

STARS AND STRIPES®

Thursday, July 26, 2018

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

US and allies train to manage radioactive threats

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA, Japan — U.S. servicemembers joined multinational drills Wednesday aimed at identifying and neutralizing radioactive threats.

The onshore training wrapped up a three-day Pacific Shield exercise that included sea drills geared toward intercepting illicit cargo that could be used to make weapons of mass destruction.

It's the fifth annual training event for the 17 countries belonging to the Proliferation Security Initiative, which aims to halt the spread of WMDs, missiles and materials or equipment that could be used to build such weaponry.

The drills were a taste of what should happen during an onshore investigation of a suspicious vessel.

Japanese police, customs and coast guard personnel showed off some high-tech search equipment to representatives from countries such as Australia, India, New Zealand, South Korea, Singapore and Canada.

They used X-ray trucks to scan a container before dispatching counterterrorism experts to remove a dangerous chemical.

A team from the U.S., Thai and Philippine militaries swept for radiation and identified and neutralized "a radioactive threat," according to U.S. Coast Guard Lt. Kevin Peters, of Maritime Security Response Team West.

"For the safety of the public, any radioactive illicit substances must be interdicted as soon as possible," he said.

The drill demonstrated a way to identify WMD materials without expensive gear.

An agent equipped with a pocket-sized "personal radiation detector" was able to identify a threat, to move to a safe location and to call for backup before a hazardous materials team removed the suspicious substance.

"Equipment does not equal capability," a narrator told observers.

Romina Rocha, of the Australian Border Force, said the training prepares nations to work together.

"Countries will have different capabilities, so it just shows what we can achieve if we share information in a timely manner."

Rate hike affects parcels sent to troops overseas

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

In January, Dave Silver logged onto the U.S. Postal Service's online portal for calculating postage for Priority Mail packages.

As president of the all-volunteer Operation Yellow Ribbon in southern New Jersey, Silver had tallied postage for thousands of care packages he had sent to servicemembers in Afghanistan and Iraq over the years.

But something was way off on this one.

"I hit enter, and all of sudden I'm looking at \$60 postage instead of \$30 or so," said Silver, who assumed there was a glitch in the USPS' website.

There wasn't. He subsequently learned it arose from a quiet change made by the USPS that doubled the shipping costs for many Priority Mail packages sent to overseas military addresses.

That roughly translates to an annual postage increase of \$50,000 for Operation Yellow Ribbon, Silver said.

"It has totally thrown a curveball at us," he said of the nonprofit that sent out about 1,900 care packages in 2017. "We know nonprofits that have just shut down and stopped because of it."

Silver and others have pinned their hopes on a bill introduced in Congress this month that could provide some relief.

For about a half-century, the USPS had used hubs in New York City, San Francisco and Miami to route packages mailed to Army Post Office, Fleet Post Office or Diplomatic Post Office addresses. The cost of mailing to APO, FPO or DPO addresses was uniform, regardless of how many of the USPS' 10 regional zones a package crossed.

In 2013, the USPS consolidated the processing of packages being sent to APO/FPO/DPO addresses in a single center in Chicago, but the one-zone postage rate was maintained.

In January, the rates for shipping such packages was changed to reflect how many of those zones were crossed.

For an organization based in New Jersey, such as Operation Yellow Ribbon, it

has meant paying extra to send through several zones to Chicago.

"The post office went rogue," said John Couch, one of the co-founders of ShipitAPO, which helps overseas servicemembers receive packages from retailers that won't send to APO addresses.

Couch had submitted a formal protest over the USPS' proposed rate change, which he said was "buried" in a notice published in the Federal Register in October 2017.

"I'm representing the military people who are my customers," he said. "They're paying me more because I have to pay the post office more. They're the ones suffering. I make the same amount of money because they pay me a handling fee."

In a statement provided to Stars and Stripes, the USPS said it receives no tax dollars for operating expenses and must rely solely on postage, products and services for funding.

"Changes to improve our operations are being made so we can reduce costs and remain competitive in the marketplace, to be able to continue to serve the public in the most efficient, cost-effective way possible," the statement said.

With the consolidation of shipping military packages from Chicago, "some customers will pay less for shipping and some will pay more based on their distance from the Chicago processing hub," the statement said.

Earlier this month, Rep. Tom MacArthur, R-N.J., introduced the Care Packages for Our Heroes Act, which would require the same postage rate for all packages going to overseas military addresses regardless of how many zones they cross.

But with little legislation moving forward in Congress these days, Operation Yellow Ribbon likely faces a hard decision.

"We can either try to match what we did last year to keep our productivity up and burn through our cash, spending more each month than we bring in and bringing down our savings every month," Silver said. "Or we cut back, but then we're hurting the morale of the brave men and women overseas. We're trying to walk that fine balance."

Pompeo: N. Korea still producing fuel for nukes

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

President Donald Trump remains upbeat about eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons although the communist regime has yet to shutter its nuclear program, the secretary of state has told Congress.

"Yes, they continue to produce fissile material," Mike Pompeo said of the North in response to a question from Sen. Ed Markey, D-Mass., during a hearing Wednesday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The administration's objective remains the "final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea, as agreed to by Chairman Kim Jong Un," Pompeo told the lawmakers.

