

STARS AND STRIPES®

Friday, July 13, 2018

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

After blasting May, Trump touts UK ties

Associated Press

ELLESBOROUGH, England — President Donald Trump pulled off a diplomatic backflip Friday, reversing himself on trade, Brexit and his critical assessment of British Prime Minister Theresa May while insisting the U.S.-U.K. relationship is “the highest level of special.” Just days after lobbing thunderous broadsides at his British hosts, Trump was on his best behavior as he capped his tumultuous two-day visit to the U.K. by dropping by Windsor Castle for tea with the queen.

Trump’s pomp-filled visit to the United Kingdom has been overshadowed by massive protests and an explosive interview in *The Sun* in which he blasted May, blamed London’s mayor for terror attacks against the city and argued that Europe was “losing its culture” because of immigration.

The president who prides himself on not saying he’s sorry did his own version of backtracking at a news conference with May by finding a way to blame his favorite foil for any perceived friction with May, whom he lavished with praise on the heels of questioning her leadership.

“I didn’t criticize the prime minister. I have a lot of respect for the prime minis-

ter,” said Trump. He blamed the newspaper for skipping over his praise of May in a piece that was published Thursday just as the prime minister played host to Trump at an opulent welcome dinner at a country palace.

The president then urged reporters to listen to a full recording of the interview, which he said would give the full picture. But the audio was already posted on *The Sun*’s website and undermined Trump’s contention it would back him up.

The interview was the latest breach of diplomatic protocol by Trump, whose predecessors tended to avoid criticizing their foreign hosts. And it comes at a perilous time for May, whose government is teetering amid contentious negotiations on how the U.K. will leave the European Union.

“Well, I think the deal that she is striking is not what the people voted on,” Trump said in the interview. He also praised one of May’s political rivals, former foreign secretary Boris Johnson. He furiously backpedaled away the comments on Friday, saying of May’s Brexit talks: “Whatever you’re going to do is OK with us. Just make sure we can trade together. That’s all that matters.”

May, for her part, praised the strength of

the U.S.-U.K. bond. But in a gentle rebuke, said, “It is all of our responsibility to ensure that trans-Atlantic unity endures.”

As for her relationship with Trump, she said, “We are friends.”

In a frenetic news conference at Chequers, May’s official country house, an unrestrained Trump blamed his predecessor for Russian aggression in Crimea, placed fair trade at the center of Britain’s efforts to leave the European Union, defended his beliefs that immigration has damaged Europe and repeatedly jostled with television correspondents’ whose coverage he found critical.

The news conference was a scene in itself, featuring the moos of cows in the distance at the end. Trump at times drew laughs from some British reporters, who jeered his criticism of the media and openly laughed at his numerous boasts.

Interviewed before he left Brussels for the U.K, Trump accused May of ruining what her country stands to gain from its Brexit vote to leave the European Union. He said her former foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, would make an “excellent” prime minister, speaking just days after Johnson resigned his position in protest over May’s Brexit plans.

A dozen Russians charged over 2016 election hacking

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Twelve Russian intelligence officers were indicted on charges they hacked into Democratic email accounts during the 2016 U.S. presidential election and released stolen information in the months before Americans headed to the polls, the Justice Department said Friday.

The indictment — which comes days before President Donald Trump holds a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin — was the clearest allegation yet of Russian efforts to meddle in American politics. U.S. intelligence agencies have said the interference was aimed at helping the presidential campaign of Republican Donald Trump and harming the election bid of his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton.

The indictment lays out a sweeping, coor-

ordinated effort to break into key Democratic email accounts, including those belonging to the Democratic National Committee, the Clinton campaign and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

The charges come as special counsel Robert Mueller investigates potential coordination between Russia and the Trump campaign to influence the presidential election. The indictment does not allege that Trump campaign associates were involved in the hacking efforts or that any American was knowingly in contact with Russian intelligence officers.

The indictment also does not allege that any vote tallies were altered by hacking.

Still, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein said the internet “allows foreign adversaries to attack Americans in new and unexpected ways. Free and fair elections are hard-fought and contentious and

there will always be adversaries who work to exacerbate domestic differences and try to confuse, divide and conquer us.”

Before Friday, 20 people and three companies had been charged in the Mueller investigation. That includes four former Trump campaign and White House aides, three of whom have pleaded guilty to different crimes and agreed to cooperate, as well as 13 Russians accused of participating in a hidden-but-powerful social media campaign to sway American public opinion in the 2016 election.

Hours before the Justice Department announcement, Trump complained anew that the special counsel’s investigation is complicating his efforts to forge a better working relationship with Russia. Trump and Putin are to hold talks Monday in Finland, a meeting largely sought by Trump.

Duterte pressed on South China Sea dispute

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte came under renewed pressure Thursday to seek Chinese compliance to an arbitration ruling that invalidated China's claims to much of the South China Sea two years ago but has been ignored by Beijing and remains unenforced.

Former Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario, who spearheaded the arbitration suit, called China a "grand larcenist" for pressing its territorial claims despite the July 12, 2016, decision and labeled the Philippines a "willing victim" for allowing such defiance.

