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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Afghanistan troop deployment undecided

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has yet to decide how many additional American troops he will send to Afghanistan to bolster the deadlocked fight with Taliban and Islamic State insurgents under his revised strategy for the nearly 16-year war, Pentagon officials said Friday.

Mattis, who was granted authority this week by President Donald Trump to set troop levels for Afghanistan, is still finalizing the new plan for America's longest-ever war, said Dana W. White, the Pentagon's chief spokeswoman.

The Associated Press on Thursday reported Mattis would deploy about 4,000 new U.S. troops to Afghanistan in the near future. Several U.S. de-

fense officials who have spoken on the condition of anonymity have said in the last few weeks that the Pentagon was considering an additional 3,000 to 5,000 troops for Afghanistan.

"Secretary Mattis has made no decisions on a troop increase for Afghanistan," White said Friday in a prepared statement. "As he said throughout the week in testimony, the revised Afghanistan strategy will be presented to the president for his approval in the coming weeks."

Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other Pentagon officials have said the number of American servicemembers deployed will be at least partially based on how many troops that NATO countries are willing to commit to Afghanistan.

Several NATO nations, in-

cluding the United Kingdom, have reportedly been considering adding additional forces to Afghanistan, though none has publicly announced its commitment.

Mattis told lawmakers this week on Capitol Hill that he expected to present the new Afghanistan strategy to Trump by mid-July. He testified to various House and Senate committees alongside Dunford on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

The defense secretary painted a grim picture of the situation in Afghanistan. Despite nearly 16 years of war, the Taliban has made inroads in several regions throughout the country in the last year, and terrorist organizations including ISIS and al-Qaida remain active.

"We are not winning in Afghanistan," Mattis told the Sen-

ate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday. "We will correct this as soon as possible."

There are now about 8,400 American troops deployed to Afghanistan. NATO nations contribute about another 5,000.

Additional troops would primarily be used to bolster the NATO-led mission to train, advise and assist Afghan security forces, but some American troops also might be used in U.S. counterterrorism operations, Mattis said.

In addition to more troops in Afghanistan, the Pentagon's new strategy could include some changes to how U.S. troops operate in the country.

Mattis said Wednesday that his proposed strategy is likely to call for inserting NATO air controllers within Afghan units to make air response more effective against the Taliban or ISIS.

Russia: Airstrike may have killed ISIS leader

BEIRUT — Russia said Friday it was verifying if it had killed the leader of Islamic State in an airstrike targeting a meeting of ISIS leaders just outside the group's de facto capital in Syria, dealing a potentially severe blow to the extremist group.

U.S. Army Col. Ryan Dillon, the spokesman for the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition, said he would welcome such news but urged caution.

The Russian Defense Ministry claimed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed in a Russian strike in late May along with other senior group commanders, adding that the information about his death was still "being verified through various channels."

Asked about that claim at a news conference in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said: "I don't have a 100-percent confirmation of the information."

There had been numerous reports in the past of al-Baghdadi being killed, but they did not turn out to be true. The ISIS leader last released an audio on Nov. 3, urging his followers to keep up the fight for Mosul as

they defended the Iraqi city against a major offensive that began weeks earlier.

The report of al-Baghdadi's death comes as ISIS suffers major setbacks in which they have lost wide areas of territory. Both of their remaining strongholds — Mosul in Iraq and Syria's Raqqa — are under attack by groups who are fighting under the cover of airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition.

Lavrov, at the press conference, added on a cautious note that if al-Baghdadi's death is confirmed, its importance mustn't be overestimated.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the air raid on May 28 that targeted an ISIS meeting held on the southern outskirts of Raqqa in Syria also killed about 30 midlevel militant leaders and about 300 fighters.

It was not clear why al-Baghdadi, who is known to move around with great secrecy, would attend a meeting in an area frequently targeted by the coalition, along with 300 ISIS fighters in attendance.

The ministry said the ISIS leaders were gathered to discuss the group's withdrawal

from Raqqa, the group's de facto capital. It said the military began planning the hit after getting word that the group's leadership was to meet to plan their exit to the south.

The Russian military sent drones to monitor the area and then dispatched a group of Su-34 bombers and Su-35 fighter jets to hit the ISIS gathering.

The Defense Ministry added that it had warned the U.S. of the coming strike.

Syrian activists reported airstrikes on May 28 south of Raqqa that killed more than a dozen people.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which tracks Syria's war, said airstrikes on the road linked the villages of Ratla and Kasrat killed 18 people while the activist-operated Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently said 17 civilians were killed in the airstrike on buses carrying civilians.

