

STARS AND STRIPES®

Thursday, June 18, 2020

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Stop-movement order burdens families

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

Andrea and Army Capt. Jerry Bortner bought their first home on the same street as Jerry's brother near their next duty station in northern Virginia, confident that their military housing allowance would cover the monthly mortgage payment.

But a Pentagon stop-movement order issued in March in response to the coronavirus pandemic has left them paying for two homes: their new 4-bedroom home near Fort Belvoir and the home they're stuck renting at Fort Riley, Kan., until the Army lets them move.

"We're paying for two houses in May, June and July," Andrea Bortner said in a phone call Thursday. "It's a big mess."

The Bortners are among tens of thousands of military families whose permanent change of station moves have been de-

layed by the order. Many of those families are facing financial difficulties because of the backlog, said Kathy Roth-Douquet, CEO of the California-based nonprofit Blue Star Families.

"About a fifth of families with PCS orders polled have been paying two mortgages or leases," Roth-Douquet said in a phone call Monday.

Some 18% of respondents to a Blue Star Families survey of 7,500 family members reported unexpected out-of-pocket expenses due to rescheduling their moves.

Meanwhile, 28% said they have had to dip into their savings as a result, according to the unreleased data shared this week by the nonprofit with Stars and Stripes.

So far, the stop-movement order has delayed about 24,000 soldiers and 42,000 sailors originally scheduled to move, Army and Navy spokesmen said this week. The Air Force

and Marines have also experienced PCS backlogs.

The Army has allowed about 3,000 soldiers to continue their moves since the stop movement order took effect March 16 and was extended twice.

The Navy said they offer waivers to the stop-movement order for those facing "extreme financial hardships." It will prioritize operational sea duty billets as it clears its five-month PCS backlog, a service memo said last week.

The Air Force did not respond to a request for comments on its plans.

Congress has also tried to help, with a bill introduced in May that would provide some financial relief to military families affected by the stop-movement order.

In the meantime, families like the Bortners are spending their savings. The family bought their house in northern Virginia — which is within one

of the priciest metro areas in the U.S. — on the expectation they would receive a housing allowance of about \$2,800 a month, Andrea Bortner said.

However, they're only entitled under DOD rules to receive about \$1,400, based on their on-post residence in Fort Riley.

"The member would continue to receive a housing allowance at the current duty station but would not be eligible for a second housing allowance at the prospective duty station," Pentagon spokeswoman Lisa Lawrence said in an email.

While the family has found someone to rent their new home for a few months, which will partly help with costs, Andrea Bortner said PCS season this year has been much more stressful than their previous five moves.

"We are used to change, but no one knows what the rules are now," she said.

1.5M more Americans seek unemployment benefits

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — About 1.5 million laid-off workers applied for U.S. unemployment benefits last week, evidence that many Americans are still losing their jobs even as the economy appears to be slowly recovering with more businesses partially reopening.

The latest figure from the Labor Department marked the 10th straight weekly decline in applications for jobless aid since they peaked in mid-March when the coronavirus hit hard. Still, the pace of layoffs remains historically high.

The total number of people who are receiving unemploy-

ment aid fell slightly, a sign that some people who were laid off when restaurants, retail chains and small businesses suddenly shut down have been recalled to work.

The figures are "consistent with a labor market that has begun what will be a slow and difficult healing process," said Nancy Vanden Houten, an economist at Oxford Economics. "Still, initial jobless claims remain at levels that at the start of the year might have seemed unthinkable."

Last week's jobs report showed that employers added 2.5 million jobs in May, an unexpected increase that suggested that the job market has

bottomed out.

But the recovery has begun slowly. Though the unemployment rate unexpectedly declined from 14.7%, it is still a high 13.3%. And even with the May hiring gain, just one in nine jobs that were lost in March and April have returned. Nearly 21 million people are officially classified as unemployed.

Even those figures don't capture the full scope of the damage to the job market. Including people the government said had been erroneously categorized as employed in the May jobs report and those who lost jobs but didn't look for new ones, 32.5 million people are out of work, economists estimate.

That would have raised May's unemployment rate to 19.7%.

Thursday's report also shows that an additional 706,000 people applied for jobless benefits last week under a new program for self-employed and gig workers that made them eligible for aid for the first time. These figures aren't adjusted for seasonal variations, so the government doesn't include them in the official count.

The weekly reports on applications for unemployment benefits track layoffs. But they don't directly account for hiring, which can offset layoffs.

The surprise job gain in May suggests that some employers are recalling laid-off workers.

Marine dies during airborne training

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

A special operations Marine died Tuesday from injuries suffered during airborne training at Fort Benning, Ga.

Sgt. Wolfgang “Wolf” K. Weninger, 28, a critical skills operator assigned to the Marine Raider Training Center, was fatally injured while taking part in the Army’s Basic Airborne Course 24-20, Marine Forces Special Operations Command said in a statement Thursday.