The ruling invalidated China's historical claims to virtually the entire waterway, but Beijing refused to acknowledge it or to join the arbitration proceedings held by a tribunal in The Hague under the 1982 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Duterte, who has nurtured close ties with China after rising to power in 2016, has not sought immediate Chinese compliance to the landmark ruling but has vowed to discuss the decision with Beijing at some point in his six-year presidency.

Pentagon to cap transfers of GI Bill benefits at 16-year mark

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Servicemembers who want to transfer their GI Bill benefits to their spouses or dependent children will have to do so before serving 16 years, a change set to take effect next year, the Pentagon announced Thursday.

The new policy narrows the window during which servicemembers may transfer their Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits to family members to after their sixth year in uniform and before their 16th year of service. The policy will go into effect July 12, 2019, according to Pentagon documents.

Previously, any servicemember who already had served six years in the military and agreed to remain in uniform for an additional four years was granted the opportunity to transfer his or her GI Bill benefits to a family member. Effective immediately, servicemembers deemed ineligible to extend their time in the service for four or more years for reasons such as injuries, mandatory retirement dates or medical conditions cannot transfer their benefits to family members.

The Pentagon is also doing away with an exemption that granted the right to transfer those benefits to family members for troops who served at least 10 years in the military but were precluded from extending their service for four years for a variety of reasons, including people medically discharged for injuries.

Servicemembers who are involuntarily separated under "force shaping" measures — typically efforts to reduce the size of the military — through no fault of their own before reaching their four years of extended service will be allowed to transfer their benefits, according to the new guidance.

The policy shift was part of an overhaul of the post-9/11 benefits aimed at encouraging troops to stay in the service as the Pentagon looks to

increase the size of U.S. military, said Stephanie Miller, the Pentagon's director of accessions policy.

"After a thorough review of the policy, we saw a need to focus on retention in a time of increased growth of the armed forces," she said. "This change continues to allow career servicemembers that earned this benefit to share it with their family members while they continue to serve."

However, it was unclear Thursday exactly how the policy changes affect retention efforts.

More so, veterans' groups officials indicated Thursday that they were not consulted by Pentagon officials regarding the change. Groups including the Military Officers Association of American and the American Legion expressed concerns about the new policy.

"The fact that nobody was consulted about this is alarming," said Paul Frost, a retired Navy captain who serves as MOAA's program director for financial and benefits education. "What else is being discussed on the changes of this bill, which is one of the key benefits that a servicemember gets?"

Joe Plenzler, a spokesman for the American Legion, called the change a "curtailment of veterans' earned benefits."

"We understand the minimum time-in-service for transferability eligibility, and that makes sense from a retention perspective," he said. "But the 16-year transfer-or-lose rule makes no sense to us as [the Department of Defense] has articulated it and disadvantages the veteran when it comes to the full use of this earned benefit."

The Pentagon said it brings the policy more in line with the original intent of the bill that became law in 2008. The law pays college costs for people who serve in the military in the years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and was meant to drive wartime recruitment and retention efforts, according to the Pentagon.

Massive turbine must be replaced on USS Michael Monsoor

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine — Shipbuilder Bath Iron Works is going to replace one of the massive turbines on the future USS Monsoor because its blades were damaged during sea trials, but the unexpected repair won't delay the ship's arrival in California by year's end, the Navy said Thursday.

Before it can depart from Maine, one of the two Rolls-Royce gas turbines that help produce electricity to power the ship and

its systems must be replaced.

"Out of an abundance of caution, the Navy decided to remove the engine in its entirety to ensure a successful and safe transit of the ship to her San Diego homeport," said Colleen O'Rourke, spokeswoman for the Naval Sea Systems Command in Washington.

The turbine is so large that a special rail system will be used to remove the turbine and to install a new one at the shipyard in Bath, 35 miles from Portland.

Bath Iron Works had no comment Thursday.

The stealthy destroyer, named for a Navy SEAL who threw himself onto a grenade to save comrades, is due to be commissioned in January in Coronado, Calif.

Its turbines were run to full power during acceptance trials in the North Atlantic, and the damage wasn't discovered during a post-cleaning inspection in February, two months before the Navy conditionally accepted delivery of the ship, O'Rourke said.

Austin selected for Futures Command HQ

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
AND ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Army will station its new four-star command aimed at harvesting innovation to better equip soldiers to fight modern wars in an office building in downtown Austin, Texas, top service officials announced Friday.

About a half-dozen Army officials left the Washington, D.C. area Friday to begin setting up the new Army Futures Command in the Texas capital, Ryan McCarthy, the undersecretary of the Army, told reporters at the Pentagon. The service aims to have the command, which will include about 500 personnel, fully operational in Austin in one year.

Austin boasts all of the attributes that Army leaders were looking for in a home for the new command, McCarthy said. Those features included top-tier educational institutions with advanced science, technology, engineering and math programs; access to cutting-edge industry; high quality of life, and an affordable cost of living, he said.

Austin is “the right place,” Army Secretary Mark Esper said.

While the commander and his staff will work in the headquarters office, the Army envisions much of the Futures Command staff operating from cells inside businesses, schools and in other Army commands to work hand-in-hand with other entities to develop technology, McCarthy

said. The Army has already selected a commander to lead this organization, officials said, but they declined to name the general publicly on Friday before a nomination is formally sent to Congress.