Pompeo, who earlier this month traveled to Pyongyang for the third time since April, said last week that the North Koreans reaffirmed their commitment to denuclearize during his most recent visit.

The pledge was one of several points

made in a historic summit between Trump and Kim last month in Singapore that included an agreement to resume a long-stalled search for the remains of thousands of Americans believed lost in the North during the 1950-53 Korean War. The North is expected to hand over as many as 55 sets of remains on Friday.

"We are engaged in patient diplomacy, but we will not let this drag out to no end," Pompeo told lawmakers on Wednesday. "Progress is happening. We need [Kim] to follow through on his commitments that he made in Singapore. Until North Korea eliminates its weapons of mass destruction, our sanctions, and those at the ... United Nations will remain in effect."

Multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions require North Korea to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs, Pompeo added.

"Those resolutions were passed unanimously, and they remain binding. We absolutely need every single nation to maintain

the enforcement of those sanctions to which every nation is committed," he said. "The path ahead is not easy, but our hopes for a safer world and a brighter future for North Korea endure."

Markey expressed concern that there is "no verifiable evidence that North Korea ... is denuclearizing."

"I am afraid at this point that the Trump administration is being taken for a ride," he said.

"Fear not, senator," Pompeo responded. "This administration has taken enormously constructive actions that have put us in a place that is far better than in either of the two previous administrations, one Republican, one Democrat. We have put a sanctions regime in place that is unequaled."

The secretary of state declined to answer questions in public about whether North Korea is still trying to develop submarine-launched ballistic missiles and whether its nuclear program is advancing, Reuters reported.

Osan airman suffers heat illness during ruck march

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A South Korea-based airman who collapsed during a ruck march is among thousands hospitalized from a heat wave that has claimed dozens of lives this month in the Far East.

A GoFundMe page seeking donations for the family of Airman 1st Class Mikhahael Ragay says that "during a ruck at Osan Air Base, South Korea, A1C Ragay fell out due to heat exhaustion and dehydration. His core body temperature was 108 degrees Fahrenheit and he is currently in critical condition in a comatose state. His family

flew out to Osan to be with him, and all proceeds will go to his family to support them during this difficult time."

Members of the 51st Security Forces Squadron participated in a ruck march about 6 a.m. Saturday, said Staff Sgt. Tinesse Jackson, a 51st Fighter Wing spokeswoman. The trek culminated an eight-day Combat Readiness Course, which is an initial training exercise for airmen new to the unit.

"A member of the 51st SFS passed out during the ruck march and was taken to the emergency room," she said. "The Airman is currently being treated and recovering at an off-base hospital in the Republic

of Korea.

"The 51st Fighter Wing remains focused on the safety of all servicemembers while maintaining readiness at Osan Air Base," she added.

The temperature outside at the time of the ruck march was approximately 77 degrees, Jackson said.

The Korean Meteorological Administration said temperatures reached a high of 97 degrees at Osan on Saturday and 99 degrees the next day.

Airman 1st Class Logan Palmer said he set up the GoFundMe page to help Ragay's family, who traveled to Osan from Texas to be with him.

House approves compromise defense policy measure

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The House on Thursday approved a compromise defense policy bill that would authorize a wave of significant Defense Department increases, including servicemembers' pay and the number of troops, equipment and weapons for the upcoming fiscal year.

The National Defense Authorization Act, or H.R. 5515, also will usher through

a series of new reforms and policy efforts. It passed by a House floor vote of 359 to 54, with most of the no votes coming from Democrats.

The Senate now must approve it, and at this pace, the defense bill could see passage ahead of the start of the next fiscal year on Oct. 1, the first on-time passage of the NDAA in about 20 years.

On Monday, a joint panel of House and Senate lawmakers reached a deal on the

\$716 billion NDAA after weeks of negotiations that followed a series of discussions and hearings with top military officials.

For now, the compromise NDAA authorizes a 2.6 percent pay raise for servicemembers, as well as new purchases of aircrafts, ships, submarines and weapons. It also includes new policy initiatives, such as revamping the military's promotion system, and moves to rein in sexual misconduct in the ranks.

Navy's first female admiral dies at 98

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The first woman to rise to the rank of admiral in the Navy died Saturday, just more than 46 years after her groundbreaking promotion into the ranks of flag officer, the service announced Wednesday.

Retired Rear Adm. Alene Duerk spent her career in the Navy's nursing corps, serving during three major wars and eventually rising to the Navy's top nurse position, according to the Naval History and Heritage Command. She was 98 years old.

Duerk never envisioned making the Navy a career when she entered the service as an ensign in 1941 after graduating from the Toledo Hospital School of Nursing in her native Ohio, she said in a 2016 interview at Bowling Green State University.

"I didn't go into the Navy for a lifetime — I went in for six months," she told the Ohio university from which she received a doctorate in Human Relations in 1973, two years before her retirement from the

military. "But I had an amazing career and have a lot of good memories. I hope I did my duty."

Duerk recalled feeling honored when she learned she'd become the Navy's first female admiral. With the rank came a lot of attention she had not previously experienced, she told Bowling Green, recalling regular requests for interviews with newspapers, television and radio stations.