Born and raised in Auburn, Ohio, Weninger graduated from Kenston High School, MARSOC said. He joined the Marine Corps in May 2015 and was the honor graduate for his platoon at Marine boot camp in Parris Island, S.C.

From November 2015 to December 2018, he was an armory custodian with Combat Logistics Battalion 2, 2nd Marine Logistics Group, out of Camp

Lejeune, N.C. He reported to MARSOC in January 2019.

Enlisted Marine Raiders earn the critical skills operator designation after undergoing a competitive two-phase assessment and selection process and completing a nine-month individual training course. Weninger completed the course in October 2019, earning the Marine Special Operator insignia, MARSOC said in the statement.

“Wolf was exactly what we look for when training students to become Marine Raiders,” said a statement issued on behalf of the course’s instructor cadre. “He was a consistent top performer, a natural leader, he never complained, and was always there to pick up his team during challenging events.”

An avid hockey player, he could often be found on the ice even after a tough week of training, said the instructors’ statement. They said they

were “proud and honored” to have Weninger join the formation and become a part of their legacy.

He showed “unsurmountable determination, a deep sense of integrity, and an unconquerable spirit,” as well as a good sense of humor even in the most challenging times, said Col. Travis Homiak, the commanding officer of the Marine training center.

Weninger’s death comes about six months after Army Green Beret Master Sgt. Nathan Goodman died after a free-fall jump during routine training near Eloy, Ariz., in January.

Last year, at least four service members died in parachuting incidents, including a Ranger who died during a routine training jump in Arizona in March.

But hundreds of service members attend the three-week Basic Airborne Course in

Georgia each year. In the final week, before graduating and earning the silver parachutist badge known as “jump wings,” they must complete five static line parachute jumps from either a C-130 or C-17 aircraft at an altitude of over 1,200 feet, the course website states.

On three “Hollywood” jumps, they wear only the main chute and a reserve. On two “combat equipment jumps” — one of them at night — they each carry a rucksack with a modular airborne weapons case and a dummy weapon.

Class 24-20 was slated to graduate Friday, an Army schedule showed. Members completed the first two of their five qualifying jumps on Monday, according to a post on the Airborne School’s Facebook page.

The final Tuesday on the training schedule usually includes the daytime combat equipment jump.

Navy aviators safely eject from F/A-18

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Two naval aviators assigned to the carrier wing on the USS Theodore Roosevelt had to eject from their aircraft Thursday over the Philippine Sea, according to a Navy statement.

The aviators were flying an F/A-18F Super Hornet during routine pilot proficiency training when the incident happened, according to a statement from the Roosevelt. The statement did not say to which unit the aviators were assigned, but U.S. Naval Institute News reported that the Black Knights of Strike Fighter Squadron 154 from Naval Air Station Lemoore, Calif., is the only unit in

the carrier wing on the ship to fly the F/A-18F aircraft.

The aviators were picked up by a helicopter that was assigned to Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 8 from the Roosevelt. They were assessed by medical personnel aboard the aircraft carrier and are in good condition, according to the statement.

The incident is currently being investigated, according to the Navy.

The Roosevelt returned to its deployment in the Indo-Pacific region on June 4 after being sidelined in Guam due to an outbreak of the coronavirus among its crew. Of the nearly 4,800-member crew, 1,273 were infected by the virus and one sailor died.

Trump to meet Polish president at White House

Associated Press

President Donald Trump will meet with Poland’s President Andrzej Duda at the White House next week to discuss defense, trade, energy and telecommunications security, the White House announced Wednesday.

The meeting, set for June 24, comes on the heels of Trump announcing plans to reduce the U.S. military presence in Germany. Under the current plan, at least some of those Germany-based troops are expected to be shifted to Poland.

Trump announced Monday that he was reducing the U.S. military presence in Germany to 25,000 troops, which would be down from the current level of about 34,500.

He told Duda during an Oval Office meeting last year that he was thinking of moving some troops from Germany to Poland. He also complained that Germany was not living up to its defense spending obligations under NATO, while praising Poland for doing its part.

Duda has been trying to woo more American forces, even suggesting Poland would contribute over \$2 billion to create a permanent U.S. base in the country.

Germany is one of several members of the NATO military alliance that have failed to reach a goal set by member nations in 2014 for each to spend at least 2% of gross domestic product on defense by 2024. Germany says it hopes to reach 2% by 2031.

For 8th time this year, F-22s intercept Russian bomber formations off Alaskan coast

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — F-22 Raptor stealth fighter jets were scrambled late Tuesday to intercept two Russian bomber formations flying off Alaska's coast, the eighth such incident reported this year by U.S. military officials.

The latest intercept announced Wednesday by the North American Aerospace Defense Command comes about a week after a similar incident with a similar Russian formation flying unusually close to Alaskan shores on June 10. While Russian bombers flew within eight nautical miles of sovereign American airspace last week, they remained farther away Tuesday, according to the NORAD statement.