The Army spent months searching for a home for its new command headquarters since it was announced in October. Service officials considered about 150 cities, settling on five — Austin, Boston, Minneapolis, Philadelphia and Raleigh, N.C. — for final consideration. McCarthy said Austin provided the Army incentives to establish its new headquarters in the city, but he declined Friday to provide specifics.

Futures Command is the first new major command that the service has established since

1973 when it created Forces Command and Training and Doctrine Command following the Vietnam War as it shifted its focus to Cold War operations.

Similarly, top Army officials elected to build Futures Command as the Pentagon shifts much of its attention from the recent — and ongoing — wars in Afghanistan and Iraq focused against insurgencies and terrorist groups to large-scale warfare against potential near-peer rivals, such as Russia or China.

The Army has forgone major weapons modernization for years to focus on those terrorist operations and other low-intensity fights in places such as Syria, Yemen and Somalia.

Nearly half of youngest immigrant children haven't rejoined families

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration said Thursday all eligible small children who were separated from their families as a result of its zero-tolerance immigration policy have been reunited with their parents.

But nearly half of the children younger than 5 remain apart from their families because of safety concerns, the deportation of their parents and other issues, the administration said.

The administration was under a court mandate to reunite families separated between early May and June 20, when President Donald Trump signed an executive order that stopped separations. The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit on behalf of a woman who had been separated from her child, and U.S. District Court Judge Dana Sabraw ordered all children reunited with their parents.

Fifty-seven children had been reunited with their parents as of Thursday morning, administration officials said.

“Throughout the reunification process, our goal has been the well-being of the children and returning them to a safe environment,” according to a statement from the heads of the three agencies responsible for the process. “Of course, there remains a tremendous amount of hard work and similar obstacles facing our teams in reuniting the remaining families. The Trump administration does not approach this mission lightly.”

Most of the reunions occurred by Tuesday’s court-ordered deadline, but the government acknowledged in a court filing that 19 occurred Wednesday and one occurred Thursday.

The ACLU proposed in a court filing that the administration should be monitored closely as a July 26 deadline approaches to reunite more than 2,000 children who are 5 and older with their parents. It asked the judge to require that all parental relations be verified and all background checks be completed by next Thursday. It also wants a daily report on how many families are reunited, starting Tuesday.

Pentagon IDs soldier killed in Afghanistan

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Pentagon has identified the U.S. Army soldier killed Thursday in eastern Afghanistan.

Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Andrew Celiz, 32, was the second U.S. servicemember killed in the country within a week. Celiz, of Summerville, S.C., was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, at Hunter Army Airfield, Ga. He died of a wound suffered while fighting in support of a medevac landing zone in eastern Paktia province, the Pentagon said. The incident is under investigation.

“The 75th Ranger Regiment suffered a tremendous loss with the passing of Sgt. 1st Class Chris Celiz,” regiment commander Col. Brandon Tegtmeier said in a statement Friday. “The Celiz family has been a critical component of our team and their community in Savannah (Ga.). Chris was a national treasure who led his Rangers with passion, competence, and

an infectious positive attitude no matter the situation. He will be greatly missed.”

Celiz, who was on his seventh deployment, has been posthumously awarded the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star and a Meritorious Service Medal, according to a U.S. Army Special Operations Command statement Friday. Celiz was serving as a battalion mortar platoon sergeant and was in the process of reclassifying to the infantry branch at the time of his death, the statement said.

Celiz’s death came less than a week after Army Cpl. Joseph Maciel was killed in an apparent insider attack in Tirin Kot district in the southern Uruzgan province. Two other U.S. soldiers were wounded in the July 7 attack.

The soldiers were assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division’s 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, which provides security for the Army’s 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade, or SFAB. The SFAB is spread across Afghanistan to train and advise Afghan forces.

Emmett Till book author gave FBI recordings

Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Weeks after he published a book about the brutal slaying of Emmett Till, a North Carolina author received a call from FBI agents asking about his interview with a key witness who acknowledged lying about her interactions with the black teen.

Not long after that, Duke University scholar Timothy Tyson said, he turned over interview recordings and other research materials for his 2017 book on the 1955 case that shocked the nation and helped build momentum for the civil rights movement.

Hours after news broke Thursday about a renewed investigation prompted by the book, Tyson told reporters that he supports a fresh look at “one of the most notorious racial incidents of racial violence in the history of the world,” but doesn’t think his research alone will provide enough evidence for new charges.

“It’s possible that the investigation will turn up something. But there’s nothing that I know of, and nothing in my research, that is actionable, I don’t think,” he said. Still, he said investigators may be able to link it to other material in their possession.

Tyson’s 2017 book “The Blood of Emmett Till” quotes a white woman, Carolyn Donham, as saying during a 2008 interview that she wasn’t truthful when she testified that the black teen grabbed her, whistled and made sexual advances at a Mississippi store six decades ago.

Supreme Court could return abortion debate to states

Associated Press

BOSTON — Anticipating renewed fights over abortion, some governors and state lawmakers already are searching for ways to enhance or dismantle the right in their constitutions and laws.