"I traveled a lot and made extensive trips, both here and overseas," after being promoted to rear admiral, she said. "And whenever I visited naval hospitals and naval facilities, I tried to speak with the women serving in the Navy, and not just the nurses."

"It was a nice distinction to have, and to be recognized as the first, but I wanted to make certain that I used that notoriety to do as much positive as I could."

Following her death, Navy officials described her as a trailblazer for military women and a medical innovator.

"Alene Duerk was a strong and dedicated trailblazer who embodied the very princi-

ples that continue to guide Navy medicine today," said Vice Adm. Forrest Faison, the service's surgeon general. "She will forever be remembered as a ... leader who provided the best care to those who defended our nation, honoring the uniform we wear and the privilege of leadership."

Duerk served at Navy hospitals in Virginia and Maryland in her early years before deploying during World War II into the Pacific theater aboard the USS Benevolence hospital ship in 1945. After World War II, Duerk worked at the Naval Hospital Great Lakes in Illinois until she was released from active duty in 1946 and assigned to the inactive reserves, according to the Navy. She was called back to active duty in 1951 during the Korean War. She would spend the next two decades working as a nursing instructor, educator, recruiter and manager in Virginia, Pennsylvania, San Diego, Japan, Chicago and Washington.

In 1970, as a captain, Duerk was appointed the director of the Navy Nurse Corps. Two years later, President Richard Nixon approved her promotion to rear admiral.

Backing off auto tariffs, US agrees to EU talks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump and European leaders pulled back from the brink of a trade war over autos Wednesday and agreed to open talks to tear down trade barriers between the U.S. and the European Union.

But while politicians and businesses welcomed the deal Thursday, the agreement was vague, the negotiations are sure to be contentious, and the U.S. remains embroiled in major trade disputes with China and other countries.

In a hastily called Rose Garden appearance with Trump, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said the U.S. and the EU had agreed to hold off on new tariffs, suggesting that the U.S. will suspend plans to start taxing European auto imports — a move that would have marked a major escalation in trade tensions between the allies.

Trump also said the EU had agreed to buy "a lot of soybeans" and to increase its imports of liquefied natural gas from the U.S.

And the two agreed to resolve a dispute over U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said Thursday addressing steel and aluminum tariffs and countertariffs would be covered in the first phase of talks between the U.S. and the EU. He reiterated that no new tariffs would be imposed during the negotiations and, if the U.S. concluded an agreement, "there would be no car tariffs on the EU."

Trump was traveling Thursday to Iowa and Illinois, where his trade agenda was expected to be a leading issue. The administration recently announced a \$12 billion temporary aid package for farmers — including soybean producers — dealing with the impact of retaliatory tariffs.

11 House GOP members seek to impeach DOJ's Rosenstein

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A group of 11 House conservatives introduced articles of impeachment against Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, the Justice Department official who oversees special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation.

The move came Wednesday after months of criticism aimed at the department — and the Russia investigation in particular — from President Donald Trump and his Republican allies in Congress. Trump has fumed about Mueller's probe and repeatedly has called it a "witch hunt," a refrain echoed by some of the lawmakers.

The impeachment effort is led by Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., who talks to Trump frequently and often defends him to his colleagues.

It is unclear whether there will be enough support in the party to pass the impeachment resolution, as Republican leaders have not signed on to the ef-

fort and are unlikely to back it.

Meadows, Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan and the other Republicans who introduced the resolution have criticized Rosenstein and Justice Department officials for not being responsive enough as House committees have requested documents related to the beginning of the Russia investigation and a closed investigation into Democrat Hillary Clinton's emails.

The introduction does not trigger an immediate vote, but Meadows could make procedural moves on the House floor that could force a vote late this week or when the House returns in September from its upcoming recess. The House is scheduled to leave Thursday for the five-week recess.

The five articles accuse Rosenstein of "high crimes and misdemeanors" for failing to produce information to the committees and of signing off on what some Republicans say was improper surveillance of a Trump adviser.

EUCOM aids fire response effort in Greece

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. military aircraft continue to search for hot spots in Greece, where wildfires tore through a coastal village earlier this week outside Athens, U.S. European Command said Thursday.

Greece made its initial request for U.S. assistance Tuesday, and since then U.S. military assets in Europe have been in the area.

“Right now, the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force, at the request of the Greek government, are conducting overflights to identify hot spots and damaged areas as a result of the fires,” said Lt. Cmdr. Joseph Hontz, a EUCOM spokesman.

The U.S. Navy is providing one P-8A aircraft based out of Naval Air Station Sigonella, Sicily.

The U.S. Air Force is providing a MQ-9 Reaper drone, which is operating out of Larissa Air Base, a Greek air force installation, Hontz said.

Greece’s initial request was for 48 hours of support, but EUCOM will continue the mission as needed, he said.

Judge: Emoluments suit brought against Trump can proceed

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — A federal judge on Wednesday rejected President Donald Trump’s latest effort to stop a lawsuit that alleges Trump is violating the Constitution by continuing to do business with foreign governments.

The ruling, from U.S. District Judge Peter J. Messitte in Greenbelt, Md., will allow the plaintiffs — the attorneys general of Maryland and the District of Columbia — to proceed with their case, which says Trump has violated little-used anti-corruption clauses in the Constitution known as the emoluments clauses.

