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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Pentagon open to renaming 10 posts

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy are open to starting a conversation about changing the names of 10 of the service's posts named for prominent Confederate generals from the Civil War, Army officials said Monday.

McCarthy wants to have a "bipartisan discussion" about the controversial issue, the official said. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, did not provide further details, including what sparked McCarthy's willingness to discuss the topic.

Esper also supports such a discussion about changing the installation names, officials said. Esper was McCarthy's predecessor as Army secretary.

It marks a substantial change in the Army's position on the naming of the 10 Army posts: Camp Beauregard and Fort Polk in Louisiana; Fort Benning and Fort Gordon in Georgia; Fort Bragg in North Carolina; Fort A.P. Hill, Fort Lee and Fort Pickett in Virginia; Fort Rucker in Alabama, and

Fort Hood in Texas.

The installations were named primarily during the south's Jim Crow era in the 1910s and 1940s.

As recently as February, Army officials said the service had no intentions of addressing the topic of the naming of its installations. A service spokesperson said some posts were named for Confederate generals in "the spirit of reconciliation" and not in "support for any particular cause or ideology."

The apparent change in thinking, first reported Monday by Politico, comes as demonstrators across the United States have held protests to systemic racism and police brutality. Uprisings in all 50 states and in Washington were sparked by the May 25 death of a handcuffed black man, George Floyd, by a Minneapolis police officer, who has since been fired and charged with second-degree murder.

A second Army official on Monday pointed to those events and a June 3 memorandum issued by McCarthy, Gen. James McConville, the service chief of staff, and Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston, its top enlisted soldier, as driving the willing-

ness to discuss installation names. In the memo, the leaders acknowledge racism exists in the Army and pledged to listen to soldiers about those issues.

The change in stance towards the Army's long-held installation names also comes as the Marine Corps implements a ban on the Confederate battle flag on its bases.

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., sent a letter Monday to McCarthy asking him to follow the Marine Corps' lead in banning Confederate memorabilia on Army installations. She sent similar letters to the leaders of the military's other services.

Duckworth, a former Army pilot and member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, asked the Army's top civilian to prohibit the display of the Confederate battle flag and "eliminate any honors that could reasonably be interpreted as commemorating or celebrating any enemy force, foreign or domestic, that engaged in armed conflict against the U.S. armed forces and sought to destroy the United States of America," a reference to the names of the 10 posts.

The Army does not need lawmaker input to change post names.

USS Ford's launch system fails during testing

Bloomberg News

The U.S. Navy's newest aircraft carrier experienced a failure of its electromagnetic launch system last week in the latest sign that the \$13.2 billion vessel hasn't fully resolved hurdles tied to its cutting-edge technology as it undergoes at-sea testing.

The system on the USS Gerald R. Ford — which propels planes off the deck and into the sky — "went down" June 2 just before a scheduled aircraft launch, the Navy said in a statement published late Sunday. The failure of the system, built by General Atomics, "curtailed flight operations to

some extent," according to the statement.

No root cause for the breakdown has been found, according to an internal Navy document. After several days, the Navy said, it found a workaround to the catapult problem and jets were able to resume flight operations Sunday.

"The crew supported by a team of experts developed an alternate method to launch the air wing off yesterday," Capt. Danny Hernandez, a Navy spokesman, said in a statement. "Any corrective actions will be key to ensuring that when Ford enters the fleet after operational testing" it's ready to support operations, he added.

The latest breakdown didn't pose a "safety-of-flight risk" because of where and when in the system it took place, the Navy document said. It "occurred during a manual reset" of the "power handling" system, which is in accordance with current procedures, it added.

"The Navy is reviewing those procedures and any impacts on the system" and "until further notice, the ship's crew will not be using the manual reset," according to the document.

In an annual report in January, Pentagon testers continued to report "deficiencies and limitations" with the ship's radar, electronic warfare surveillance

system and a ship-to-ship communications data network.

Those issues followed the discovery that none of the 11 elevators needed to bring weapons up to the Ford's deck were installed when the ship was delivered in May 2017 — about 32 months later than planned. The Navy says it's making steady progress installing them.

The Government Accountability Office, in its latest program assessment released last week, said that "despite maturing its critical technologies," the Navy "is still struggling to demonstrate the reliability" of the launch and arresting gear systems.

Iran appears to have built fake carrier

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — As tensions remain high between Iran and the U.S., the Islamic Republic appears to have constructed a new mock-up of an aircraft carrier off its southern coast for potential live-fire drills.

The faux foe, seen in satellite photographs obtained Tuesday by The Associated Press, resembles the Nimitz-class carriers that the U.S. Navy routinely sails into the Persian Gulf from the Strait of Hormuz, its narrow mouth where 20% of all the world's oil passes through.

While not yet acknowledged by Iranian officials, the replica's appearance in the port city of Bandar Abbas suggests Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard is preparing an

encore of a similar mock-sinking it conducted in 2015. It also comes as Iran announced Tuesday it will execute a man it accused of sharing details on the movements of the Guard's Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, whom the U.S. killed in a January drone strike in Baghdad.