President Donald Trump’s nomination of Judge Brett Kavanaugh to the U.S. Supreme Court has raised the possibility that a conservative court majority could weaken or overturn the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, which created a nationwide right to abortion. That could fan an already raging battle in states over what should and should not be legal.

While a complete reversal of *Roe* remains a long shot, some Democratic elected officials want to enact new abortion protections and to repeal dormant laws that criminalize abortion. While those laws have been ignored for decades, some stretching back to the 19th century, Democrats want to erase them so they cannot be revived in the future.

“As long as they are enshrined in statute, they can be picked up and used by people who do not feel the same way about women and their bodies that I would say most people in this state feel,” said Massachusetts state Senate President Harriette Chandler, a Democrat.

Chandler is pushing to repeal an abortion ban from the 1800s that has remained unenforced, in part because of a 1981 state court ruling protecting access

to abortion.

The Massachusetts Senate approved the bill unanimously in January. The House speaker, also a Democrat, said that chamber will take it up before the end of the formal legislative session July 31.

In New York, Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo has been holding rallies after Kavanaugh’s nomination this week urging the state Senate to reconvene. He wants it to strengthen the right to an abortion, a seemingly unlikely event in the Republican-led chamber.

Democratic Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said the state law legalizing abortion, passed three years before the *Roe* ruling, includes a ban on third-trimester abortions and offers very limited exceptions. The assembly has passed legislation codifying *Roe* six consecutive times, but the Senate repeatedly has blocked it.

“There may have once been a time when we felt comfortable with the protections *Roe v. Wade* offered,” Heastie said. “But that time has passed, and now these fundamental rights are threatened like never before.”

Seventeen states already have laws that could be used to restrict the legal status of abortions if *Roe* is overturned or severely limited. Of those, Massachusetts is one of 10 states that still have pre-*Roe* abortion bans on the books, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a national research group that supports abortion rights.

Day after arrest, porn star dances but doesn’t touch

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Stormy Daniels danced — but she didn’t touch — at an Ohio strip club a day after her arrest at another club for interacting too closely with patrons who turned out to be undercover police officers.

Prosecutors on Thursday dropped charges against the porn star hours after she was accused of illegally rubbing undercover police officers’ faces against her bare breasts during her performance.

Her attorney said she was “set up” in a Columbus police sting operation, calling it an “absurd use of law enforcement resources.” Police said they

routinely conduct such undercover operations.

Daniels, 39, who claims to have had sex with Donald Trump before he became president, was charged with three misdemeanors. She was released on \$6,000 bail about daybreak Thursday.

By early afternoon, prosecutors said they were dropping the case because Ohio’s law against physical contact between strippers and customers applies only to someone who “regularly” performs at a club. In Daniels’ case, it was her first appearance at Sirens in Columbus.

Columbus police chief Kim Jacobs said “one element of the

law was missed in error.”

“A mistake was made, and I accept full responsibility,” she said.

The officers’ motivations will be reviewed internally. Without providing details, she said unsubstantiated allegations about their motivations were circulating on social media.

Daniels’ lawyer called for an investigation into the arrest, saying some of the officers had what appeared to be “very Pro-Trump” social media pages. The lawyer, Michael Avenatti, tweeted screenshots from what he claimed was the Facebook page of one officer with a pseudonym and asked people to help confirm it.

Daniels considered reappearing at Sirens but later opted for a different club Thursday night, Vanity Gentlemen’s Club. She performed there for about 20 minutes, baring her breasts but not physically interacting with any patrons. A host had announced, “No phones, no photography, no touching!”

Daniels has said she had sex with Trump in 2006, when he was married. Trump has denied it. Before the election, she was paid \$130,000 to stay silent in a deal handled by Trump’s personal attorney Michael Cohen. She is suing to invalidate the nondisclosure agreement.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man cited after bear finds dog carcasses

AK JUNEAU — An Alaska man who operates a pet crematorium was cited for creating a nuisance after one or more bears tore into his soft-sided carport, dragged carcasses out and fed on them in a roadway.

Mike Dziuba of Bridge Pet Services told the Juneau Empire that he fell behind in his work but has moved dog remains to a bear-resistant location.

A caller told Juneau police shortly before 12:30 a.m. Tuesday that four dead dogs had been found on a city street. An animal control officer found the dogs' remains in heavy plastic bags and reported the bags had been ripped open and the carcasses partially consumed.

Murderer of own kin wants less prison time

ME ALFRED — A Maine man convicted of murdering his grandmother and setting fire to her house is arguing for a lighter sentence, with his attorney arguing the crime wasn't "the worst of the worst."

Derek Poulin, 29, is asking the court to reduce his life sentence. The Journal Tribune reported Poulin's attorney was in court in Alfred to make arguments Tuesday.

Poulin was convicted of murdering his grandmother, Patricia Noel, 61, by beating her with a golf club and stabbing her 70 times before burning her home. Nielsen argues the sentence is unfair because of his client's age of 23 at the time of the crime. State prosecutors countered by saying that it's unfair that Noel is dead, and noting Poulin likely would have received the death penalty in other states.

Crews disentangle distressed whale

NJ SANDY HOOK — Crews have disentangled a humpback whale that got caught in material in waters off New Jersey.