This ruling appeared to mark the first time a federal judge had interpreted those constitutional provisions and applied their restrictions to a sitting president.

If the ruling stands, it could bring unprecedented scrutiny onto Trump’s businesses — which have sought to keep their transactions with foreign states private, even as their owner sits in the Oval Office.

Messitte’s 52-page opinion said that in the modern context, the Constitution’s ban on “emoluments” could apply to Trump — that it could cover any business transactions with foreign governments where Trump derived a “profit, gain or advantage.”

“This includes profits from private transactions, even those involving services given at fair market value,” Messitte wrote.

In the past year, the Trump Organization has hosted several large events paid for by foreign governments and reported about \$150,000 in what it called “foreign profits” last year.

“In sum, Plaintiffs have plausibly alleged that

the President has been receiving or is potentially able to receive ‘emoluments’ ... in violation of the Constitution,” Messitte wrote.

Trump still owns his company, though he has said he has stepped back from day-to-day control.

The Trump Organization and the Justice Department both had urged Messitte to dismiss the case, arguing the Founding Fathers had written this clause to stop officials from taking bribes — but not to stop them from doing business.

The company did not respond to requests for comment. The Justice Department released a short statement saying it was reviewing the decision and adding, “We continue to maintain that this case should be dismissed.”

They now could seek to appeal the ruling.

The plaintiffs now want to interview Trump Organization employees and to search company records to determine which foreign countries have spent money at Trump’s hotel in downtown Washington — and how much they spent. They also could seek to review Trump’s tax returns, which — unlike other recent presidents — he has not made public.

“We are one step closer to stopping President Trump from violating the Constitution’s original anti-corruption provisions,” said District of Columbia Attorney General Karl Racine, a Democrat, who brought this case along with Democratic Maryland Attorney General Brian Frosh.

Frosh said his staff already was preparing to seek financial documents related to the president’s Washington hotel, which is located in a federally owned building, the Old Post Office. Before he became president, Trump won a federal contract to operate the hotel in the historic building.

Iranian general: War would ‘destroy all’ Trump owns

The Washington Post

ISTANBUL — The powerful commander of Iran’s special forces warned the U.S. on Thursday to halt threats of military action against Tehran, raising the stakes in an already fiery exchange between U.S. and Iranian leaders this week.

The combative message from Gen. Qasem Soleimani, chief of the Revolutionary Guard’s elite Quds force, also suggested that Iran’s leadership is willing to stoke tensions with the Trump administration as part of Tehran’s efforts to project wider

regional influence.

Soleimani said President Donald Trump would regret waging a war that would “destroy all that he owns.”

“You may begin the war, but it us who will end it,” Soleimani said in a speech in the central city of Hamedan, Iran’s Tasnim News Agency reported.

He also said that the Red Sea, a critical waterway linking the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean basin, was “no longer secure” with U.S. military assets stationed in the area.

Iran often has denounced the U.S. military presence in the

Persian Gulf, including the Navy’s 5th Fleet headquarters in Bahrain. But Soleimani’s reference to the Red Sea reflects an expanded regional reach for what Iran considers within its military sphere.

Soleimani — a shadowy commander who has waged proxy wars in Iraq and Syria, including against U.S. troops — stopped short of issuing any concrete threats against U.S. forces.

But his remarks came just one day after Saudi Arabia announced it was suspending oil shipments in the Bab al-

Mandeb Strait, which connects the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea, because of what authorities said was a missile attack on two Saudi oil tankers by Iran-allied rebels in Yemen.

The war in Yemen has been a theater for spiking tensions between Iran and the U.S. The Trump administration and ally Saudi Arabia have accused Iran of providing weapons, including ballistic missiles, and other support to the Houthis, a rebel group that seized control of Yemen’s capital four years ago.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police officer shouts, saves man from train

NJ PERTH AMBOY — A police officer in New Jersey saved a man who was just seconds from being struck by a moving commuter train.

Body camera video captured the incident as Perth Amboy Patrolman Kyle Savoia ran along the tracks last week.

“Hey, bud! Hey move,” Savoia shouted as he screamed, “Stop the train!”

The man got off the tracks with moments to spare before the train stopped.

The man’s name has not been released. It’s not known why he was sitting on the tracks.

Couple tracks down thief using Facebook

MS DIAMONDHEAD — Just weeks after their May wedding, a Mississippi couple found that all their gifts had disappeared from a storage unit.

Chance Stockstill told WLOX-TV that the wedding gift heist was caught on camera at the storage facility, so he and his wife, Katherine, uploaded the footage to Facebook. Within a few hours, a stranger reached out and told them they had the address of the likely culprit, but not his name.

An investigator used that information to identify the suspect as William Smith, who had already been jailed for similar crimes.

Authorities were able to recover only three of the Stockstills’ gifts.

‘Simpsons’ writer says show based ‘nowhere’

MA BOSTON — A veteran writer for “The Simpsons” said the show isn’t based in Massachusetts despite

several references to the state.

The Boston Globe reported Mike Reiss recently sat down for a segment on MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” to discuss the show and his new book, “Springfield Confidential: Jokes, Secrets, and Outright Lies from a Lifetime Writing for The Simpsons.”