The first formation Tuesday night featured two Tu-95 Bear bombers, two Su-35 Flanker fighter jets and an A-50 airborne early warning and control aircraft, NORAD said. The second formation included two more Cold War-era Bear bombers and an A-50. The Russian aircraft remained in international airspace at all times.

The second group of Russian aircraft flew within 32 nautical miles of Alaskan shores, NORAD said. U.S. airspace stretches 12 nautical miles from its shores. But NORAD — the command that defends

American and Canadian airspace — expects all aircraft to identify themselves for national security purposes when flying within about 200 miles of U.S. and Canadian shores, in what are known as air defense identification zones.

It is not unusual for Russian military aircraft to fly near U.S. and Canadian airspace, especially off Alaska's coast, to observe off-shore training. NORAD has reported such incidents for three consecutive months. The United States, too, flies regular military flight operations near Russian territory, which are typically intercepted by Russian aircraft.

Air Force Gen. Terrence J. O'Shaughnessy, who commands NORAD and U.S. Northern Command, linked the uptick in Russian military flights off Alaska's coast to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The general has repeatedly warned that Russia would test America's ability to defend its territory during the crisis.

"Despite the [coronavirus] pandemic, NORAD constantly monitors the northern approaches to our nations, and our operations make it clear that we will conduct homeland defense efforts 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year," O'Shaughnessy said in a statement issued Wednesday.

China sends ships to Senkakus for 66 straight days

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — China set a new record Thursday for the number of consecutive days — 66 — its government vessels have been seen in waters near the Japan-controlled Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea.

In the latest sighting, four Chinese coast guard vessels appeared around 9 a.m. about 18 miles north-northwest of Uotsuri Island, inside Japan's contiguous zone, and heading southwest, a spokesman for the Japan 11th Regional Coast Guard headquarters said Thursday.

Chinese vessels have been spotted in Japan's contiguous waters every day since April 14.

Nations may exert limited control in the contiguous zone, a maritime area that extends 12 nautical miles beyond the territorial limit. They may act there to prevent further intrusion or illegal activity in their territorial waters.

China's presence there is not

an intrusion, but is viewed by Japan as provocative.

Beijing also claims the barren group of rocks and islands that total 7 square miles and that it calls Diaoyu. The area surrounding them, however, is a rich fishing ground and may hold oil and natural gas deposits.

During a press conference Wednesday, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga declined to speculate on the ships' purpose in the contiguous waters.

"The Senkaku islands are under our control and are unquestionably our territory historically and under international law," he said.

"We think it is an extremely serious [matter] that these activities continue," he added. "We will respond firmly and calmly to the Chinese side."

Suga said the Japanese government had lodged a protest with Chinese diplomats over the incident.

The previous record for Chinese vessels in the contiguous zone was 64 days between April 12 and June 14, 2019, the Japan Coast Guard spokesman said.

USMC sends RQ-21 drones to Australia for first time

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The annual Marine Corps rotation to Darwin, Australia, will, for the first time, incorporate unmanned surveillance drones this year, according to U.S. and Australian officials.

RQ-21 Blackjack drones will soon arrive in Australia to support Marine Rotational Force — Darwin, rotational force commander Col. David Banning said in a telephone inter-

view Thursday.

This year's rotation, delayed by two months due to the coronavirus pandemic, includes 1,200 Marines, fewer than half as many as headed south last year.

The force is made up of a ground combat element from Twentynine Palms, Calif., Combat Logistics Battalion 5 out of Camp Pendleton, Calif., and a command element from the III Marine Expeditionary Force on Okinawa, Banning

said.

He declined to reveal exactly how many Blackjacks will support the force until the aircraft arrive in Australia.

"It's the first time for the rotational force to incorporate unmanned aircraft," he said of the RQ-21s.

The Blackjacks, supported by a detachment of Hawaii-based Marines, will monitor remote battlespace, he said, adding that his forces will practice dispersing small units across wide

areas in line with recent guidance from Marine Commandant Gen. David Berger.

The Blackjack is made by Insitu, a Boeing Inc. subsidiary in Washington. A "small, tactical" aircraft, it can carry payloads of 39 pounds maximum and stay aloft more than 16 hours, depending on how it's configured. It has a line-of-sight range of 64 miles, according to Boeing's website.

Bolton: Trump asked China to help reelection

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump “pleaded” with China’s Xi Jinping during a 2019 summit to help his reelection prospects, according to a scathing new book by former Trump adviser John Bolton that accuses the president of being driven by political calculations when making national security decisions.

The White House worked furiously to block the book, asking a federal court for an emergency temporary restraining order Wednesday against its release.

Bolton’s allegations that Trump solicited Chinese help for his reelection effort carried

echoes of Trump’s attempt to get political help from Ukraine, which led to his impeachment.

“I am hard-pressed to identify any significant Trump decision during my tenure that wasn’t driven by re-election calculations,” Bolton wrote.

