody. In 2013, authorities said Simon struck another man with a hammer during an argument outside of a bar. The man suffered a fractured skull.

Coffee with Viagra-like substance recalled

TX GRAND PRAIRIE — A Texas coffee company is recalling one of its roasts because it was making some men a bit too excited.

Bestherbs Coffee LLC issued the voluntary recall for its New of Kopi Jantan Tradisional Natural Herbs Coffee after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration found it contains desmethyl carbodenafil, which is similar to sildenafil in the erectile dysfunction drug Viagra.

Bestherbs sold the coffee nationwide from July 2014 through June 2016 on various websites and in some retail stores.

Some customers were buying it to help in the bedroom, but FDA spokeswoman Lyndsay Meyer said it is not clear if the product works like Viagra.

No injuries have been report-

ed, but the FDA says the undeclared ingredient could interact with prescription medicine and lower blood pressure to dangerous levels. The product also contains undeclared milk, which could cause a life-threatening reaction to consumers with milk allergies.

A weird mystery: Meat falling from the sky

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — Meat falling from the sky is weird, even by Florida standards.

But that's what happened at 4 a.m. Saturday when a 15-pound bag of frozen pork landed on the Deerfield Beach home of Travis Adair.

Adair said Thursday that the package hit the roof with a "big bang." He thought it was thunder, but his wife later went outside and found two bundles next to the house and three on the roof.

An address on the package shows it originally belonged to Jim Williams, who lives 170 miles away in Myakka City.

Williams said Thursday he bought some pigs at a fair earlier in the year. He gave some of the meat away, but has no idea how any of it ended up on the Adairs' roof.

Drug dealer calls 911, reports stolen cocaine

FL FORT WALTON BEACH — Calling 911 to report a stolen bag of cocaine probably wasn't the best idea for a self-described Florida drug dealer.

But Okaloosa Sheriff's officials wrote on Facebook that David Blackmon, 32, did just that.

The post said Blackmon called 911 to report a robbery in Fort Walton Beach. Black-

mon told the responding deputy that someone entered his car and took \$50 and about a quarter ounce of cocaine. The report said the deputy spotted cocaine and a crack rock on the console and a crack pipe on the floor by the driver's side door.

Trooper reels in huge tuna while fishing

NH RYE — A New Hampshire state trooper reeled in a big fish — a massive 650-pound tuna.

Nick Cyr said he was reading a book on his boat with two lines out Tuesday when the tuna bit one of the lines. He told WBZ-TV he could immediately tell it was a big fish, the biggest he's reeled in in a decade of tuna fishing.

Cyr said the fish spun the boat in circles and dragged it for about 2 miles. After a 90-minute tug-of-war, Cyr managed to reel in the 9-foot fish.

He said the big check he received for the tuna will help finance what he calls his low-stress hobby of fishing.

Dad arrested for speeding to hospital

LA PINEVILLE — A Louisiana man rushing his wife to the hospital at speeds topping 100 mph missed his child's birth because he was in jail.

KALB-TV reported Zak Evans was arrested on Monday and remained in jail as the couple's daughter was born. His wife, Bridget, received an ambulance ride to a hospital. Evans was given a ticket for speeding, flight from an officer and careless operation.

Creola police Chief Heath Landry said an officer clocked the couple going 108 mph in a 55 mph speed zone. He said the

officer pulled them over in Pineville. The officer who stopped the couple dropped Evans off at the hospital. Evans said the only thing he was aiming for was to see his baby being born.

Tourist on bus sets off bear spray

CO ASPEN — A tourist's can of bear spray did not meet its intended target.

Pitkin County Sheriff's Deputy Anthony Todaro said a female tourist accidentally sprayed a can of capsaicin pepper in a bus with several passengers Sunday after she leaned on her backpack while they were headed to Maroon Bells.

Emergency responders said only the tourist and two other people were heavily exposed to the substance.

The bus continued on to the picturesque mountain peaks after the air was let out.

Teenager rolls car on airport runway, flees

NM LAS VEGAS — A 17-year-old boy has been issued several citations after taking a car onto a New Mexico airport runway and getting in a rollover crash while an 8-year-old was in the vehicle.

The Las Vegas (N.M.) Optic reported the boy and 8-year-old fled the scene Wednesday after the crash. The boy later checked into a nearby hospital with unknown injuries and was cited by the Las Vegas Police Department.