Reiss said the Springfield where the show is set is “nowhere.” He explained the writers chose Springfield as a location because there are more than 40 cities and towns across the U.S. that share the name.

Police arrest 2 men with stolen fish tank

OH NILES — Police in Ohio said two men on a motorcycle, with the passenger holding a large, boxed fish tank, were arrested after an officer passed them while responding to a pet store’s report of a stolen aquarium.

The Niles police Facebook page said the passenger jumped off, breaking the aquarium, when the officer turned to follow the motorcycle Monday and was arrested.

Another officer found the bike at another location and a “nervous-looking” man pruning a tree with his bare hands behind a home. He was identified as the bike’s operator.

Niles Municipal Court officials said Mitchell Adkins, 52, and Christopher Binion, 46, pleaded not guilty to theft charges.

Man charged after climbing office tower

NC CHARLOTTE — Police charged a man they say scaled a 33-story office tower under construction in North Carolina.

Local media reports said Charles Lamont Jackson, 23, fled when police arrived at the

construction site in Charlotte’s uptown district Sunday night, but he was caught about a block away.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department records show Jackson was charged with first-degree trespassing and resisting arrest.

The office tower Jackson is accused of climbing is part of the Legacy Union Development in uptown Charlotte and is one of several large buildings under construction in the area.

Man arrested for exercising in the nude

NH PLAISTOW — A man who stripped naked before working out at a New Hampshire gym told police officers he thought he was in a “judgment-free zone” before being arrested.

NECN reported Eric Stagno, 34, of Haverhill, Mass., was charged with indecent exposure, lewdness and disorderly conduct Sunday for taking off his clothes and exercising at a Plaistow Planet Fitness.

Police said that he walked back and forth and started doing poses on a yoga mat.

He allegedly referenced Planet Fitness’ slogan that it is a “judgment-free zone.”

Officials: Beware the clinging jellyfish

RI NARRAGANSETT — Rhode Island’s environment and health agencies warned the public about the presence of clinging jellyfish in one of the state’s bodies of water.

The Department of Health said Monday that for the previous two weeks, people have reported experiencing stinging sensations and painful welts after spending time in Point Judith Pond.

State marine biologists were able to confirm the presence of the clinging jellyfish.

These jellyfish are the size of a dime and marked with an orange and brown cross on their transparent torsos.

City to spend \$2.8M on dock for warship

IN EVANSVILLE — City officials plan to spend nearly \$2.8 million toward building a new dock and visitor center near downtown Evansville for a restored World War II naval vessel that’s been based in the city since 2005.

Officials said the money will come from the city’s riverboat gaming fund, which has about \$28 million available.

Deputy Mayor Steve Schaefer told the Evansville Courier & Press that costly changes must be made at the Ohio River dock previously used by the Tropicana Evansville casino riverboat to meet Army Corp of Engineers regulations.

July 28 set as national American cowboy day

WY CHEYENNE — The U.S. Senate declared July 28 National Day of the American Cowboy.

The annual resolution was passed by unanimous vote Tuesday.

Wyoming Republican Sens. Mike Enzi and John Barrasso were among the main sponsors of the resolution.

Started in 2005 by Wyoming Sen. Craig Thomas, the National Day of the American Cowboy traditionally coincides each year with Cheyenne Frontier Days. The resolution honors the culture, traditions and values of the American cowboy way of life that are still alive today.

From wire reports

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Rangers' Hamels struggling at bad time

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Cole Hamels was coming off a no-hitter when he got traded to the Texas Rangers three years ago.

With Tuesday's non-waiver trade deadline approaching and the Rangers now at the bottom of the AL West and far out of contention, the left-hander would seem to be a target for contending teams.

Except the 2008 World Series MVP is in a stretch that he calls "probably the worst of my career so far."

In his last home start for Texas before the deadline, Hamels (5-9) allowed seven runs on Monday night against Oakland. It was the third time in four July games he allowed seven runs, including at Baltimore when he got only two outs on 41 pitches on a day four runs were unearned.

"He's a competitor, man, and I think the way everything's happened this year, it's affect-

ing him. He's a guy that his whole career he's been in contention," Rangers shortstop Elvis Andrus said Wednesday. "I think he's kind of like thinking too much out there while he's pitching right now."

Along with the extended struggles by Hamels, some of the Rangers' relievers scouted by other teams also are in rough patches.

Texas took a 10-2 lead into the seventh inning against Oakland on Tuesday night and lost 13-10 in 10 innings. Closer Keone Kela threw a career-high 40 pitches in his first blown save after converted 23 in a row to start this season, and left-hander Jake Diekman walked three batters and hit another while allowing four runs.

Hamels is 1-3 in his last five starts, allowing 25 earned runs in 22 innings and raising his ERA from 3.41 to a career-high 4.72. He has given up 23 homers in 20 starts and has thrown fewer than 100 pitches in eight of his last 10.

"When you're not performing physically, there's an easier excuse," Hamels said. "But when it kind of snowballs into multiple games, especially when they're back-to-back-to-back, that's when the mental side can kind of creep in a little bit more."