The Observatory said the dead included 10 Islamic State members. It did not elaborate at the time.

McCain vexed by Navy's ship purchases

BY DIANNA CAHN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Sen. John McCain on Thursday called the Navy's problem with purchasing equipment "vexing" and reamed service leaders over long delays and cost overruns, particularly in the development of littoral combat ships and two aircraft carriers.

McCain, who is chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, also lambasted acting Navy Secretary Sean Stackley and Adm. John Richardson, the chief of naval personnel, during a committee hearing for the Navy's announcement it will amend the fiscal year 2018 presidential budget proposal to add the purchase of as many as three littoral combat ships.

The Navy is in the early stages of preparing the design of a new frigate to replace the LCS, which, after delays and added costs, has failed to meet its promised capabilities. The frigate will go out for bid in 2020.

Until then, Navy officials said they will continue to acquire a minimum number of littoral combat ships to keep the two shipyards that will compete to build the frigate operating.

McCain challenged Richardson when the admiral said he was accountable for the LCS, and asked whether anything had changed in his lifestyle as a result. Then the senator pressed Richardson on why the Navy had said it needed one LCS and was now asking for three.

Richardson said the Navy "continues to learn about the industrial base" and provides information to Congress as it receives it.

McCain was not satisfied and asked for an explanation "for the record" of how the request jumped "just literally in a matter of days — after months of being told we only need one [LCS]."

In another tense exchange, McCain questioned Stackley about the continuing high costs of new aircraft carriers, with

the nearly \$13 billion price tag for construction of the USS Enterprise that emerged in the 2018 budget proposal.

McCain also questioned repair costs on the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford, the first of its class, which was just delivered to the Navy last month, and which could cause the Ford to exceed a congressionally imposed cost cap.

Stackley said the Navy is still evaluating whether the expenditure will breach the cost cap, and the Navy would notify Congress if it will be the case.

Unsatisfied, McCain ultimately asked for an explanation in writing on whether there was a \$20 million cost overrun that was allowable and required Congress be notified or the expense of the carrier breached the cost cap.

The senator also questioned both leaders about why it will take seven years to get a new frigate into the water when just a few years ago, McCain said, the Navy was able to design,

put out for bid and develop a complex new aircraft in far less time.

"I will tell you the threat has changed and has become more challenging," Richardson said. "We operate the fleet under new concepts. We want that frigate to be relevant to a distributed maritime operation concept."

Richardson said the Navy is completing the requirements for the ship and then will work with industry experts to explore what is technologically possible and do a cost analysis. Stackley said the experts will then start designing the product to be put out for bid in 2018. The bids will be submitted in 2019 and the award will likely be made in 2020.

Stackley said the Navy will accelerate development of the ship, if possible, but the service didn't want to rush a project that would then fall into the same problems as the LCS with a nonrealistic schedule.

Four pilot deaths may be linked to oxygen system failures

BY TARA COPP

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Four pilot deaths could be tied to oxygen system failures in the cockpits of F/A-18 Hornets, the Navy revealed Thursday in a review of oxygen problems plaguing its jets.

The review was launched in late March after instructor pilots at Navy training bases in Kingsville, Texas; Meridian, Miss.; and Pensacola, Fla.; refused to fly with students in T-45 trainer jets because "concern about contaminated breathing air reached a tipping point" after a sharp increase in the number of reported cases of hypoxia or related incidents. Hypoxia is when enough oxygen fails to reach body tissue and can lead to disorientation, loss of consciousness or death.

T-45 oxygen system failures rose from 13 in 2012 to 38 in 2016, the report found. There also have been 21 failures in the first five months of 2017. Hornet oxygen system failures have similarly spiked, the report found, from 57 in 2012 to 125 in 2016 to 52 in the first five months of this year.

The Navy redacted specific information about what caused the F/A-18 fatalities, which took place during more than a decade, said Adm. Bill Moran, vice chief of naval operations. A fifth incident resulted in the loss of the aircraft but the pilot was able to safely eject, the investigation found.

"Subsequent to these mishaps, training to recognize the symptoms increased and procedures now stress the importance of selecting emergency oxygen as a first step. Correct application of emergency oxygen would have likely prevented these mishaps," the investigation reported.

Oxygen system failures in the T-45s have not led to a fatality, the report found. But in August 2016 in Kingsville, a student and instructor ejected resulting in the loss of the aircraft. While the Navy's findings in that crash investigation were redacted, instructors and student pilots there challenged the conclusions.