The 577-page book paints an unvarnished portrait of Trump and his administration, amounting to the most vivid, first-person account yet of how Trump conducts himself in office. Several other former officials have written books, but most have been flattering about the president. Other former officials have indicated they were saving their accounts of their time working for Trump until

after he left office to speak more candidly. The Associated Press obtained a copy of Bolton’s book in advance of its release next week.

Bolton, Trump’s national security adviser for a 17-month period, called Trump’s attempt to shift the June 2019 conversation with Xi to the U.S. election a stunning move and wrote that it was among innumerable conversations that he found concerning. He added that Congress should have expanded the scope of its impeachment inquiry to these other incidents.

Deeply critical of the president and much of his senior team, Bolton wrote that because staff had served him so poorly,

Trump “saw conspiracies behind rocks, and remained stunningly uninformed on how to run the White House, let alone the huge federal government.” He added that while he was at the White House, Trump typically had only two intelligence briefings a week “and in most of those, he spoke at greater length than the briefers, often on matters completely unrelated to the subjects at hand.”

Trump on Thursday denounced the book as “a compilation of lies and made-up stories, all intended to make me look bad. Many of the ridiculous statements he attributes to me were never made, pure fiction,” he tweeted.

Officer charged with murder in Atlanta shooting

Associated Press

ATLANTA — As Rayshard Brooks lay dying in a Wendy’s parking lot, prosecutors say the Atlanta police officer who shot him in the back kicked him and didn’t give him medical attention for more than two minutes.

Rolfe, who is white, shot Brooks after the 27-year-old black man grabbed a Taser and ran, firing it at the officer, the prosecutor said. But when the officer fired his gun, Brooks was too far ahead of him for the Taser to be a danger, and it had already been fired twice, so it was empty and no longer a threat, Fulton County District Attorney Paul Howard said.

“I got him!” Howard quoted Officer Garrett Rolfe as saying.

On Wednesday, the prosecutor announced a murder charge against Rolfe and an aggravated assault charge against a second officer, Devin Brosnan, who the district attorney said stood on Brooks’ shoulder as he struggled for his life.

The decision to prosecute came less than five days after the killing rocked a city — and a nation — already roiling from the death of George Floyd under a police officer’s knee in Minneapolis late last month.

Rolfe’s lawyers said he feared for his and others’ safety and was justified in shooting Brooks. Rolfe opened fire after hearing a

sound “like a gunshot and saw a flash in front of him,” apparently from the Taser.

“Mr. Brooks violently attacked two officers and disarmed one of them. When Mr. Brooks turned and pointed an object at Officer Rolfe, any officer would have reasonably believed that he intended to disarm, disable or seriously injure him,” the lawyers said in a statement.

The prosecutor said Brooks “never presented himself as a threat” during a more than 40-minute interaction with officers before the shooting. An officer found him asleep behind the wheel of his car in the restaurant’s drive-thru, and a breath test showed he was intoxicated.

Senate GOP unveils proposed changes to policing

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans unveiled proposed changes to police procedures and accountability Wednesday, countering Democrats’ far-reaching overhaul with a more modest package but one that underscores how swiftly the national debate on race has been transformed five months before elections.

The White House signaled President Donald Trump’s support as Republicans embraced a new priority with the “Justice Act,” the most ambitious GOP policing proposal in years in response to the massive public protests over the death of George Floyd and other black Americans.

Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell promised speedy action next week, when the House will also be voting on the Democratic plan. That puts the two bills on a collision course, but the momentum of suddenly shifting American attitudes is driving both. Half of adults now say police violence is a serious problem, according to an Associated Press-NORC poll.

“We hear you,” said Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina at a press conference with GOP colleagues at the Capitol. The only black Republican senator, he had asked leadership for a say in the bill and was tapped to craft it.

The outlook is extremely fluid, as both

parties see a need to meet the moment after graphic cellphone videos and a public outcry over police killings sparked a worldwide movement against racism and police violence.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi criticized the GOP package as “inadequate.” But she also said House Democrats “hope to work in a bipartisan way to pass legislation that creates meaningful change to end the epidemic of racial injustice and police brutality in America.”

In the Senate, McConnell is pushing the Republican bill ahead of other priorities, all but daring less-than-satisfied Democrats to block the debate.

Court rejects Trump bid to end DACA

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Thursday rejected President Donald Trump's effort to end legal protections for 650,000 young immigrants, a stunning rebuke to the president in the midst of his reelection campaign.

For now, those immigrants retain their protection from deportation and their authorization to work in the United States.

The outcome seems certain to elevate the issue in Trump's campaign, given the anti-immigrant rhetoric of his first presidential run in 2016 and immigration restrictions his administration has imposed since then.

The justices rejected administration arguments that the 8-year-old Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program is illegal and that courts have no role to play in reviewing the decision to end DACA.

Chief Justice John Roberts, joined by his four liberal colleagues, wrote for the court that the administration did not pursue the end of the program properly.

"We do not decide whether DACA or its rescission are sound policies," Roberts wrote. "We address only whether the agency complied with the procedural requirement that it provide a reasoned explanation for its action. Here, the agency failed to consider the conspicu-

ous issues of whether to retain forbearance and what, if anything, to do about the hardship to DACA recipients."