The vehicle was towed from the runway, and it's not known who owns it. The extent of damage to the vehicle or to any Las Vegas Airport property was also unknown.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

On a mission to provide credible reporting and daily news to America's military, wherever they serve.

Mobile apps available: www.stripes.com/apps.

Ole Miss coach Freeze resigns amid scandal

Associated Press

Mississippi football coach Hugh Freeze resigned Thursday after university officials found a “pattern of personal misconduct” that started with the school’s investigation into a call to an escort service.

Freeze’s resignation brings a stunning end to a five-year tenure that saw a Sugar Bowl victory, but also a wide-ranging NCAA investigation into rules violations. His ultimate downfall came after school officials investigated Freeze’s phone records and found misconduct.

“In our analysis, we discovered a pattern of conduct not consistent with our expectations as the leader of our football program,” athletic director Ross Bjork said. “As of yesterday, there appeared to be a concerning pattern.”

Bjork said the school’s investigation started last week after an outside Freedom of Information request revealed a concerning phone call that lasted less than a minute. The school then looked into the rest of his phone records and found more problems.

Bjork said Freeze “admitted the conduct” and that the coach offered his resignation Thursday afternoon. When pressed to explain Freeze’s conduct, Bjork said the school needed to “protect that information.”

“His privacy is important,” Bjork said. “The conduct was just not something we could continue with as our head coach.”

Freeze’s university cell phone records obtained by The Associated Press show a 1-minute call made on Jan. 19, 2016, to a Detroit-based number. An internet search shows the number linked to a site that offers various escort services.

“I’ve got no idea, to be honest,” Freeze told Yahoo Sports, which first reported the nature of the call. “I was in an 813 area code and that was a 313 number, I think that might have been a misdial. I don’t think there was even a conversation. There’s nothing to it.”

Co-offensive coordinator Matt Luke has been named the interim coach.

“This is a sad day for the University of Mississippi,” Ole Miss Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter said.

Vitter and Bjork both said Freeze’s resignation is strictly because of his personal conduct and not because of the ongoing NCAA investigation.

The Rebels had a quick rise under Freeze, recruiting at a high level and reaching an apex with a Sugar Bowl victory over Oklahoma State following the 2015 season.

But an NCAA investigation — alleging 21 charges of academic, booster, and recruiting misconduct — has overshadowed much of that

success, especially over the past year. The school has already self-imposed several penalties, including a one-year postseason ban for the upcoming season.

Freeze — who was making more than \$5 million per year — had a 39-25 record over five seasons, including a 19-21 mark in the Southeastern Conference. Bjork said that Freeze will receive no buyout on his contract.

The 47-year-old Freeze’s shocking exit — just a few weeks before preseason camp begins — completes a stunning fall for a coach considered one of the profession’s rising stars a few years ago.

Freeze took over after Houston Nutt was fired during a miserable 2011 season that ended with a 2-10 record. Ole Miss immediately improved under Freeze, finishing 7-6 in 2012 and winning the Birmingham Bowl.

The Rebels continued to surge on the field and on the recruiting trail over the next several seasons. They signed some of the nation’s top recruits in 2013, including defensive lineman Robert Nkemdiche, receiver Laquon Treadwell and offensive lineman Laremy Tunsil. They helped push the program to eight wins in 2013, nine in ‘14 and a 10-3 record in ‘15.

But Ole Miss’ newfound ability to recruit at a high level drew the attention of the NCAA, which was already investigating the school for a handful of violations that occurred during Nutt’s tenure.

The school has received two Notice of Allegations letters from the NCAA over the past two years. The first alleged 13 rules violations, including nine that were classified as Level I, which the governing body deems the most serious.

But the case expanded in April 2016 after Tunsil became the story of the NFL draft after a bizarre video of him smoking from a gas mask-bong contraption was posted on his Twitter account just before the selections began.

There was also a post on Tunsil’s Instagram account showing an alleged text conversation with a football staff member about arranging payment for bills.

Though the NCAA didn’t appear to find much from that particular exchange, the governing body did reopen its investigation, sending a second NOA earlier this year that expanded the case to 21 allegations, including 17 that are Level I.

Nutt’s lawsuit was source of phone records

Associated Press

The man whom Hugh Freeze replaced as Mississippi’s football coach was at least partially responsible for Freeze’s stunning downfall.