The replica carries 16 mock-ups of fighter jets on its deck, according to satellite photos taken by Maxar Technologies. The vessel appears to be 650 feet long and 160 feet wide. A real Nimitz is over 980 feet long and 245 feet wide.

The fake carrier sits just a short distance away from the parking lot in which the Guard unveiled over 100 new speedboats in May, the kind it routinely employs in tense encounters between Iranian sailors and the U.S. Navy.

The mock-up strongly resembles a similar one used in 2015 during a military exercise called "Great Prophet 9." During that drill, Iran swarmed the fake aircraft carrier with speedboats firing machine guns and rockets. Surface-to-sea missiles later targeted and destroyed the fake carrier.

That drill, however, came as Iran and world powers remained locked in negotiations over Tehran's nuclear program. Today, the deal born of those negotiations is in tatters. President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the accord in May 2018. Iran later responded by slowly abandoning nearly every tenant of the agreement.

Last summer saw a series of attacks and incidents further ramp up tensions between Iran

and the U.S. They reached a crescendo with the Jan. 3 strike near Baghdad International Airport that killed Soleimani, head of the Guard's expeditionary Quds, or Jerusalem, Force.

Also on Tuesday, judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili said Iranian citizen Mahmoud Mousavi Majd had been convicted in a Revolutionary Court. Esmaili accused Majd of receiving money for allegedly sharing security information on the Guard and the Quds Force, as well as the "positions and movement routes" of Soleimani. Esmaili did not say when Majd would be executed, other than that it would be "soon."

The U.S. Navy's Bahrain-based 5th Fleet did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

S. Korea's calls to North go unanswered in leaflet spat

BY KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea refused to answer the phone Tuesday after vowing to sever communication lines with the South due to anger over the dispatch of anti-regime leaflets across the heavily fortified border that divides the peninsula.

South Korea's government, which has made improving relations with the North a key policy, said it will continue to press for peace.

The North said all lines would be cut after accusing the South Korean government of conniving with "the riff-raff" in hostile acts, while "trying to dodge heavy responsibility with nasty excuses."

"This has driven the inter-Korean relations into a catastrophe," the state-run Korean Central News Agency said in a report posted Tuesday.

Phone calls via military lines and a liaison office went unanswered Tuesday, according to officials at South Korea's unification and defense ministries.

The spat was another sign of rising tensions with the North since U.S.-led nuclear talks with the North broke down. Pyongyang also resumed missile tests amid the impasse and already has suspended most cooperation with the South.

However, military officials said the two Koreas usually call each other twice a day to maintain the communication channels. Tuesday was the first time the North Koreans didn't answer the calls since the hotlines were restored after a bilateral military agreement was reached in 2018, defense ministry spokeswoman Choi Hyun-soo told reporters. The North's anger erupted after South Korean activists, including defectors from North Korea, floated leaflets criticizing leader Kim Jong Un last week.

Report: Afghan planned '18 killing of guardsman

Associated Press

OGDEN, Utah — An Afghan commando who fatally shot a Utah mayor serving in the National Guard in 2018 had planned the killing for weeks, according to an Army investigative report.

U.S. intelligence screeners failed to act swiftly enough on signs of the radicalization of the commando who was being trained by Maj. Brent Taylor, according to the report that was obtained through a public records request by the Standard-Examiner newspaper in Ogden. Taylor, 39, had taken a yearlong leave of absence as mayor of North Ogden for his deployment to Afghanistan.

Gen. Austin Scott Miller, commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, said in the report's summary that officials identified numerous missed opportunities to prevent Taylor's death on Nov. 3, 2018, the Standard-Examiner reported Monday.

A person who had interviewed the shooter failed to act on several signs of potential radicalization, including his expressed disdain for Americans, the report said.

"We could and should have done better. We will learn from this tragedy," Miller said.

Miller agreed with most of the investigation's findings but disagreed with the conclusion that camp leadership had been lax on security.

The killing occurred while Brent Taylor and the trainees were on a weekly training hike, the report said. They were making a final turn back to camp when Sgt. Asfar Khan of the Afghan special forces Taylor was helping train fired two to three shots, hitting Taylor in the back of the head, officials said. A fellow U.S. Army member on the hike was shot in the back but fired back at Khan. Afghan commandos shot Khan as he tried to escape, killing him.

Baltic exercise scraps amphibious landings

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — At least 3,000 troops are taking part this week in one of the U.S. Navy's largest maritime drills in the Baltic Sea, but for the first time Marines won't be conducting amphibious landings during the exercise because of coronavirus concerns.

"We are taking precautions to ensure our crews and partners stay healthy and operational," said the U.S. 6th Fleet's Vice Adm. Lisa Franchetti, as the Baltic Operations exercise got underway Monday. "Accordingly, for the first time in its history, BALTOPS 2020 will be held entirely at sea."