The juvenile whale — estimated to be more than 30 feet long — was freed Wednesday. It had been spotted in the Raritan and Sandy Hook bays in recent days.

Officials said the whale had a piece of gill net — a type of netting used in commercial fishing — wrapped around its mouth, forming a closed loop around its blowhole.

Numerous responders — including federal, state and local authorities and a disentanglement team from the nonprofit Center for Coastal Studies — worked together Wednesday to free the whale. They used a custom-designed, hook-shaped knife, attached to a 15-foot-long pole, to slice the piece of netting. The whale was not harmed.

Neo-Nazi books found in Little Free Libraries

NE OMAHA — An anti-defamation group says it's received hundreds of calls from Omaha residents upset over neo-Nazi books left in several Little Free Libraries.

The Plains States Region of the Anti-Defamation League says dozens of neo-Nazi books were found in outdoor book exchanges across Omaha. They say they're working with law enforcement to combat the rise in hate speech. Trendwood Neighborhood Association President Susie Dugan says the libraries are intended to bring the community together.

Signs encouraging citizens to report individuals living in the country illegally also have turned up on poles in Omaha neighborhoods. Residents have

been taking them down.

Resident Dalila Rios said the signs are discriminatory and invite people to make false assumptions.

Plane lands on belly, causes delay

ME PORTLAND — A plane landed on its belly at a Maine airport without causing injuries or a fire.

The twin-engine plane landed without its landing gear at the Portland International Jetport Thursday morning.

A city spokeswoman said the airport would close its runways for one or two hours while workers remove the plane.

The Portland Press Herald reported the Federal Aviation Administration's database shows the plane is registered to a small Waterville carrier.

Police: Man arrested over 3-vehicle crash

NH MANCHESTER — Police in New Hampshire say a man who abruptly drove off from a disturbance at a courthouse caused a three-vehicle crash that injured him and three others.

Police arrested Scott Sprague, 28, of Manchester, on a charge of reckless conduct. Police said he initially faced additional charges of second-degree assault and attempted assault, but said Thursday the charges were amended.

Police said Sprague was involved in a disturbance at Manchester District Court and a police sergeant spoke with him before he sped away Wednesday. Witnesses said he narrowly missed hitting a couple of pedestrians before striking a car that crashed into another vehicle. Sprague suffered a broken leg. Three others were hurt, two seriously.

Sprague was arrested at a

hospital. It wasn't immediately known if he had a lawyer.

Man dies after getting caught in machine

MA SHARON — Authorities say a man who got caught in a machine that uses a laser to cut metal at a Massachusetts factory has died.

Firefighters responded to Industrial Metal Products Co. Inc. in Sharon about 9:30 a.m. Thursday. Deputy Fire Chief Richard Murphy said the man in his 20s was conscious and talking to rescuers when they arrived. It took about an hour to extricate him. He was taken to a hospital, where he later was pronounced dead.

The man's name was not immediately made public.

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration is investigating.

Black bear snacks on lunch inside minivan

GA ATLANTA — Bears don't usually pack a lunch, but they'll be happy to eat whatever someone else has prepared.

WSB-TV reported that Carrie Watts of Rabun County found a large black bear enjoying her sandwich, chips and a cookie inside her minivan after climbing through an open window.

Watts had left the windows down Wednesday to combat the summer heat. She initially thought the bear was a black cat.

She said the bear spent about 30 minutes in the minivan before it climbed back out the window and scaled a tree.

Watts said lunch wasn't the only thing the bear demolished; it also destroyed her child's carseat and shredded some paperwork.

From wire reports

On a mission to provide objective reporting to America's military, wherever they serve.
Read us online at www.stripes.com.

STARS AND STRIPES®

Williams on brink of 24th Grand Slam

Associated Press

LONDON — Serena Williams has been saying it over and over and over: Wimbledon is only her fourth tournament since returning to the tour after having a baby.

“Every time I go out there, I want to, I guess, take a giant step forward,” she said. “Keep taking giant steps, but keep improving.”

Williams played a total of seven matches in 2018 before arriving at the All England Club, and she’ll be playing her seventh match in the last two weeks when she meets 11th-seeded Angelique Kerber of Germany in the Wimbledon final on Saturday.

Certainly didn’t take long for the 36-year-old American to get her game in gear and close in on what would be an eighth Wimbledon title, one short of Martina Navratilova’s record, and 24th Grand Slam trophy in all, equaling Margaret Court’s all-time mark.

It was only 10½ months ago that Williams had far more serious concerns.

After giving birth to her daughter, Olympia, on Sept. 1, Williams dealt with health complications that included blood clots and led to what she said were multiple operations.

“Almost didn’t make it, to be honest,” Williams said shortly after completing her 6-2, 6-4 semifinal victory over 13th-seeded Julia Goerges on Thursday.

She’s been wearing compression leggings during her matches as a precaution and says she remains nervous.

“I mean, even this week, I had a pain in my leg, and I went to the worst-case scenario: ‘Oh, my God, I have a (pulmonary embolism) in my leg,’” Williams said. “I didn’t know I would have such, kind of, traumatic thoughts. Especially now that I have a daughter, I want to be around as long as I can to support her. It’s interesting how that mental recovery is actually taking much longer than I ever expected.”