It was a recently filed civil lawsuit from Houston Nutt — who coached Ole Miss from 2008 to ‘11 — against the university that unearthed the phone records that eventually revealed Freeze’s school-issued cellphone had dialed an escort service on at least one occasion in 2016.

Freeze resigned Thursday after university officials found that the coach engaged in a “pattern of personal misconduct” that was unacceptable. The 47-year-old — who was making more than \$5 million per year — will receive no buyout, according to Ole Miss athletic director Ross Bjork.

Freeze’s phone records might never have been researched if Nutt hadn’t sued the university earlier this month. The lawsuit claims a breach of his severance agreement because of false statements he says school officials made to try to pin blame for the NCAA investigation on Nutt.

There are 21 allegations in the NCAA’s case against Ole Miss. Four of them occurred in relation to Nutt’s tenure while 17 happened under Freeze.

Ole Miss strongly defended Freeze in its latest response to the NCAA’s allegations, saying the coach emphasized NCAA rules compliance during his tenure. Now the school will go forward in its case without him.

In researching the civil suit, Nutt’s lawyers made a Freedom of Information filing asking for Freeze’s phone records covering several days in January 2016. The aim — which is detailed in the suit — was to try to show that Ole Miss officials conspired to spread misinformation to media and form a “smear campaign” against Nutt.

It found much more.

Braves snap Dodgers' 11-game streak

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Something strange happened to the Los Angeles Dodgers on Thursday night. They lost a game.

The Dodgers had their 11-game winning streak snapped with a 6-3 loss to right-hander Mike Foltynewicz and the Atlanta Braves.

"It's a weird feeling," manager Dave Roberts said. "It's different."

Winning is almost all the Dodgers have known of late. They had won 31 of their last 35 to build baseball's best record (66-30).

"Even until that last out, I thought we were going to find a way to win the game," Roberts said. "I guess we have to start another (streak) tomorrow."

Los Angeles fell behind 6-1 after four innings and never could mount a full comeback against Foltynewicz (8-5). He allowed three runs on six hits and two walks in 6 $\frac{1}{3}$

innings, striking out five.

"Really good job," Braves manager Brian Snitker said. "He had good stuff, was on the attack. It looked like he had a lot of confidence in what he was doing."

Rex Brothers, Arodys Vizcaino and Jim Johnson held the Dodgers scoreless over the last 2 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings.

Johnson closed for his 22nd save, helped by a splendid defensive play from Johan Camargo. With two runners on, the second baseman ranged into the outfield and made a difficult, twisting catch of a popup almost directly over his head for the final out.

Brandon McCarthy (6-4) gave up six runs and nine hits in four innings. McCarthy has failed to pitch into the fifth in three of his last four starts, and his spot in the rotation is in jeopardy.

Atlanta jumped out to a 2-0 lead in the first on Freddie Freeman's RBI single and Matt Adams' run-scoring double.

The Dodgers got one back in the bottom of the inning when Corey Seager doubled off the left-field wall and scored on Cody Bellinger's single.

Freeman singled home another run in the third.

After a walk to Nick Markakis, Kurt Suzuki hit a two-run homer in the fourth to give the Braves some breathing room. Ender Inciarte added an RBI single.

"The walk and home run by Suzuki put them in a good spot," Roberts said.

Yasmani Grandal hit a two-run homer in the sixth for Los Angeles, which had won 18 of its last 19 at Dodger Stadium.

The Braves were an unlikely team to hand the Dodgers their first loss overall since July 2. Atlanta had just been swept in a three-game series by the Cubs and had lost eight of nine at Dodger Stadium.

"Big, definitely," Freeman said.

Roundup

Red-hot Pirates knock off Milwaukee

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Gregory Polanco homered, Chris Stewart added three hits and the Pittsburgh Pirates completed a four-game sweep of the NL Central-leading Milwaukee Brewers with a 4-2 victory on Thursday.

The Pirates have won 11 of 13 and moved within three games of Milwaukee in a division that's tightened up since the All-Star break. The Brewers have lost five straight, cutting their lead to one game over the idle Chicago Cubs.

Polanco hit a solo shot off Jimmy Nelson (8-5) in the fourth inning, his ninth homer. Stewart scored the go-ahead run in the fifth on a single by Josh Harrison.