Normally, Marines arriving

by landing craft for amphibious assault drills in places like Lithuania are a highlight of the exercise, which takes place in the vicinity of the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.

This year's iteration of the U.S.-led BALTOPS involves 19 countries combining aircraft and warships that practice skills such as air defense, anti-submarine warfare and mine countermeasures.

Franchetti, in a call with reporters, said it was "especially critical" that militaries continue to train "even in the face of the coronavirus pandemic."

"This exercise will flex maritime and air forces to enhance our combined and joint capabilities, and our ability to

work together in the challenging environment of the Baltic Sea," she said. "No single nation can address today's challenges alone."

For the military, the coronavirus pandemic has complicated large exercises across the force. Numerous multinational exercises were canceled or curtailed as infections increased sharply in March around Europe.

Now, as the number of new cases slows, militaries in Europe are resuming major war games. Last week, the U.S. Army and Poland started their first big exercise since the outbreak, Agile Spirit, which includes about 6,000 soldiers.

BALTOPS for the first time

is being commanded from Lisbon, Portugal, where NATO has a maritime headquarters.

The aim is to test the Lisbon command center's ability to coordinate with 6th Fleet headquarters in Naples, Italy, NATO operation centers and forces in the Baltic Sea.

While amphibious forces were not included this year, that's not an entirely bad thing, said Rear Adm. Guy Robinson of the U.K. Royal Navy and deputy commander for Naval and Striking Support Forces at NATO.

"This allows us to put a focus on different aspects of naval warfare, train different disciplines and focus in different areas," he said.

Children returning to off-base schools in Japan

By JAMES BOLINGER

Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — Parents working on the air station whose children attend off-base schools sent those students back to class Monday after Marine Corps officials eased coronavirus restrictions.

Dozens of students have been away from school since March when base commander Col. Lance Lewis ordered all personnel subject to the status of forces agreement to keep their children out of local schools.

Although the Defense Department runs its own school system overseas, some U.S.

service members and Defense Department civilian employees choose to send their children to Japanese schools.

Lewis also asked Japanese workers on base to keep their children home.

"Our local area has had zero new cases for some time, which has allowed us, as a base, the opportunity to reevaluate our COVID prevention measures," he said in an update Sunday on the base's official Facebook page, authorizing the change. COVID-19 is the respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus.

The return to school coincided with the relaxing of many other restrictions at

MCAS Iwakuni. Personnel may now go off base for take-out food, medical or veterinary appointments and to return to their off-base jobs.

Elementary and junior high schools near MCAS Iwakuni in Yamaguchi prefecture in western Japan reopened May 7. Schools in Japan closed due to coronavirus concerns in early March, and the current Japanese school year began in April.

When the restrictions began, the base worked with the Iwakuni school board to ensure that children who stayed home from school at Lewis' request were not penalized.

8,500 airmen volunteer to move to Space Force

By JENNIFER H. SVAN

Stars and Stripes

More than 8,500 active-duty airmen are interested in moving over to the U.S. Space Force, the service said Tuesday.

May was the first month applications to transfer into the military's newest branch were accepted from current service members. The thousands of applications come from a mix of officers and enlisted airmen from within 13 career fields.

"I am incredibly proud of

the men and women who made the bold decision to volunteer to join the U.S. Space Force and defend the ultimate high ground," said Gen. Jay Raymond, chief of space operations, in a statement.

Calling it "a critical time for space," Raymond said airmen "will build the Space Force necessary to compete, deter, and win as required to meet the needs of the National Defense Strategy."

Of those who volunteered, about 6,000 will be selected for

transfer, the service said in a statement.

Applications are being reviewed and volunteers will receive notification in July explaining the next steps in the process, service officials said.

Airmen already in space-related jobs will transfer first, starting in September. More general career fields will start transferring in February.

About 16,000 military and civilians from the former U.S. Air Force Space Command are now assigned to Space Force.

The upcoming process will officially commission or enlist military members into the force.

Airmen in space career fields who decline to transfer into the Space Force will receive assistance in examining other options, to include applying for retraining into nonspace jobs in the Air Force, going to the reserve components or applying for separation or retirement, if eligible.

Activists heartened, but hungry for more

Associated Press

ATLANTA — In the two weeks since George Floyd's killing, police departments have banned chokeholds, Confederate monuments have fallen and officers have been arrested and charged amid large global protests against police violence and racism.

The moves are far short of the overhaul of police, prosecutors' offices, courts and other institutions that protesters seek. But some advocates and demonstrators have said they are encouraged by the swiftness of the response to Floyd's death — incremental as it may be.

"Everywhere you look, you see something that gives you hope," said Frank James Matthews, 64, an activist in Alabama. "But we have no illusions because something that's embedded like racism is hard to kill."

Matthews spent years pushing for the removal of a Confederate monument in Bir-

mingham near the site where four black girls died in a racist church bombing in 1963. The city took down the obelisk last week after protesters tried to remove it themselves during one of the many nationwide demonstrations over Floyd's killing by police in Minneapolis.