The tennis? That’s come quite naturally, not surprisingly.

She was off the tour for more than a year after her Australian Open title in January 2017 — won while she was pregnant, she later revealed. Williams first came back by playing doubles with her older sister, Venus, for the U.S. Fed Cup team in February. Then came her singles return, at Indiana Wells in March, when she won her first two matches before losing to her sibling.

Next was a first-round loss at Miami.

“I honestly felt I would have done better in some of the earlier tournaments. That was the hardest part — accepting that I didn’t,” Williams said. “I know that sounds weird, but I worked out a lot and I worked hard.”

Following another two months away from competition, she entered the French Open

in late May, and won three matches before pulling out before the fourth round because of an injured pectoral muscle.

Williams rested some after that, not practicing serving at all for a couple of weeks, and was able to ease into things once Wimbledon began because of a draw that allowed her to avoid playing any seeded opponents — or anyone ranked inside the top 50, for that matter — until Goerges, who was making her Grand Slam semifinal debut.

Now will come the sternest on-court test Williams has faced: Kerber, a former No. 1 and two-time major champion with a lefty stroke and never-give-up-on-a-ball defense.

Williams is 23-6 in Grand Slam finals, and Kerber is responsible for handing her one of those rare defeats, at the 2016 Australian Open. Kerber also won that year’s U.S. Open, replacing Williams atop the WTA rankings right afterward. That was also the year that Kerber reached the Wimbledon final, losing to Williams in straight sets.

They’ve played each other a total of eight times in the past, and Williams leads 6-2.

After winning her semifinal against Jelena Ostapenko 6-3, 6-3, Kerber was asked what she sees across the net when she goes up against Williams.

“I see a champion,” Kerber said, “that’s for sure.”

Former No. 1 Kerber back in Wimbledon final

Associated Press

LONDON — It was clear right from the opening game of Angelique Kerber’s Wimbledon semifinal how things were going to go. She was not going to dictate or control much.

She was, instead, going to employ spectacular defense and solid, steady play, while letting her opponent, Jelena Ostapenko, be the one to determine the outcomes of nearly every point.

It worked. The 11th-seeded Kerber reached her second final at the All England Club by avoiding too many mistakes and using a seven-game run to seize control for a 6-3, 6-3 victory over the 12th-seeded Ostapenko on Thursday.

“These are the matches I was working for as a young kid,” Kerber said, “and to stand here again in the final at Wimbledon is great.”

Kerber is a former No. 1 and a two-time major champion, both coming in 2016 at the Australian Open and U.S. Open. That was also the year the German was the runner-up at Wimbledon, losing to Serena Williams in the title match.

She finds herself up against Williams yet again: The 36-year-old American defeated No. 13 Julia Goerges of Germany in Thursday’s second semifinal on Centre Court.

Williams will bring a 20-match Wimbledon winning streak into the final. She won the grass-court tournament the last two times she played it, in 2015 and 2016, before missing it last year while pregnant. Williams gave birth to a daughter in September.

The left-handed Kerber was mainly a passive participant in the early going against Ostapenko. That first game consisted of eight points: Three were unforced errors by Ostapenko, including a double-fault to begin the proceedings; the other five were winners by her, including a 100 mph ace to close the hold.

Five games in, Ostapenko led 3-2, and the numbers were still tilted toward her. She had 14 winners and 10 unforced errors, while Kerber had three winners and — this was key — zero unforced errors.

There were no drawn-out points in the early going, no lengthy baseline exchanges, essentially because Ostapenko wouldn’t allow it. The Latvian plays an aggressive

brand of first-strike tennis that carried her to the 2017 French Open title as an unseeded 20-year-old.

Kerber, in contrast, bides her time, working the back of the court to get everything back over the net, often kneeling to get low enough to reach shots.

Eventually, Kerber’s style ruled the day. She went on a half-hour run in which she took the last four games of the first set and took a 3-0 lead in the second. Ostapenko’s strokes were missing and she grew increasingly frustrated, slapping a thigh after a miss or leaning forward and putting her hands on her knees after others. By the time she flubbed a backhand while falling behind 5-1 in the second, she dropped her racket and screamed.

It took Kerber two tries to serve out the victory, getting broken to 5-2. But unlike in the quarterfinals, when she needed seven match points to win, this time it required only two, with the match ending — fittingly enough — on a forehand by Ostapenko that sailed wide.

The final tally told the story: Ostapenko had far more winners, 30-10, but also far more unforced errors, 36-7.

Betts' slam lifts BoSox to 10th straight

Associated Press

BOSTON — Mookie Betts was so excited he nearly tripped when his feet got tangled on the way to first base.

Boston's normally mild-mannered right fielder let loose with some emotion after ending a marathon at-bat with a grand slam that helped lead the Red Sox to a 6-4 victory over the Toronto Blue Jays on Thursday night.

"I almost went down," Betts said with a chuckle after going 2-for-4 with five RBIs. "I had to depend on my athletic ability and it came through that time."

That ability has Betts leading the majors in batting and the Red Sox riding a 10-game winning streak to the best record in the big leagues. Boston has the longest current winning streak in the majors and hasn't lost since getting routed 11-1 at Yankee Stadium on July 1.