When asked after the 15-3 loss to Oakland if the idea of being traded again had entered his mind, he said that was part of the game and something players have to deal with.

"You can't run away from it," said Hamels, whose next scheduled start for the Rangers is Saturday at Houston.

The 34-year-old pitcher is owed about \$8 million for the rest of this season. His contract includes a \$20 million club option for 2019 that includes a \$6 million buyout.

Hamels is 1-7 with a 6.41 ERA in 10 home starts this season but 4-2 with a 2.93 ERA in 10 starts away from Arlington. Overall, he has lost 13 of 20 decisions since opening his Rang-

ers career with a 31-7 record.

"Professional, very competitive. Look at the expression on his face, I think that tells a little bit about the story, but I don't think he's ever lost the drive and the competitiveness," manager Jeff Banister said.

The 25-year-old Kela converted 25 consecutive save chances dating to last year before Tuesday night, when he entered with one out in the eighth. He allowed Stephen Piscotty's tying homer in the ninth.

Diekman, the reliever who was traded with Hamels from the Philadelphia Phillies, has pitched in 44 games this season — 22 each at home and on the road. The results have been drastically different, with a 7.94 ERA with 18 walks in 17 innings at home and an 0.47 ERA with five walks in 19 innings on the road.

"I feel terrible when I pitch at home," Diekman said. "Just keep pitching and figure it out."

Davis' 2nd homer of game lifts Oakland over Texas

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Oakland slugger Khris Davis has more homers than anyone in the majors since the start of the 2016 season. The Texas Rangers have seen way too many of them.

Davis homered two more times in Texas, including a towering two-run homer with two strikes and two outs in the ninth inning Wednesday night, as the Athletics rallied again to beat the Rangers 6-5.

"Honestly, I blacked out and I couldn't tell you," Davis said when asked what he was thinking when down to his last strike. "I was telling myself, 'Swing at a good pitch,' and it showed up. It was amazing. I felt like I did my job."

Davis hit a three-run homer in the seventh to get the Athletics to 5-4. He went the opposite way in the ninth, a no-doubt blast into the upper deck of

seats in right field off Jose Leclerc (2-3) for his 27th homer of the season.

"Up and away fastball, he did a great job at staying on it, hitting it out to right," Rangers manager Jeff Banister said. "He's one of those guys that probably feels very comfortable in the box against us."

Of his 112 homers the past three seasons — three more than Giancarlo Stanton of the New York Yankees — Davis has gone deep 24 times against the Rangers in that span. He has homered in six consecutive games against them.

Texas led 5-1 going into the seventh, a night after being ahead 10-2 into the seventh and losing 13-10 when Davis hit a tiebreaking three-run homer in the 10th.

Davis has 25 homers and 57 RBIs in 49 career games overall against the Rangers — 15 homers and 31 RBIs in 26 road

games, though he insisted he doesn't really feel any different when hitting in Texas.

"The moment that you think you have it figured out, it will bite you in the behind," he said. "I just take it pitch by pitch," he said.

Then as reporters started walking away from his locker, he called out, "See you tomorrow."

Only Ken Griffey Jr. has homered in more consecutive games against Texas — seven in a row with the Mariners in 1994.

Leclerc, without a save in his four chances, worked Wednesday in place of Keone Kela, the regular closer who threw a career-high 40 pitches and had his first blown save in 24 chances this season on Tuesday night.

Oakland has won the first three games of the four-game series, and 26 of 33 overall. It

has won 10 of its last 11 series, with a split in the other.

Lou Trivino (8-1), the fifth Oakland pitcher, worked a scoreless eighth.

Scoring late: The A's have scored 24 of their 34 runs in this series in the seventh inning or later. They lead the majors with 201 runs scored in the seventh inning or later. "They try and tell me this is supposed to make me younger. I don't know that it makes me any younger. It might make him (Davis) younger," A's manager Bob Melvin said.

Coming back strong: The loss overshadowed six strong innings by Texas starter Martin Perez, who allowed only one run over six innings in his third start since coming back from 2½ months for his second DL stint recovering from a broken right elbow during the offseason. "Probably one of the brighter spots of the night," Banister said.

Trio of sluggers lift Angels over ChiSox

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — With their three biggest stars all shining Wednesday night, the Los Angeles Angels put on quite a show.

Mike Trout, Albert Pujols and Shohei Ohtani homered in the same game for the first time, and the Angels romped to an 11-3 win over the Chicago White Sox.

Pujols passed Ken Griffey Jr. for sixth place on the career list with his 631st home run. Trout connected twice and drove in four runs. Ohtani launched a two-run shot projected at 446 feet.

Not to be outdone, Tyler Skaggs (8-6) tied a career high with nine strikeouts in six overpowering innings. He whiffed his first five batters — the previous Angels pitcher to accomplish that was Jim Abbott at Oakland in September 1995.

Trout had another grand day with his 13th career multihomer game. He hit a solo shot in the first inning and a three-run

drive in the sixth to give him 28 homers this season. The two-time MVP went 3-for-4 and scored three runs.

Trout has been walked 93 times, the most in club history through 103 games. He got pitches to hit Wednesday and also reached base when he was plunked in the elbow.