In Virginia, Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam last week ordered the removal of a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee in Richmond, the former capital of the Confederacy. A judge on Monday halted the move for 10 days, but a spokeswoman for the governor said that he remained committed to removing the "divisive symbol."

At a memorial for Floyd on Monday in Houston, Bracy Burnett said that it was hard to tell if the changes which have taken place since Floyd's death will last.

"It's a start, but you can't expect an oppression of 400 years to be eliminated in a few months, a few years," Burnett,

66, said.

Tancey Houston Rogers, 49, said that she's seen more progress in addressing racism and police brutality in the last two weeks than she's seen in the past.

"Now we've got to take it forward," she said.

Floyd died May 25 when a white Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for several minutes even after Floyd stopped responding. Prosecutors have charged that officer, Derek Chauvin, with second-degree murder. Three other officers at the scene were charged with aiding and abetting.

Minneapolis has since banned chokeholds, and a majority of the City Council has vowed to dismantle the city's 800-member police agency. Police in Denver have also banned the use of chokeholds and required officers who intentionally point their gun at someone to notify a supervisor and file a

report.

Police officers have also faced charges for violent conduct during protests.

Savano Wilkerson said that he worries about a backslide on reform if national attention shifts away from Floyd's case. He's also concerned about convictions against the officers charged in Floyd's death.

"It's not really a win yet because they could easily get off," the 22-year-old resident of West Palm Beach, Fla., said during a phone interview on Monday.

The recent protests are the country's most significant demonstrations in a half-century — rivaling those during the civil rights and Vietnam War eras.

Ashley Howard, an assistant professor of history and African American studies at the University of Iowa, said that she sees perseverance and a long-term vision for a "radical alternative" among the marchers and is hopeful for more substantive changes.

Key Dems spurn push to defund police amid attacks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump and his allies have seized on calls to "defund the police" as a dangerous example of Democratic overreach as he fights for momentum amid crises that threaten his reelection.

Key Democrats, including presumptive presidential nominee Joe Biden, are distancing themselves from the "defund" push, which some supporters have said is a symbolic commitment to end systemic racism and shift policing priorities rather than an actual plan to eliminate law enforcement agencies.

But confusion over the proposal's intent has created an opportunity for the Republican president, who has struggled to navigate the delicate debate over racial justice, risking support from people of color, suburban women and indepen-

dents less than five months before Election Day.

Facing increasing pressure to weigh in, Biden addressed the issue Monday in an interview with "CBS Evening News."

"I don't support defunding the police. I support conditioning federal aid to police based on whether or not they meet certain basic standards of decency, honorableness and, in fact, are able to demonstrate they can protect the community, everybody in the community," Biden said.

Other opponents of the movement include Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., a former presidential candidate and one of two black Democratic senators, and Rep. Karen Bass, D-Calif., head of the Congressional Black Caucus.

NAACP President Derrick Johnson, in an interview, also declined to endorse calls to defund the police.

"I support the energy be-

hind it. I don't know what that substantively means. As I'm talking to people about the concept, I've gotten three different explanations," said Johnson, who has criticized Trump. "We know there has to be a change in the culture of policing in this country."

Democrats are well-positioned to win over the political center this fall, according to Republican pollster Frank Luntz, who said that Trump's uneven actions and rhetoric at a time of sweeping social unrest are "killing him."

Luntz added, however, that Democrats risk their advantage by embracing policies viewed as radical following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The handcuffed black man died after a white officer pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for more than eight minutes.

There was little evidence that the effort was gaining momentum in Congress. Some

Democrats described it as bad politics, even if most Democrats shared the desire to overhaul policing.

Former Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., a white moderate who lost her 2018 reelection bid, said that "defund the police" is "a horrible name" that misconstrues the goal.

"By starting with the word 'defund,' you've left the impression that you are doing something much more radical than what needs to be done," said Heitkamp, a leader of the One Country Project, which is trying to help Democrats connect better with rural voters.

She said the term left her frustrated that "there's going to be somebody who's going to try to find an opportunity in this, especially among the Republican Party, and use it now as an excuse not to address what is a very real problem in America."

In Hong Kong, march marks year of change

Associated Press

HONG KONG — Hundreds of people marched in Hong Kong's streets on Tuesday to mark a year since the start of anti-government protests, as the leader of the semi-autonomous city called for peace and stability.

"Everyone has to learn their lesson, including the Hong Kong government," Carrie Lam told reporters. "Hong Kong cannot bear that kind of chaos, and the people of Hong Kong want a stable and peaceful environment to be able to live and work here happily."

Lam did not elaborate on what lessons should be learned.

Hundreds of protesters marched in Hong Kong's central district Tuesday evening and shouted slogans including "Hong Kong independence, the only way out" and "Fight to the end."

They marched despite police warnings that force could be used to disperse participants and that they faced up to five years in prison. Riot police later charged at a group of protesters, deploying pepper spray and tackling some to the ground.