The investigation into that T-45 crash has not been completed yet, the Navy said.

While the Navy has not been able to isolate a cause for the oxygen system failures, it did identify several areas of concern. For

example, pilots on both aircraft breathe through the on-board oxygen generation system, or OBOGS. The systems use a sieve that absorbs excess nitrogen from the air and adds oxygen into the mixture before passing it on to the pilot.

The sieve is sensitive to temperature changes and humidity, and can be affected by water to the point that "any entrapped contaminants could be exchanged for moisture in the sieve bed and the contaminants then released from OBOGS into aircrew breathing air," the investigation found.

The report also found the sieves in both aircraft have outlasted their expected shelf lives. For example in the Hornets, the sieves were developed to last 6,000 flight hours, the same as the F/A-18s were designed to last. But the high pace of operations and budget pressures have extended the use of the aircraft to 10,000 hours in some cases.

As the planes age, they undergo a more rigorous inspection process, to check for cracks in the wings and engine wear, for example. That rigorous inspection, however, did not previously require the oxygen systems to be checked, the investigation found.

Ballgame of unity and spirit won by Dems

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans and Democrats joined in a spirited, friendly rivalry at their annual Congressional Baseball Game, many fresh from the penetrating horror of the ballfield shooting rampage a day earlier and all playing in honor of their grievously wounded colleague.

The game at Nationals Park in Washington on Thursday evening carried on a century-old, bipartisan ritual, this one tinged with worry about Louisiana Rep. Steve Scalise and the players' determination to answer the attack by coming together in sport. Democrats won in an 11-2 blowout.

In a final flourish of bipartisan camaraderie for the night, Democratic Rep. Mike Doyle, of Pennsylvania, his team's manager, accepted the trophy and then gave it to his GOP counterpart, Rep. Joe Barton, of Texas, to put in Scalise's office on behalf of the Democrats.

After accepting it gracefully, Barton cracked, "Next year, we won't be so nice."

A huge ovation came from the crowd, which swelled to a record 24,959, when Special Agent David Bailey, one of the Capitol police officers injured in the at-

tack on Republicans at their ball practice in Virginia, threw out the first pitch. "ONE FAMILY," proclaimed a sign in the crowd.

The announcer's mention of Scalise, the House majority whip who was critically wounded in the attack Wednesday, brought the masses to their feet.

Scalise remained listed in critical condition Thursday night after multiple surgeries, though word came from the hospital during the game that he had improved.

"By playing tonight, we are showing the world that we will not be intimidated by threats, acts of violence or assaults on our democracy," said President Donald Trump, appearing on the park's giant screen but not attending. "The game will go on."

When the president intoned three words he said have brought Americans together for generations — "Let's play ball" — cheers rang out.

But despite the unifying nature of the event, there were boos for the president, too, from the section for Democratic fans on the third base side.

Before the event, House Democratic leader Rep. Nancy Pelosi, of California, told reporters, "Tonight, we will go to the game, play our hardest, but we

will all be Team Scalise."

Republican Rep. Chuck Fleischmann, of Tennessee, scored in the first inning, enjoying a different sort of adrenaline than the one he experienced Wednesday when he passed by the shooter over bloodied ground to take shelter in a dugout — confessing later that "the fear factor was horrific."

On Wednesday, a man later identified as the attacker approached Rep. Jeff Duncan, of South Carolina, in the parking lot of the Alexandria, Va., ballfield, asking him, "Excuse me, sir, who's practicing today, Democrats or Republicans?" Duncan said, recalling the encounter. He said Republicans were on the field shortly before the gunman began shooting at them.

Duncan found that memory hard to shake Thursday night as he stood in for Scalise at second base.

"That was tough for me," Duncan said. "That was humbling in a way. It was never off my mind when I ran out there ... the reason I was going to second base was Steve Scalise, my colleague, was fighting for his life in the hospital right now."

Rep. Roger Williams, of Texas, taken away in a stretcher with an injured ankle from

the chaos in Virginia, hobbled around the third-base box Thursday night, coaching the GOP team as planned, with his crutches set aside. He wore a purple boot.

His aide, Zack Barth, who was shot in the attack Wednesday, walked across the field on crutches. Both had appeared on the House floor earlier Thursday.

Scalise was fielding balls at second base during the practice Wednesday when he was shot in the hip and sustained serious injuries as the bullet traveled through his pelvis and injured internal organs.