Jameson Taillon (6-3) struck out a season-high eight in 5 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings. Felipe Rivero worked a perfect ninth for his ninth save.

Yankees 4, Mariners 1: Luis Severino pitched out of trouble to throw seven shutout innings, and Brett Gardner hit a solo home run off Felix Hernandez

in New York's victory over host Seattle.

Severino (6-4) struck out six and allowed eight hits. Gardner connected against Hernandez (5-4) in the sixth. Other than that, Hernandez was as good as he's been in 2017, striking out a season-high nine and pitching at least seven innings for the second time.

Three of New York's four runs were unearned.

Padres 5, Giants 2: Jhoulys Chacin outpitched Madison Bumgarner, and Cory Spangenberg hit a go-ahead, two-run homer in the seventh inning that chased Bumgarner from his first home start in more than three months as visiting San Diego defeated San Francisco.

Bumgarner (0-4) struck out five and walked one over 6 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings, taking his home mound for the first time since spraining his pitching shoulder in an April 20 dirt bike accident. The 2014 World Series MVP is winless after six starts this season. San Francisco is 0-6 in those games.

Royals 16, Tigers 4: Brandon Moss drove in four runs, Mike Moustakas had three RBIs and Kansas City routed visiting Detroit. Eric Hosmer and Whit Merrifield homered for the Royals, who moved within 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ games of first-place Cleveland in the AL Central division. The 16 runs and 19 hits were season highs for Kansas City.

Michael Fulmer, the 2016 AL Rookie of the Year, threw 37 pitches in the first. Fulmer (10-7) was removed after facing 18 batters in the shortest outing of his career.

Blue Jays 8, Red Sox 6: Justin Smoak hit a pair of homers and Steve Pearce drove in two runs when Boston second baseman Brock Holt lost his popup in the sun, givin visiting Toronto a four-game split.

Including the 15-inning game on Tuesday with the Blue Jays, the AL East-leading Red Sox played 76 innings in about 144 hours — the equivalent of 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ games in six days.

Orioles 9, Rangers 7: Jonathan Schoop and Adam Jones both homered and drove in three runs, and host Baltimore rallied to beat Cole Hamels and Texas to complete a four-game sweep.

Baltimore hit 10 home runs in the series and outscored Texas 34-11. The Orioles' four-game winning streak is their longest since a six-game run in early May.

Diamondbacks 12, Reds 2: Jake Lamb hit a pair of three-run homers and Patrick Corbin pitched into the eighth inning during an emergency start, sending Ariona over host Cincinnati.

Arizona stabilized itself by taking two of three in the series. The Diamondbacks had dropped eight of nine heading into the set.

Mets 3, Cardinals 2: St. Louis pitcher Trevor Rosenthal was late covering first base on a two-out grounder by Jose Reyes that turned into a game-winning single in the ninth inning for host New York.

Three Americans tied atop British Open

Associated Press

SOUTHPORT, England — The wind off the Irish Sea pushed away the rain clouds and bathed Royal Birkdale in sunshine, Stars and Stripes.

The British Open began Thursday with an All-American flavor.

Jordan Spieth, chomping away on gum as he watched one putt after another pour into the center of the cup, worked some bunker magic late in the round to keep his card filled only with birdies and pars for a 5-under 65. He was tied for the lead with U.S. Open champion Brooks Koepka and Matt Kuchar.

Koepka, with no competition and barely any practice since capturing his first major a month ago, ran off three straight birdies and holed a tough shot from a pot bunker for eagle on the par-5 17th hole.

Kuchar, who first endeared himself to these British fans as a 19-year-old amateur in

1998 at Royal Birkdale, tied the course record with a 29 on the front nine, only to fall into a routine of pars the rest of the way. He still shot 65, his best score ever in a major.

They were a stroke ahead of Paul Casey and Charl Schwartzel on a day that started nasty and ended with 39 players breaking par. The biggest question after a long day on the links was what was in store for Friday, when high wind and occasional showers were in the forecast.

“I thought today’s round was extremely important, as they all are,” Spieth said, atop the leaderboard at a major for the first time since last year’s Masters. “But given the forecast coming in, I thought you really needed to be in the red today. You can certainly make up ground in a round tomorrow, and we’ll see it happen. But being able to kind of play with shots, or play a little more

conservative because you don’t try to do too much on a day like tomorrow, that’s nice and very helpful.”