Tuesday is the one-year anniversary of a huge march through central Hong Kong that grew into a pro-democracy movement that saw protesters break into the legislative building and take to the streets every weekend for months.

"The mass protest on 9 June last year has been etched in the collective memory of Hongkongers," the Civil Human Rights Front, which organized the event, wrote in a Facebook post on Tuesday. "It also marks the beginning of our togetherness in defending our beloved city."

The June 9, 2019, march was in opposition to a proposed extradition bill that would have allowed people in the former British colony, which has its own legal system, to be sent to mainland China to face trial. Organizers pegged the turnout at more than a million people, while police estimated the crowd at 240,000.

China blames the protests in part on foreign intervention and is hastening to enact the national security law aimed at curbing secessionist and subversive activities in Hong Kong.

Midwest faces wind, rain from Cristobal remnants

Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. — The remnants of Tropical Storm Cristobal moved across parts of the Midwest on Tuesday after lashing the South, unleashing downpours and bringing gusty winds as more high winds, heavy rain and thunderstorms were forecast.

Heavy rain hit Missouri on Tuesday morning and Cristobal was expected to intensify later in the day as another "energetic" weather system approaches from the west and begins to interact with it, the National Weather Service said.

Cristobal may produce flash flooding and isolated river flooding, as well as a few tornadoes, the weather service said.

Wind gusts of up to 45 mph were expected in Chicago by Tuesday night, the weather service said. Boaters were being warned of gale-force winds on Lake Michigan on Tuesday and Wednesday.

High winds could be felt from Nebraska to Wisconsin, forecasters said. In parts of Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota, the gusty winds and low humidity will bring the threat of wildfires in areas with dry grass, forecasters warned.

IG: Coast Guard Academy didn't fix poor racial climate

Associated Press

The U.S. Coast Guard Academy failed to properly address complaints of racial harassment, including the use of racial slurs by cadets, according to the Department of Homeland Security's inspector general.

The academy in New London, Conn., said Monday it accepts the recommendations of the inspector general's report and is committed to "pursuing improvements to policies and procedures that govern the response and investigation of all allegations of harassment and misconduct."

The complaints investigated by the Inspector General's Office included episodes in which cadets used racial epithets, posed with a Confederate flag and watched and laughed at a blackface video in a common area.

Of 16 allegations of race-based harassment at the academy between 2013 and 2018 identified by the inspector general, the academy failed to properly investigate or handle 11 of them, the report said.

The report, dated June 3, also found that harassing behaviors persist at the academy and that cadets are under-reporting instances of harassment in part because of "concerns about negative consequences for reporting allegations."

The review began in June 2018 after several cadets raised concerns about racist jokes, disparities in discipline and the administration's handling of what some saw as racial hostility.

The Coast Guard Academy said it has agreed to implement changes including mandatory training for academy personnel and cadets involved in instances of harassment or hate,

mandatory training for cadets on how to recognize harassing behavior, and investigating and documenting any harassment involving race or ethnicity.

"The Coast Guard, and its academy, are steadfast and enduring in its commitment to build an inclusive environment, free of harassment, and this extends to the highest levels of our service," the academy said in a statement.

One of the nation's smallest service academies, the Coast Guard Academy is overseen by Homeland Security, unlike others such as the U.S. Military Academy and the Naval Academy, which are run by the Defense Department. It enrolls over 1,000 cadets, who attend the school tuition-free and graduate as officers with a Bachelor of Science degree and a requirement to spend five years in the service.

The incidents documented in the report included a third-year cadet repeatedly using the N-word toward a first-year cadet in April 2016 during a conversation, even after the first-year cadet tried to walk away. The third-year cadet was not disciplined or ordered to participate in respect remediation, according to the report, and it was not noted on his official conduct record.

A December 2018 report by the inspector general's office substantiated allegations that a lieutenant commander at the academy was retaliated against after making discrimination and harassment complaints against her superiors. The Coast Guard said it implemented several changes after that report, including additional training for supervisors and managers on discrimination, harassment and bullying policies.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Summer reading club to bring books to students

WV CHARLESTON — A summer reading project in West Virginia will bring about 200,000 books to children entering the first and second grades.

The West Virginia Blue Ribbon Selections Book Club is a partnership among the state Department of Education, Marshall University's June Harless Center and The Dollywood Foundation.

Two books will be shipped to the homes of about 37,000 children in mid-June and three more books will be sent in mid-July, the Department of Education said in a news release. First- and second-grade teachers will also receive these books before the start of the school year.

"These may be the only books some children have in their homes, and we hope this will be the beginning of a lifetime of reading and learning," said state schools Superintendent Clayton Burch.

Treasure chest hidden in Rockies finally found

NM SANTA FE — A bronze chest filled with gold, jewels and other valuables worth more than \$1 million and hidden a decade ago somewhere in the Rocky Mountain wilderness has been found, according to a famed art and antiquities collector who created the treasure hunt.