The Department of Homeland Security can try again, he wrote.

The court's four conservative justices dissented. Justice Clarence Thomas, in a dissent joined by Justices Samuel Alito and Neil Gorsuch, wrote that DACA was illegal from the moment it was created under the Obama administration in 2012.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh wrote in a separate dissent that he was satisfied the administration acted appropriately in trying to end the program.

DACA recipients were elated by the ruling.

"We'll keep living our lives in the meantime," said Cesar Espinosa, a DACA recipient who leads the Houston immigration advocacy group FIEL. "We're going to continue to work, continue to advocate."

Espinosa said he got little sleep overnight in anticipation of a possible decision Thursday. In the minutes since the decision was posted, he said his group has been "flooded with calls with Dreamers, happy with that hope that they're going to at least be in this country for a while longer."

DACA covers people who have been in the United States since they were children and are in the country illegally.

Europe sees virus spikes; China's outbreak wanes

Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece — Europe grappled Thursday with local spikes in coronavirus infections as the continent's lockdown restrictions eased after hundreds of cases were found at one meatpacking plant in Germany and Greece had to impose a total seven-day lockdown on one village.

The developments came even as a new outbreak in Beijing saw a decline in daily cases and Hong Kong Disneyland reopened after a major drop in infections in the Chinese territory.

In western Germany, health officials in Guetersloh on Wednesday said the number of new COVID-19 cases linked to the Toennies slaughterhouse in Rheda-Wiedenbrueck had risen to 657, a significant regional spike for a country that has recorded daily nationwide infections in the low hundreds lately.

Greek authorities on Thursday imposed a full lockdown on Echinis, which has a population of around 3,000, in the

northeastern province of Xanthi, after a spike in cases and deaths, while the small Balkan nation of Montenegro reported new infections after weeks of having no positive cases.

All residents of Echinis were under curfew, allowed to leave their homes only to buy food or medication and only while wearing masks, after 73 new coronavirus cases and four deaths were registered in the last week.

In neighboring Turkey, authorities made wearing masks mandatory in three major cities, including the financial hub of Istanbul and the capital of Ankara, following an increase in confirmed cases since many businesses were allowed to reopen.

In China, an outbreak detected in a wholesale market in the capital last week has infected at least 158 people in the country's largest resurgence since the initial outbreak was brought under control in March. The city reported 21 new cases of COVID-19 on Thursday, down from 31 on Wednesday.

Base post offices to offer space to fill out new forms

BY JAMES BOLINGER

Stars and Stripes

Post offices on some U.S. military bases across the Pacific are setting up self-service workstations with printers to accommodate a switch from customs forms filled out by hand to computer-generated ones.

A new rule that takes effect Aug. 13 requires all packages mailed from any overseas military post office to carry a customs form completed and printed from the U.S. Postal Service website.

Sasebo Naval Base and Yokota Air Base, both in Japan, and Osan Air Base in South Korea, have either already installed computer stations for customer use or plan to do so in the near future.

"We have set up a printer and computer in the lobby to handle these issues," said Sasebo postal manager Lewis Powell on Wednesday. "However, we have a limited number of [customer] lines. So, we plan to set up a line for people with the customs form already printed

out and another for the computer station."

Powell said the post office will provide patrons with step-by-step instructions to complete the process.

At Yokota, the home of U.S. Forces Japan in western Tokyo, the base post office plans on three or four printing stations but hasn't received the equipment yet, postal clerk Senior Airman Brianna Phillips said Wednesday.

The post office at Yokosuka Naval Base, south of Tokyo, does not have the money for a workstation and printers but is always "looking for ways to improve our services to the community," according to a Facebook message to Stars and Stripes from the post office on Wednesday.

The switch from the familiar green-and-white form available on post office counters to the digital version is required under global trade agreements, Powell said.

Stars and Stripes reporters Theron Godbold, Matthew Keeler and Christian Lopez contributed to this report.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Farmers offer reward after melon crop ruined

FL NEWBERRY — A family of farmers in north Florida is seeking answers after a field of watermelons was sprayed with damaging chemicals.

Hugh Martin told the Gainesville Sun his family is offering a \$10,000 reward for information that helps lead to the arrest and conviction of the person they believe intentionally poisoned 56 acres of melons.

The family rents the property in Newberry, near Gainesville, for their business, Martin Farms LLC. Martin and his stepson Joshua Moore said they believe someone filled their crop-sprayer with the harsh chemicals.

On June 1, Moore said he sprayed what he thought was a tank filled with pesticides over the crops to keep insects away. As he was spraying that evening, one of the sprayer's nozzles got damaged on a fence. So he stopped before the entire field was sprayed.

When he returned to the field, the watermelons were already wilting.