“I’m always ready. I’m not going up there thinking they’re going to walk me,” Trout said. “I’ve got to have the mindset of, I’m going to get a pitch to hit, and taking the walks when they come.”

Pujols hit a solo homer to left field in the second, his 17th of the season. The 38-year-old slugger even swiped third in the fourth inning for his first stolen base this year.

“It’s crazy. It seems like every hit is a homer, double, and he’s passing somebody,” Trout said. “He probably passed somebody on that stolen base, too. He puts that cape on every once in a while. It’s pretty cool. It’s fun to be a part of and fun to witness.”

Skaggs retired the first 10 batters he faced, seven by strikeout. He allowed two

runs, one earned, and four hits.

The Angels had lost five of their previous six games, but Skaggs got early run support and then his teammates broke the game open.

“It makes baseball a lot more fun. You feel like you’re pitching well and scoring runs. It’s a good time to be an Angel when that happens,” he said.

James Shields (4-12) had another difficult outing for Chicago, giving up three home runs. He struck out six in the first two innings but also allowed two solo homers during that stretch. He permitted six runs on seven hits and three walks in four innings.

“Shieldsy has been really, really good for us, in spite of his record, believe it or not,” White Sox manager Rick Renteria said. “This guy gives us really good outings. Today they got him early. He was probably close to getting out of a jam and wasn’t able to. Their guy did a nice job keeping us contained.”

MLB roundup

Blackmon finds redemption against Astros

Associated Press

DENVER — Charlie Blackmon didn’t have to wait long for a shot at redemption.

The night after Blackmon made a costly error in center field, he hit a solo home run with one out in the bottom of the ninth inning as the Colorado Rockies held the World Series champion Houston Astros to one hit at Coors Field in a 3-2 victory Wednesday.

Jon Gray pitched seven sharp innings and Carlos Gonzalez also homered for Colorado.

Blackmon, whose fielding error in the 10th opened the door to a big inning in Houston’s 8-2 win on Tuesday, drove a 3-1 pitch from Collin McHugh (5-1) into the Astros’ bullpen for his 20th home run of the season and second career game-ending hit.

“That’s the beauty of baseball,” Blackmon said. “You can stink, which is OK as long as you don’t let that make you stink the next time or the next time after that. That’s what makes baseball great. It’s a long season and it gives you another chance.”

It was a dramatic finish to a wild game in which the Astros had a triple wiped out after a replay review because of fan interference, and the Rockies scored the tying run on a foul popup.

AL MVP Jose Altuve ended up with Houston’s only hit — an RBI double.

Leading off the sixth, Alex Bregman cruised into third with an apparent triple off the wall that eluded the leap of Colorado left fielder Gerardo Parra.

Rockies manager Bud Black challenged for fan interference, and Bregman was ruled out after replays showed a spectator clad in an orange Astros jersey extended his glove over the railing enough for the ball to glance off it, changing its trajectory slightly at the moment Parra was reaching up to attempt the catch. The fan was escorted out of the ballpark by security.

After the game, Bregman disagreed heatedly with the decision, saying it changed the game.

Rays 3, Yankees 2: Sergio Romo relieved in the eighth in-

ning, shifted to third base when Jonny Venters replaced him in the ninth, then struck out Brett Gardner to end the game with two on and give host Tampa Bay a win over New York.

Indians 4, Pirates 0: Trevor Bauer struck out 10 over seven innings, Brad Hand got his first save for his new team and host Cleveland stopped Pittsburgh’s winning streak at 11.

Phillies 7, Dodgers 3: Scott Kingery homered and Carlos Santana hit a three-run triple in their team’s five-run fifth inning, leading host Philadelphia.

Nationals 7, Brewers 3: Bryce Harper tied for the NL lead with his 25th home run, Tanner Roark pitched eight scoreless innings to end a seven-start winless streak and Washington beat host Milwaukee.

Cubs 2, Diamondbacks 1: Jon Lester bounced back from his worst start of the season with six strong innings and host Chicago scored the go-ahead run in the eighth on Arizona shortstop Nick Ahmed’s throwing error.

Mariners 3, Giants 2: Jean Segura chopped the first pitch

from Sam Dyson into center field to score Guillermo Here-dia with the go-ahead run in the eighth inning, and host Seattle won yet another one-run game.

Reds 7, Cardinals 3: Eugenio Suarez homered for the third straight game, Tucker Barnhart added a two-run shot and host Cincinnati powered to a win over St. Louis.

Tigers 8, Royals 4: Mike Moustakas had two hits, including a run-scoring double, in what might have been his final home game for host Kansas City.

Twins 12, Blue Jays 6 (11): Max Kepler drove in the tie-breaking run when he was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded in a six-run 11th inning, and Minnesota completed its first sweep at Toronto in more than 15 years.

Mets 6, Padres 4: Rookie Corey Oswalt beat his hometown team for his first major league win, pitching three-hit ball over five innings to lead host New York past San Diego for its first series win in two months.

French team gets first win of Tour

Associated Press

PAU, France — A French team finally won a stage in this year's Tour de France when Arnaud Demare of Groupama-FDJ comfortably claimed a sprint victory in the 18th stage on Thursday.