Forrest Fenn, 89, told the Santa Fe New Mexican on Sunday that a man who did not want his name released — but was from "back East" — located the chest a few days ago, and the discovery was confirmed by a photograph the man sent him.

He posted clues to the treasure's whereabouts online and

in a 24-line poem that was published in his 2010 autobiography, "The Thrill of the Chase."

Fenn, who lives in Santa Fe, said that he hid the treasure as a way to tempt people to get into the wilderness and give them a chance to launch an old-fashioned adventure and expedition for riches.

Most in Sturgis want motorcycle rally delayed

SD STURGIS — A survey by the Sturgis City Council found that most locals want the 80th annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally postponed due to the coronavirus.

The Rapid City Journal reported that the city mailed 3,290 surveys to resident addresses and more than 60% of those responding want the rally, which is scheduled for Aug. 7-16, suspended.

The city will hear a presentation from the rally officials on Monday with information gathered throughout May and June from businesses, hotels, motels, campgrounds, police and hospitals. The city has said that it would make an official decision in mid-June on whether to continue moving forward with hosting the event.

Sturgis Rally and Events Director Jerry Cole said that his staff and city officials have had about three to five meetings a day over the past five weeks with businesses, state and federal representatives and others.

Card program organized for isolated veterans

NH HOLLIS — New Hampshire residents are invited to write cards that will be delivered to veterans who are unable to see their loved ones during the coronavirus pandemic.

All cards will be delivered

to the New Hampshire Veterans Home and the VA medical centers in Manchester and in White River Junction, Vt.

U.S. Sen. Maggie Hassan and Laura Landerman-Garber, of Hollis, announced the Cards 2 Connect Program. Landerman-Garber previously worked on a Military Holiday Card Challenge, in which people can send holiday cards to active-duty military troops. Cards can be dropped off at the Hollis Pharmacy or sent to Laura Landerman-Garber, Card Challenge, 400 Amherst Street, Suite 407, Nashua, NH, 03063.

Lightning suspected in fire that razed church

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A church whose congregation dates back 144 years caught fire over the weekend in rural western Minnesota during a thunderstorm and was destroyed.

Bethel Lutheran Church caught fire early Saturday evening about 11 miles south of Battle Lake and "began to collapse before the fire was totally extinguished," read a statement from the Otter Tail County Sheriff's Office. No injuries were reported.

The Star Tribune reported that the Rev. Todd Hylden believes lightning caused the blaze.

The church has about 150 members. Worship services scheduled for late Sunday morning have been moved to the parking lot next to the charred rubble of the church, whose congregation was formed in 1876.

Road-rage incident led to chase and shooting

DE LEWES — A Delaware man has been charged with attempted murder after a road-rage incident

in which police said that the attacker shot a man who tracked him down at his home.

According to Delaware State Police, a man witnessed an SUV driving recklessly down Camp Arrow Head Road late Saturday afternoon in Lewes. The man followed the SUV and confronted the driver, 28-year-old Kevin Brownlee of Lewes. Police said that Brownlee attempted to punch the man and drove off while his victim's arm was stuck in the vehicle.

After the man got free, police said that Brownlee tried to run him over.

Police said that the victim, a 38-year-old man, then followed Brownlee back to his house, where they got into a fight. Police said that Brownlee got a gun from his home and shot the victim, who was able to run off after being struck in the arm and grazed in the head with a bullet.

Helicopter museum to move for construction

IN BUNKER HILL — A museum devoted to the Huey helicopters that transported U.S. troops during the Vietnam War will be housed in a new building set for construction in north-central Indiana.

The National American Huey History Museum will be on a 22-acre site along U.S. 31, across from the Grissom Air Reserve Base in Bunker Hill, according to John Walker, president and founder of the nonprofit American Huey 369 Inc.

Work is expected to begin next spring on the 30,000-square-foot building which will include a repair hangar.

Although construction is moving ahead on the new museum building, when it might actually open to the public is still a question mark.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Players ponder stadiums without fans

Associated Press

The roar of the crowd has been such a staple of major sports, such an advantage for the home team, that NFL clubs have been accused at times of artificial amplification. The Atlanta Falcons even admitted to the mischief, leading to a 2015 punishment from the league.

When the coronavirus risk wanes enough to allow the games to begin again, something besides the fans will be missing: The very essence of these events will be gone, too, at least for a while. No cheers, no boos, no chants or whistles. No one behind the backboard trying to distract a free-throw shooter. No kids seeking autographs.

Playing in empty buildings, for these well-paid performers, will require a significant recalibration.

"You know how much I love to talk to the fans, you know? To be in conversation, to throw the ball to kids," Kansas City Royals catcher Salvador Perez said, hoping a baseball season will come to pass. "It's going to be hard. It's never happened before to me. If that's going to be the best way to start playing, we have to do it, but I don't think I'm going to feel good the first couple of games with no fans."