Officials: 9/11 memorial plaza to reopen July 4

NY NEW YORK — The Sept. 11 memorial plaza will reopen to the public on July 4, more than three months after it was closed due to coronavirus, the 9/11 Memorial & Museum announced Tuesday.

Visitors will once again be allowed to approach the memorial pools that sit in the footprints where the twin towers used to stand, but the museum at the site remains closed. A plan for its reopening is in the works.

The memorial and the museum had been closed since March 13, with the water flow-

ing into the pools turned off except for maintenance and the area roped off to keep people away from the panels of names. The memorial will open with safety protocols to enforce social distancing regulations, said Michael Frazier, spokesman for the museum and memorial.

Woman finds mother's ashes, long after flood

MI SANFORD — With a friend's help, a woman has discovered her mother's ashes in the flood-ravaged remains of her Midland County home.

Kathy Parsch said she had made eight trips to the home in Sanford, which was destroyed by a flood nearly a month ago, but couldn't find the container that held a portion of her mother's cremains. A friend felt inspired to search a bedroom area Sunday.

"She's in this corner, I can feel it," Margaret Charbonneau said. "So I found a piece of broken window. It was a fairly large piece, and I took it very carefully and I started digging with it."

And the ashes were found.

Officials warn of large jellyfish near beaches

MA HINGHAM — Swimmers in Massachusetts are being warned about large jellyfish that have been spotted off the state's coast.

The Hingham Harbormaster issued a warning Sunday saying numerous lion's mane jellyfish had been seen in the town's inner and outer harbor over the weekend. At least one resident has been stung but did not require medical treatment, the warning said.

The lion's mane jellyfish, the largest known variety, can grow to five or more feet across, with tentacles more

than 100 feet long. Encounters can cause temporary pain and redness but are not known to be fatal, the state's Department of Conservation and Recreation said in an advisory.

Arrest made after man pushed in train's path

CA BERKELEY — A woman who allegedly pushed a man onto the tracks at the downtown BART platform in Berkeley as a train approached was arrested Tuesday on suspicion of attempted murder, authorities said.

Roli Okoropudu, 34, also was booked for probation violation charges, according to a BART statement. Station video showed the woman leaping up from a bench Monday night and pushing a man with both hands as the train neared, the statement said.

"The victim was able to squeeze between the train and the platform and avoid being struck," BART said. He had a minor ankle injury.

Ex-news anchor named in embezzlement suit

MA BOSTON — A multimillion-dollar lawsuit has been filed against a former television news anchor for allegedly embezzling millions.

The former chief financial officer of Massachusetts-based Alden Shoe Co., Richard Hajjar, allegedly stole nearly \$27 million, The Boston Globe reported. Hajjar allegedly funneled \$15 million into former WCVB-TV anchor Bianca de la Garza's beauty business. Alden attorneys estimated that Garza received \$2.7 million in 2019 alone.

Garza now refuses to return the money or the lavish gifts purchased by Hajjar, according to the lawsuit.

Attorneys for Alden filed a letter in November requesting Garza to return all the misappropriated funds. According to court filings, an attorney for Garza agreed to return the funds, however, payment has not been made.

Hajjar has only returned about \$3 million in assets.

Woman accused of firing at boy on bike

DE HARRINGTON — Delaware State Police arrested a woman accused of firing a rifle at a 12-year-old boy who was riding a three-wheeler bike near her home over the weekend, according to the agency.

The child was riding through a field near the property of Jeanne D. Zebley, 55, on Sunday afternoon when the woman came out of her house with a rifle, pointed it toward the boy and fired off two rounds, police said in a statement Monday. The boy was not struck, and returned home to get his stepfather, police said.

Man arrested after valuable beehives stolen

WA BELLINGHAM — A man who authorities believe stole dozens of beehives across the West has been arrested in Washington state, the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office said. The bees could be worth more than \$200,000.

"The case has the potential of over 30 victims spread across California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington," the Sheriff's Office told the Bellingham Herald. Perry David Bayes, 56, was arrested and charged with possession of stolen property in the first degree, which is a class B felony, according to officials.

From wire reports

Your objective source for military news
updated 24/7 from bases
around the world.
Now online at www.stripes.com.

STARS AND STRIPES®

Fans likely to put asterisk on MLB season

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Fresh off a robust round of batting practice in Central Park, softball slugger Todd Montgomery squared up his Mets cap and took a swing at hardball questions involving his favorite team.

Would Jacob deGrom be worthy of a third straight Cy Young Award if he goes 4-2 with a 1.45 ERA?

Does Pete Alonso get on the hallowed MVP list by hitting 19 home runs?

And the big one: If the New York Mets win the World Series in a 50-game season, does that pennant proudly flap alongside the banners from '69 and '86?

"Fly it high! It counts. It all counts," Montgomery said. "DeGrom doesn't get to have this year back. Whatever you get, it counts."

With a caveat, of course.

"It's abnormal," offered the 60-year-old songwriter who ran the "School of Rock" team in the Broadway Show League. "Everybody 100 years from now will know it was abnormal."