After two grueling days in the Pyrenees, Geraint Thomas was able to enjoy his seventh day in the yellow jersey during the less challenging 106.3-mile leg from Trie-Sur-Baise to Pau that featured only two minor climbs and a flat finish.

Thomas remained 1 minute, 59 seconds ahead of Tom Dumoulin with the Welshman's Sky teammate and four-time champion Chris Froome third, 2:31 behind.

Only two challenging stages remain — a lengthy leg through the Pyrenees on Friday including three major climbs, then a technical individual time trial on Saturday — before the mostly ceremonial finish on

the Champs-Elysees in Paris on Sunday.

Demare had time to celebrate as he crossed the line with his arms wide open ahead of fellow Frenchman Christophe Laporte.

Alexander Kristoff of Norway crossed third in the same time.

Many top sprinters had already left the race.

Fernando Gaviria of Colombia and Dylan Groenewegen — who had each won two stages in this year's race — called it quits during Stage 12 to Alpe d'Huez. That came a day after Mark Cavendish and Marcel Kittel, who have a combined 44 Tour stage wins between them, failed to make the time cut on another mountain leg.

Demare said he was motivated by an accusation on social media from Andre Greipel, a top German sprinter, who alleged that Demare held on to his team car on the way up the

grueling Col du Portet in Stage 17.

Demare finished Wednesday's stage second to last but managed to avoid the time cut.

Greipel, who also quit in Stage 12, later apologized on Twitter, saying he had relied on "incorrect" information.

"I want to thank you for this," Demare said. "I thought a lot about (Greipel) today. It's not in my mindset or my philosophy to (cheat). I worked hard in the mountains before the Tour and, as a result, I made it through mountain stages when most of the sprinters did not.

"I'm still here. I did not fight for nothing. It was super important. I'm not the best in the mountains but I did not give up and today it paid off," Demare added.

It was Demare's second career victory in the Tour, having won Stage 4 last year. The previous French sprinter to win two Tour sprints was

Jean-Patrick Nazon in 2003 and 2004. It was also the first time French riders finished 1-2 in a Tour sprint since 1978, when Jacques Esclassan finished ahead of Yvon Bertin in Saint-Amand-les-Eaux.

On a warm day in southern France, the stage took riders through the vineyards of Madiran to the city of Pau, the birthplace of 16th-century King Henri IV. It was the 70th time that the Tour passed through Pau, which first hosted the race in 1930.

Five riders — Guillaume Van Keirsbulck (Wanty-Groupe Gobert), Mathew Hayman (Mitchelton-Scott), Luke Durbridge (Mitchelton-Scott), Niki Terpstra (Quick-Step Floors) and Thomas Boudat (Direct Energie) — were involved in an early breakaway. The sprinters' teams never let them get much more than two minutes ahead, and they were caught with 16.5 kilometers to go.

Sports briefs

Falcons' Jones will report to training camp, team says

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Julio Jones will report to training camp with the Atlanta Falcons, the team said late Wednesday after reaching an agreement to renegotiate the star receiver's contract next year.

General manager Thomas Dimitroff announced the compromise about 16 hours ahead of Thursday's 4 p.m. reporting deadline, removing a major distraction hanging over a team that is again expected to be one of the top contenders in the NFC.

"We have had continued dialogue all offseason with Julio and his representation," Dimitroff said. "We have come to an agreement with Julio, and we will readdress everything in 2019. I appreciate everyone's hard work and communication on this."

The Falcons had informed Jones several weeks ago that they wouldn't be able to renegotiate his current \$71.5 million package, which still has three years remaining and included \$47 million in guaranteed money.

Ledecky wins 800 free at US Nationals

IRVINE, Calif. — Katie Ledecky cruised to a nearly 11-second victory in the 800-meter freestyle Wednesday on the opening night of the U.S. national championships.

Ledecky was under her own world-record pace through the first 300 meters before dropping off and finishing in 8 minutes, 11.98 seconds on Wednesday night. She failed to crack the top 10 performances

in the event, which all belong to her.

Leah Smith chased Ledecky all the way and touched second in 8:22.79.

Ledecky earned the 14th national title of her career and a spot in the event at next month's Pan Pacific championships in Tokyo, site of the 2020 Olympics.

In other swimming news:

■ Bob Bowman, the longtime coach of retired 23-time Olympic swimming champion Michael Phelps, has acknowledged and apologized for inappropriate text messages that were sent from his cellphone to former Olympic swimmer Caroline Burckle in 2011.

At the time, Bowman was a coach for the U.S. national team, along with Sean Hutchison, who was also said to be involved in the texting.

Two Russians will lose 2008 Olympic medals

LAUSANNE, Switzerland — Russian athletes Tatyana Lebedeva and Maria Abakumova lost their appeals to the Court of Arbitration for Sport on Thursday and stripped of three silver medals for doping at the 2008 Olympic Games.

CAS confirmed the decisions to disqualify the pair plus compatriot Ekaterina Gnidenko.

The banned anabolic steroid turinabol was discovered in retests of all three women's Olympic anti-doping samples.

Lebedeva won 2008 Beijing Olympic silver medals in the long jump and triple jump.

Abakumova won the silver in javelin at the 2008 Games.

Gnidenko was eighth in Keirin track cycling at the 2012 London Olympics.