One NASCAR driver called fan-less sports "weird" and he

won't be the last. Even when there is the green light to reopen the gates to the public, near or full-capacity attendance figures are not likely for some time. Temporary caps on the amount of fans are expected, with the goal of maintaining social distancing.

Michigan State athletic director Bill Beekman said national consultants have advised between 17% to 35% capacity at football stadiums for now, depending on layout. The combination of an economic downturn and skittishness about germ spread might naturally keep crowds smaller, too.

"Sure, it would still be guys competing at their highest level and their hardest, because that's what we do," said Minnesota Wild center Eric Staal, who won the Stanley Cup with Carolina in 2006. "But as far as comparing it to a full building in a Game 7, there's no comparison."

Strength and stamina. Speed and agility. Focus and determination. Experience and preparation. All that factors in to success on the field, court or rink. Adrenaline is also an ingredient, though, and athletes might have to learn how to play with a little less than they've been used to. LeBron James declared he had no interest in playing in front of empty seats before walking that back to

being simply disappointed.

"I feel like the fans pick you up," Los Angeles Rams defensive tackle Aaron Donald said. "The fans are what makes the game exciting. The fans would give you that extra juice when you're tired and fatigued. When you make that big play and you hear 80,000 fans going crazy, that pumps you up. If you don't have that in the game, I think that just takes the fun out of it."

The players may need to revert to school-age days of summer when a complaint about boredom might have prompted this familiar challenge from a parent: Make your own fun.

"When I was in college, we would go and play like Purdue, and there wasn't a lot of fans in the stadium, and our coach would say, 'Y'all have got to bring your own juice today,' because there's no electricity in the crowd," said Green Bay Packers safety Adrian Amos, who played at Penn State.

Edmonton Oilers defenseman Darnell Nurse was pondering this recently in light of the widely viewed ESPN documentary "The Last Dance," about Michael Jordan and the 1996-97 Chicago Bulls.

"That's a perfect example, his mindset in a lot of those games of creating your own environment, creating your own fire," Nurse said. "That's a test everyone who is in this situation

is going to have to go through: Having to create your own excitement. There shouldn't be a whole lot that you need to get you going, because you are still playing for a Stanley Cup. Yes, there are no fans there, and you might be in a hub city, but there is an opportunity to win a Stanley Cup."

The recipe for success?

"The team or the teams that get over that the quickest and buy into the format and the fact that it's not changing and we've just got to get on with it," said Winnipeg Jets right wing Blake Wheeler, anticipating the NHL's 24-team postseason tournament that will be held behind closed doors in two yet-to-be-determined cities. The NBA is planning a 22-team format in Orlando, Fla.

For all the atmospheric change that would come to the games themselves, it's worth noting just how much time teams spend rehearsing with nobody there to root them on.

"We practice every day in an empty grass area and pump in fake crowd noise for away games," Minnesota Vikings quarterback Kirk Cousins said. "Honestly, to go out and just play the game would kind of be refreshing, a breath of fresh air, to just let us know that we don't have to have all the smoke and the fire. We can just play football."

US women's soccer team wants anthem policy repealed

Associated Press

CHICAGO — The U.S. women's national team wants the U.S. Soccer Federation to repeal the anthem policy it instituted after Megan Rapinoe started kneeling during "The Star-Spangled Banner."

The U.S. women's team also wants the federation to state publicly that the policy was wrong and issue an apology to the team's black players and supporters.

"Further, we believe the Federation should lay out its plans on how it will now support the

message and movement that it tried to silence four years ago," the U.S. women's team said in a statement posted on the Twitter feed of its players association Monday night.

Rapinoe took a knee during the anthem at a pair of national team matches in 2016. She said she wanted to express solidarity with San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who silently took a knee during the national anthem before NFL games to raise awareness of police brutality and racial injustice. The U.S. Soccer Federation then approved a policy in

February 2017 that stated players "shall stand respectfully" during national anthems.

The policy remains in place, though the unions for the men's and women's teams believe it doesn't apply to their players because of their collective bargaining agreements.

Kaepernick and Rapinoe each faced sharp criticism for the protest for years. But public sentiment has changed since George Floyd's death last month.

Floyd, a black man, died after a white Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee into

Floyd's neck while Floyd was handcuffed and saying that he couldn't breathe.

His death sparked protests in Minneapolis and around the country, some of which became violent.

A lawyer for the men's team union also called for the repeal of the policy and an apology in a statement provided to BuzzFeed News, which was the first to report on the U.S. women's statement.

A message was left by the AP seeking comment from the federation.

MLB proposes expanding postseason

Associated Press

Maybe this might get Mike Trout back into the playoffs.

Major League Baseball is tossing around plenty of ideas these days to start up after the coronavirus pandemic — DHs in the National League, neutral-site games, personal rosin bags for pitchers.

Now comes a proposal certain to truly upend the sport: Up to 16 playoff teams.

More than half of the 30 clubs advance. No need to finish over .500, probably. This skewed season, heck, 35 wins could be enough to play into October.