That's if there even is a Major League Baseball season, with players and owners currently caught in a bitter dispute over

how to start amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Both sides occasionally mention fans, talking about doing right by them. But apart from taking sides, how do the fans feel — would they consider a severely shortened schedule legit?

To some, a limited MLB season would resemble a European soccer round-robin. That's how Brewers fan Matt Tobin from Wauwatosa, Wis., sees it.

"Frankly, a 50-game season is basically a playoff. I play Strat-O-Matic baseball regularly. If you play a third of a season, the numbers are so skewed," he said.

Suppose Christian Yelich got off to an incredibly fast start and wound up batting .402 in 48 games. Would that make him baseball's first .400 hitter since Ted Williams in 1941?

"I think any rate-based stat record — batting average, ERA — would have to be considered an anomaly," Oakland fan Adam Brooks said.

Brooks, an orthopedic surgeon in the East Bay suburb of Walnut Creek, Calif., had planned to bump up from a partial season-ticket package to a full plan this year.

"I mean a starter could go the whole season without giving up a run. Would we then consider that the best starting pitching season ever? Of course not. The stats in this season would just have to be compared only against itself as a bubble," he said.

Added A's fan Kimberlee MacVicar: "I don't see a reason for an asterisk for an individual game stat."

"If a player hits three home runs or the cycle in a single game, I would count that in their personal stats without an asterisk," she said.

Kay Kenealy of Waukesha, Wis., holds a 20-game ticket package at Miller Park and has her eye on a bigger prize. She would love to see her Brewers win their first World Series title.

"I'm sure there's a lot of purists out there who go, you have to play 162 games or whatever," she said. "But if the season's a month long, you play for that month."

"The season's the season. It's kind of like with the Bucks in the running for an NBA championship. A championship's a championship. The World Series is the World Series," she

said.

Sort of, said Steve Palec, who's held season tickets since Milwaukee played at County Stadium.

"I definitely would put a giant asterisk next to it," he said. "I'd also put an asterisk next to that asterisk, which is like, 'Hey, you know what? If you want to give me a car, I'll take it. I'm not going to argue about what kind of car it is.'"

No one disputes the Los Angeles Dodgers' title in 1981 during a strike-split season in which every team played over 100 games. And there's no debate about the third of four straight NL Cy Young Awards won by Greg Maddux in a 1994 season ended in August by a players' strike.

Ken Katz of Columbia, Md., has no illusions about seeing a 2020 championship flag flying over Camden Yards next year. He's been a Sunday season-ticket holder in Baltimore since 1995.

"I think a 50-game season is a joke. Sixty-five is a bit closer, but honestly, if you don't have three months of baseball, you don't have a season," he said.

Players' union quiet on latest proposal from owners

Associated Press

NEW YORK — After days of angry exchanges over money between Major League Baseball and the players' association, Commissioner Rob Manfred started to doubt whether there would be a 2020 season and said as much on national television.

He then called union head Tony Clark and offered to fly from New York to Arizona to meet for the first time in three months. They spoke one on one for several hours Tuesday in a room at The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa in Scottsdale and emerged with what MLB considered a framework for each leader to sell to his side.

MLB thought it had terms to

play the pandemic-delayed season in empty ballparks, not just a proposal.

The union said nothing publicly and staff conferred with the eight-man executive subcommittee and other players. Some on the players' side considered the framework merely another plan subject to more bargaining.

The framework includes full prorated pay, even if games are played in empty ballparks, people familiar with the details told The Associated Press. They spoke on condition of anonymity because details were not announced.

Each team would play 60 games over 10 weeks starting July 20, though a Sunday open-

er on July 19 could be added. The framework would result in players receiving about 37% of their salaries and would come to roughly \$1.48 billion from salaries originally totaling \$4 billion.

Baseball's postseason would expand from 10 teams to 16 this year, and the two wild-card games would transform into eight best-of-three series. That would create a minimum of 14 new playoff games whose broadcast rights could be sold, and MLB would have the option of 14 or 16 postseason teams in 2021.

MLB would guarantee a \$25 million postseason players' pool, creating postseason shares for players in the event

no tickets are sold.

The designated hitter would expand to all games for the first time, also involving games between National League teams, for 2020 and 2021.

The luxury tax would be suspended for 2020, saving money for the Yankees, Astros, Dodgers and Cubs.

Both sides would contribute jointly to initiatives for social justice.

Players with so-called split contracts, who get paid at a lower salary rate when sent to the minor leagues, wouldn't have to repay the advance they already received: \$16,500, \$30,000 or \$60,000, depending on their contract, for a total of about \$33 million.

NHL facing major short-term losses

Associated Press

With so much uncertainty, Larry Quinn can't predict just how severe the NHL's financial losses might be due to the coronavirus pandemic.

That doesn't stop the former Buffalo Sabres managing partner from providing a bleak assessment, at least for the short term.

"They've got big challenges ahead," Quinn said. "And the problem is that you don't know the answers to the questions you have to ask."