Betts fouled off seven pitches from All-Star lefty J.A. Happ before driving the 13th pitch well over the Green Monster and out of Fenway Park to put the Red Sox up 5-2 in the fourth inning. Betts turned to his dugout and shouted at teammates in

celebration, then almost lost his footing on the way to first base.

"Since I've been in the big leagues, that's probably the most excited that I've been," said Betts, who added an RBI single in the seventh and increased his batting average to .352.

David Price (10-6) struck out eight over 6 ²/₃ innings for Boston, and Craig Kimbrel earned his 29th save.

Teoscar Hernandez hit a two-run homer in the first and Kendrys Morales had a solo homer for Toronto, which has lost four of five.

Happ (10-6) started strong for Toronto, striking out six and holding Boston to two hits before running into trouble and some misfortune in the fourth. The Red Sox capitalized on a missed fly ball and a video review that erased what would have been the second out while scoring five runs — all unearned — before the inning ended.

"You're not going to see many innings like that. I don't think I could even describe it," Blue Jays manager John Gibbons said.

Happ threw 46 pitches in the inning, 13 to Betts as he fouled off five straight and caught a break when a popup bounced

out of first baseman Justin Smoak's glove after he ran it down in foul territory and attempted an over-the-shoulder catch. Betts worked Happ to a full count, then cleared the bases with his 23rd homer of the season and fourth career grand slam.

Happ loaded the bases with a walk to No. 9 hitter Jackie Bradley Jr., who was batting .202. Happ also threw a wild pitch while walking Bradley in an inning that was extended when Boston successfully challenged a force at second on a fielder's choice.

"I felt good tonight and I felt like my stuff was sharp," Happ said. "I don't know if they got a ball out of the infield before that homer, so that's tough to take."

After Hernandez's two-run homer soared deep into the center-field seats, Price didn't allow another run until Morales led off the seventh with another shot to center that pulled the Blue Jays to 5-3.

Smoak hit an RBI double on a drive to center in the eighth, when a fan in the front row interfered with the ball and Randal Grichuk scored to pull the Blue Jays to 6-4.

Angels' Pujols keeps climbing

Albert Pujols hit two home runs to tie Ken Griffey Jr. for sixth place on the career home run list with 630 as the Los Angeles Angels romped to an 11-2 victory over the visiting Seattle Mariners on Thursday night.

Pujols rarely talks about personal achievements. But matching Griffey, a former Mariners star, had him feeling an extra sense of pride.

"Griffey was everybody's hero growing up and that's how I look at it," Pujols said. "I know I am a right-handed hitter, but everybody wanted to have that sweet swing. For me, I got a chance to become pretty good friends with him. ... It's just really special to tie a legend."

Pujols hit a two-run shot in the first and a solo drive in the sixth. He also had three hits to pass ex-Angel Rod Carew and move into a tie for 25th on the career list with Rickey Henderson at 3,055.

— Associated Press

Roundup

Yanks score 2 in 8th, top Tribe

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Aaron Hicks drove home Didi Gregorius from first base with a one-out double in the eighth inning off Cleveland ace Corey Kluber, sending the New York Yankees to a 7-4 victory over the Indians on Thursday.

Hicks drove a 3-2 pitch from Kluber (12-5) to deep center field, and Gregorius scored easily when the ball one-hopped the wall.

Brett Gardner homered twice and Gregorius also connected for the Yankees, playing at Progressive Field for the first time since last October, when they overcame a 2-0 deficit and won the AL Division Series.

Dodgers 3, Padres 2: Andrew Toles broke a scoreless tie with an RBI single off Tyson Ross in the seventh inning to help All-Star Ross Stripling and visiting Los Angeles take three of four from last-place

San Diego.

Ross (5-8) took a one-hit shutout into the seventh before it fell apart. Chris Taylor doubled with one out and manager Andy Green came out to check on the big right-hander. Green let Ross stay in, but he allowed Toles' single on his 101st pitch and was pulled.

Twins 5, Rays 1: Kyle Gibson struck out nine batters in eight innings for host Minnesota, which handed Tampa Bay ace Blake Snell his shortest start of the season after a two-hour rain delay.

Athletics 6, Astros 4: Mark Canha hit a two-run single in a three-run eighth as surging Oakland defeated host Houston.

Rockies 5, Diamondbacks 1: Gerardo Parra and Raimel Tapia had pinch-hit RBI singles in host Colorado's three-run sixth.

Nationals 5, Mets 4: Max

Scherzer made a final pitch to start the All-Star Game on his own mound, Anthony Rendon hit two homers and Bryce Harper also connected, leading Washington over host New York.

Pirates 6, Brewers 3: Jameson Taillon had a career-high 10 strikeouts, Jordy Mercer tied his career best with four RBIs and Pittsburgh defeated visiting Milwaukee. Taillon (6-7) surrendered one run on four hits with two walks. The right-hander struck out the side twice.

Phillies 5, Orioles 4: Jorge Alfaro homered and drove in three runs, and Nick Pivetta took a three-hitter into the seventh for Philadelphia. Making the most of a one-day stay in Baltimore, the Phillies got 12 hits off Kevin Gausman (4-7) while building a 5-0 lead against the team with the worst record in the majors.