OK, we've heard this before, that an extra wild-card team or two represents the NHL-ization of baseball. But to some, an expansion from 10 playoff clubs to 16 would mean the end of civilization.

Longtime manager Jim Riggleman chuckled at that notion.

"I think that whatever they come up with this year to play, anything goes. That's fine," he said. "But moving forward into next year, I wouldn't be in favor

of that many teams making the playoffs. I don't think many players would be, either."

"To say that 16 of 30 teams are playoff teams," he said, "you've got to raise the bar higher than that."

Other sports are accustomed to a plethora of postseason hopefuls.

LeBron James and NBA teams have been putting 16 of 30 into the playoffs. Alex Ovechkin and the NHL clubs welcome 16 of 31. Patrick Mahomes and NFL squads will bump up from 12 to 14 of 32 this season.

For Aaron Judge, Clayton Kershaw, Juan Soto and others on elite teams, an expanded playoff field and extra games might make it tougher to bring home the trophy. In its offer to players Monday, MLB didn't specify how a playoff format would work with as many as eight teams in each league for this year and 2021.

For Josh Bell, Joey Votto, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and more whose clubs often are way behind, this could be an

opportunity. Get off to a surprising 15-6 start in a dramatically shortened season, there's a chance.

No doubt, a lot of Trout fans wouldn't mind that. The three-time AL MVP and eight-time All-Star has never won a playoff game in his career — he made it that far only once, when his Angels were swept by Kansas City in the 2014 Division Series.

Would this definitely lead to subpar clubs in the playoffs?

Put it this way: If eight teams had qualified for the playoffs in each league from 1995 (when wild cards started) through 2019, a total of 46 MLB clubs at or below .500 would have made it, the Elias Sports Bureau said. That'd average out to just under two per season.

Only once has a baseball team reached the playoffs with a losing record. George Brett, Willie Wilson and the 1981 Royals went 50-53 overall, but made the postseason because of a 30-23 mark in the second half of a strike-split season.

Veteran skipper Bobby Valentine is OK with extra playoff

teams — with a caveat.

"More the better this year," he wrote in an email to The Associated Press, "but they should have copied the Japanese league."

Valentine, who managed in Japan, pointed out the early playoff rounds there are hugely tilted. As in, those matchups automatically start at 1-0.

"The winner of the division gets a win in each round in advance. So there is real incentive to play every game hard," he said. "If it is best-of-three, winner as to win one game. Wild card and other teams need to win two."

For much of big league baseball, only the AL and NL pennant winners got to advance. The postseason field became four in 1969 when division play began, then doubled to eight with wild cards in 1995. In 2012, extra wild cards boosted the playoff field expanded to 10.

To Riggleman, who managed San Diego, the Cubs, Seattle and Washington, it's already gone far enough.

Georgia Tech giving athletes Election Day off

Associated Press

ATLANTA — In the wake of nationwide protests over police brutality, Georgia Tech wants to make sure its athletes take time to vote in November.

The school said Thursday that nine teams, including football, will cancel all mandatory activities on Nov. 3 to recognize the importance of casting a ballot.

Geoff Collins was one of the first Power Five football coaches to express his support for those protesting the death of George Floyd, a handcuffed black man who died after a white Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for several minutes even after he stopped moving and pleading for air.

The death has sparked wide-

spread protests and rekindled the debate over injustice toward African Americans.

"I need to find a way to lend my voice to what's going on in the black community," Collins, who is white, told reporters this week on a video conference call. "It matters to me. For far too long, I've been an internal guy, sending my thoughts and prayers and really seeing how this impacts guys on a daily basis my entire career."

"It was on my heart to step out with a small statement, lend a small voice, share my voice and try to find a way to help the healing process, make this world a better place. I want to let my guys know and the black community as a whole know that your experience matters. You matter. Your hopes matter. Your dreams matter. Your life

matters."

Election Day comes four days before Georgia Tech's football team is scheduled to host Duke.

Other teams that pledged to refrain from any mandatory activities on Nov. 3 include men's and women's basketball, both of which will be preparing for the start of their seasons, along with women's volleyball, men's swimming and diving, and the men's and women's teams for tennis and indoor track and field.

In addition, the women's swimming and diving team has a meet set for Nov. 3 but is working with its opponent to reschedule.

Elsewhere, the nine men's basketball coaches of the America East Conference also pledged to give their players a

mandatory day off on Election Day. Gonzaga coach Mark Few made the same commitment for his men's basketball team and called on other coaches to join him.

"I am very proud of our student-athletes and coaches for identifying a great way that they can take action to make a difference in our communities and society," Georgia Tech athletic director Todd Stansbury said in a statement. "It is our responsibility to provide student-athletes with an environment that promotes civic duty."

Women's basketball coach Nell Fortner and men's basketball coach Josh Pastner began pushing the idea at Georgia Tech after meeting with athletes to discuss ways to make a difference.