Dustin Johnson and Rory McIlroy fall into that category.

Johnson, the No. 1 player who hasn’t played the weekend at a major since the British Open last year, managed only one birdie on a decent day for scoring and shot 71. McIlroy also shot 71 and was relieved. Coming off three missed cuts in his last four events, he was 5 over through six holes when his caddie gave him a pep talk. McIlroy closed with three birdies over the last four holes to stay in the game.

Phil Mickelson failed to make a birdie, the first time that has happened in a major in five years, and shot 73.

Kuchar was the only one at 65 who played in the afternoon. The wind remained strong, though the course was manageable for everyone who stayed

out of bunkers and deep grass and who holed putts.

“I watched some of the golf this morning on TV. It looked awfully challenging,” Kuchar said. “It looked like anything under par was going to be a good score. Seemed like the later your tee time, the better draw you got. ... For me, to start my British Open with a 29 on the front nine is a great way to start.”

Charley Hoffman had the best start of all, holing out from the rough on the daunting opening hole for an eagle. He was poised to join the leaders when he reached 5 under with a birdie on the 15th, only to drop shots on the next two holes. Hoffman shot 67 and was in a group that included Justin Thomas, Ian Poulter and Rafa Cabrera Bello.

Defending champion Henrik Stenson, who played with Spieth, had a 69.

Boasson Hagen wins longest stage of Tour de France

Associated Press

SALON-DE-PROVENCE, France — After two second-place finishes, Edvald Boasson Hagen finally got a stage victory at this Tour de France. Chris Froome and the other top riders took it easy, saving themselves for their last big fight this weekend.

Boasson Hagen, from Norway, caught the right breakaways on the longest stage and used all of his guile and strength to hold off chasers in the final section on Friday.

Boasson Hagen was part of a 20-man group that Froome and Team Sky gave freedom to escape from the peloton because none of them presented a threat to his overall lead. After two energy-sapping days of climbs in the Alps, Froome and his rivals had their sights set instead on the time trial on Saturday in Marseille that will determine the podium order before the race ends in Paris on Sunday.

At the finish of Stage 19 in Salon-de Provence, Boasson Hagen and German rider Nikiias Arndt went right around a roundabout while others went left. Their route proved shorter. Capitalizing on that slight lead, Boasson Hagen left Arndt behind with a quick acceleration and used his strength on the flat to power to the finish. Arndt placed second, five seconds back.

Third-placed Jens Keukeleire was among those who went left around the roundabout and immediately realized they’d made a mistake, as Boasson Hagen pulled away.

“That’s when it struck me: We should have taken right,” Keukeleire said. “He’s one of those riders, give him 10 meters and he’s gone.”

It was Boasson Hagen’s third career stage win at the Tour, after his first two in 2011. He said he did his homework, studying the stage finish and

identifying the shorter route around the roundabout.

“I was hunting for opportunities, and then the roundabout arrived,” he said. “I understood that going right would be quicker.”

Froome’s group, which included the main race contenders, was still riding as Boasson Hagen celebrated his win. The peloton eventually rolled in at a leisurely pace more than 12 minutes after Boasson Hagen claimed the first stage win for the Dimension Data team at this tour.

The overall standings remained unchanged, with Froome leading French rider Romain Bardet by 23 seconds and Rigoberto Uran of Colombia by 29 seconds.

With no major difficulties, the 138-mile stage from Emburrun in the Alps offered no real opportunity for Froome’s rivals to claw back time. Instead, they and Froome settled for a quiet

ride while the 20 in front hunted the stage victory.

“We could just sit on the wheels and recover a little bit,” Froome said. “Everyone was quite happy to sit back.”

That breakaway group split again with 12 miles left. Boasson Hagen was among nine riders who ditched the others with a furious burst, leaving him in the right group to contest the stage victory. But among that leading nine, everyone but Arndt and Boasson Hagen then went left around the roundabout in the last three kilometers (under two miles), essentially eliminating themselves from the running.

On Stage 7, Boasson Hagen lost to Marcel Kittel by mere millimeters in a photo finish at Nuits-Saint-Georges. He was also second on Stage 16 and third on Stages 11 and 14.

“I didn’t have to do a photo finish this time,” he said. “I finally got my victory.”