Riders relax, reflect on longest Tour stage

Associated Press

CHARTRES, France — Peter Sagan thrust his arm and fist forward like Superman.

Chris Froome calmly dropped back to his team car to get his seat adjusted by a mechanic.

Other riders chatted as they admired the rolling countryside.

With nearly six hours in the saddle and hardly any action until the finale, there was plenty of time to relax and fool around during the longest stage of the Tour de France on Friday.

“Boring stage,” said Sagan, the three-time reigning world champion. “You’re happy it was a sunny day, no wind, without stress. But it was boring.”

“I talked to everyone,” Sagan said when asked how he passed the time after finishing third in the mass sprint which, with its uphill finish, suited him.

“I’m happy with that,” he said. “I had no

legs to beat the first two guys.”

Dutch rider Dylan Groenewegen won the stage ahead of Fernando Gaviria, who like Sagan has also won two stages in this year’s Tour.

Four-time champion Froome and the other favorites finished safely in the main pack on Stage 7, which — unlike earlier sprinting legs — was without serious crashes.

Greg Van Avermaet held on to the yellow jersey he grabbed on Stage 3 and doubled his lead over Geraint Thomas to six seconds by winning an intermediate bonus sprint.

Froome is 14th, 1:05 behind Van Avermaet.

Gaviria and Sagan were marking each other when Groenewegen surprised both and surged ahead on the final straight.

It was the second victory in the race for Groenewegen, who also won a sprint in last year’s concluding stage on the

Champs-Elysees in Paris.

“The first days were not good enough, the legs were not good. Today the legs were good and everything was OK,” said Groenewegen, who rides for Team Lotto NL-Jumbo. “With 200 meters (yards) to go I saw the gap and I was going to the finish line.”

After crossing the line, Groenewegen placed his finger to his lips in a gesture of silence. “People said I was not good enough after the first sprints but that’s not true,” he said.

The 143.5-mile trek from Fougères concluded in Chartres, site of a vast cathedral known for its stained-glass windows.

Days like these are referred to as “transfer” stages, for moving the Tour from one area to the next — from Brittany to north-central France in this case, as the race winds toward Sunday’s highly awaited cobbled leg to Roubaix near the Belgian border.

Briefly

Knights, Fleury agree on terms of 3-year extension

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The Vegas Golden Knights have agreed to terms with three-time Stanley Cup champion goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury on a three-year contract extension worth an average of \$7 million a year.

Fleury had one year remaining on his contract. The extension announced Friday would keep him with Vegas through the 2021-22 season, creating the possibility that Fleury, 33, could end his career with the Golden Knights.

Fleury helped the Golden Knights to the Pacific Division title and an appearance in the 2018 Stanley Cup Final in their inaugural season.

The Golden Knights selected Fleury in the 2017 expansion draft from the Pittsburgh Penguins. He won 29 games last season, including the 400th victory of his career. He registered the best statistical regular season of his career with a goals-against average of 2.24 and a save percentage of .927.

Mickelson: I’ll try to act better on course

GULLANE, Scotland — Phil Mickelson wishes he could take back the moment when he swatted a moving golf ball at the U.S. Open.

“But there’s not much I can do about it now other than just try to ... act a little better,” Mickelson said on Thursday at the Scottish Open.

In his most extensive comments since he purposely violated the Rules of Golf at Shinnecock Hills, Mickelson said whatever backlash he receives from players and the public was his own doing.

Mickelson was sliding far out of contention in the third round of the U.S. Open when he chased after a bogey putt on the 13th hole and hit it back toward the hole to keep it rolling off the front of the green. He was assessed a two-shot penalty amid criticism that he should have been disqualified for such a willful violation.

In his next tournament,

Mickelson tamped down tall grass just beyond the tee box at The Greenbrier to play a low iron shot, and then immediately realized it might have been a violation. He summoned a rules official, told him what happened and was penalized.

“It’s not been my best month,” Mickelson said.

Mickelson has apologized previously for the U.S. Open blunder, sending out a statement the following week and speaking about it during a corporate-sponsored event in Chicago for the Women’s PGA Championship.

“It’s much easier for me to deal with it because it was my own fault,” Mickelson said. “You have to be accountable for yourself. I do a lot of dumb stuff.”

AP source: Nets trade Jeremy Lin to Hawks

NEW YORK — Jeremy Lin’s injury-plagued stint in Brooklyn is over.

The Nets have agreed to trade Lin to the Atlanta Hawks,

a person with knowledge of the deal said early Friday. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the trade had not been announced.

The move helps clear up the Nets’ logjam at point guard and sends Lin to another team that is also pretty crowded at the position. ESPN first reported the deal, saying the Nets and Hawks would swap future second-round picks.

Lin has a year and \$12.5 million left on the contract he signed two summers ago. He made it through just 37 games with the Nets and only one last season, as he ruptured the patella tendon in his right knee during a season-opening loss at Indiana.

Spencer Dinwiddie stepped in while Lin was out and became one of the NBA’s most improved players. Brooklyn also has D’Angelo Russell, the No. 2 pick in the 2015 draft, at the point after acquiring him from the Lakers.