The questions are many at a time the NHL hopes to go ahead with a 24-team expanded playoff format in a bid to conclude the season with no clear timetable of when to open the next one. It could be as late as January, though Commissioner Gary Bettman has said it would be a full 82 games.

Many NHL issues are similar to those facing North America's other major professional leagues, such as when fans will be allowed to attend games. Others are more distinct to hockey, such as the effect the

drop of the Canadian dollar will have on a league with seven of its 31 teams based north of the border.

The NHL was a \$2.3 billion business with a \$39 million salary cap coming out of the lockout that wiped out the 2004-05 season. It broke the \$5 billion mark in 2018-19, with an \$81.5 million cap this past season.

Quinn said the NHL's bottom line could be sheared in half in the short term, effectively erasing the gains made since owners and players reached a revenue-sharing agreement following the lockout. The anticipated drop in revenue has already caused a large ripple through the league.

At least 10 teams have laid off employees or announced indefinite furloughs, with many executives taking pay cuts. Just this week, the Sabres made a drastic series of cost-cutting moves by firing general manager Jason Botterill and his assistants, 12 of 21 scouts and their entire minor league coaching staff. Owner Terry Pegula specifically cited uncertain times raised by the pandemic, and

a desire to become a "leaner" and "more efficient" operation.

Players are bracing for lost salaries by continuing to defer whether to receive their final paychecks. They are also in jeopardy of losing the portion of pay put aside in an escrow account, which rolls over to the owners should revenue fall short of projections; players have lost upward of 10% of their pay to escrow over the past seven-plus seasons and it is a major issue in upcoming labor talks.

Former NHL executive-turned-broadcaster Brian Burke said the pain will be felt by teams and players alike.

"I said seven weeks ago, if we lost this season and part of next season, I could foresee a \$40 million salary cap," he added. "I don't think it's going to get to that point. And I know one option that's being discussed is deferral of some of these wages they're paid and see what happens, and when the revenue bounces back they can get paid."

Bettman recently said gate receipts, while significant,

don't make up a majority of league revenue. But gate revenue is key to the NHL because it lags behind its counterparts in television dollars.

The NHL has a 10-year, \$2 billion deal with NBC, that expires after next season. It has a 12-year deal with Canada's Rogers TV that began in 2014-15, and is worth \$5.2 billion Canadian. In comparison, the NFL makes more than \$5 billion annually from broadcasting rights agreements.

The Canadian dollar plays a major role in league finances, with player salaries paid in U.S. currency. That wasn't an issue in 2007, when the Canadian dollar briefly jumped above par, which was reflected in the NHL's salary cap making its largest two-year gain, going from \$44 million in 2006-07 to \$56.7 million in 2008-09.

That's not the case today, with the Canadian dollar at the 75-cent range. Teams north of the border project losing \$400,000 each time the Canadian dollar drops a penny, putting a strain on their ability to compete for or retain high-priced talent.

Racism debate renews calls for Redskins' name change

Associated Press

The recent national debate over racism has renewed calls for the NFL's Washington Redskins to change their name, with Native American advocates believing the climate is right for action despite no evidence owner Dan Snyder is considering it.

It could take pressure from the other 31 owners and the league office itself to force Snyder's hand. A Redskins spokesman said the team had no comment, while the NFL did not immediately respond to questions about the future of the name.

"(It) might be easier if the NFL as an institution or a corporation mandates the change because then it takes the pressure off of the Washington

team themselves and Dan Snyder," University of California, Berkeley, assistant professor of psychology Arianne Eason said Wednesday.

Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser last week called the name "an obstacle" to the team building a new stadium and headquarters in the District, which would likely be on land leased by the federal government. The site of the team's former home, RFK Stadium, is one option, along with locations in Maryland and Virginia when the current lease at FedEx Field in Landover, Md., expires in 2027.

"I think it's past time for the team to deal with what offends so many people," Bowser told Team 980 radio. "This is a great franchise with a great

history that's beloved in Washington, and it deserves a name that reflects the affection that we've built for the team."

Snyder has owned the team since 1999 and shown no indication he'd make a change like Washington's NBA franchise did in 1995, going from the Bullets to Wizards. When a 2016 Washington Post poll found nine in 10 Native Americans aren't offended by the name, Snyder said the team, fans and community believe it "represents honor, respect and pride."

A peer-reviewed UC Berkeley study co-authored by Eason and University of Michigan diversity of social transformation professor of psychology Stephanie Fryberg that was released earlier this year revealed 49%

of the 1,000 Native Americans surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that the name was offensive. That number goes up to 67% among those who strongly identify as Native.

Since the death of George Floyd in Minnesota, protests have erupted around the world, with much of the conversation centered on systematic racism.

"We are very much in a moment of reckoning around equity concerns in this country," Fryberg said. "At some point, the NFL as an organization is going to have to make a decision whether teams like the Kansas City Chiefs and the Washington football team should be allowed to continue to systematically discriminate against Native people."