The congressional game, which dates to 1909 and is a summertime tradition on Capitol Hill, is a rare example of bipartisanship in an increasingly polarized Washington. Long-ago Little Leaguers now in Congress don their spikes and dust off their gloves in a game played to benefit several charities.

The charities are the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Washington, the Washington Literacy Center, the Washington Nationals Dream Foundation and, after Wednesday's shooting, the Capitol Police Memorial Fund.

Shulkin: Funding for Choice program drying up

BY NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Money is quickly and unexpectedly running out for a program that allows veterans to seek health care outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and VA Secretary David Shulkin is urging Congress to fix it.

In March, approximately \$2 billion remained in the Veterans Choice Program, which was created following the 2014 wait-time scandal in order to allow veterans to seek outside health care. The funds dropped to \$1.5 billion about a month later, and the account now holds \$821 million, Shulkin told the

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on Wednesday.

Shulkin had originally estimated \$626 million would be left in the account by the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30. Now, he's expecting all of the funds to run out before money for fiscal 2018 is appropriated. "We now have too little money in Choice," Shulkin said. "If there is no action at all by Congress, then the Choice program will dry up by mid-August."

Shulkin attributed the faster spending to fixes that he had made to the Choice program. He testified that more than 8 million community care appointments have been made so far this year, a nearly 50 percent

increase from the same time last year. He said he learned of the shortfall only last week and then directed hospitals to limit the number of veterans referred to the private sector.

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., said her constituents are already feeling the effects of restricting private-sector care. Some veterans in Walla Walla, Wash., were told by the VA to travel four hours away to hospitals in Seattle or Portland, Ore., for routine appointments, she said. "Just so you know, I'm already hearing from people in my state about the delays and burdens they're seeing as a result of this," Murray said. "This is having an impact."

To continue the Choice program through the end of the fiscal year, Shulkin is seeking the authority from Congress to transfer money from a separate community care account that holds approximately \$2 billion. The VA secretary does not have the power to move the money between accounts.

As of Friday, no legislation had been introduced to fix the problem. Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn., chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, is "working with the VA, his colleagues and other stakeholders to find the best path forward to address the serious funding issues," his office said Friday.

Kushner finances investigated

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Special Counsel Robert Mueller is investigating the finances and business dealings of Jared Kushner, President Donald Trump's son-in-law and adviser, as part of the probe into Russia's interference in the 2016 presidential election, according to officials familiar with the matter.

FBI agents and federal prosecutors have also been examining the financial dealings of other Trump associates, including former national security adviser Michael Flynn, former campaign chairman Paul Manafort and Carter Page, who was listed as a foreign policy adviser for the campaign.

The officials who described the financial focus of the investigation spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The White House has said a December meeting between Kushner and Sergey Gorkov, the head of a state-owned Russian development bank, was a pre-inauguration diplomatic encounter, unrelated to business

matters. The Russian bank, Vnesheconombank, which has been the subject of U.S. sanctions following Russia's annexation of Crimea, has said the session was held for business reasons because of Kushner's role as head of his family's real estate company. The meeting occurred as Kushner's company had been seeking financing for its troubled \$1.8 billion purchase of an office building on Fifth Avenue in New York.

Robert Mueller, who was appointed as special counsel by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein on May 17, is investigating possible coordination between the Kremlin and the Trump campaign to influence the 2016 presidential election, and related matters. The inquiry has expanded to include an examination of whether Trump attempted to obstruct justice, *The Post* reported Wednesday.

In the days following Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey on May 9 and before Mueller's appointment, the obstruction-of-justice investigation of the president began, according to people familiar

with the matter.

Discussing the firing of Comey, Trump said in an interview with NBC, "In fact, when I decided to just do it, I said to myself, I said, 'You know, this Russia thing with Trump and Russia is a made up story; it's an excuse by the Democrats for having lost an election that they should have won.'"

Trump spoke to Daniel Coats, the director of national intelligence, and Mike Rogers, the head of the National Security Agency, about the Russia investigation, according to officials.

Coats told associates Trump asked him whether he could intervene with Comey to get the FBI to back off its focus on Flynn, the officials said. Coats later told lawmakers he never felt pressured to intervene.

Trump later telephoned Coats and Rogers to separately ask them to issue public statements denying that there was any evidence of coordination between Trump's campaign and Russian officials. Coats and Rogers refused to comply with the president's requests, officials said.

Anger about potential cause of London fire

Associated Press

LONDON — Grief over a London high-rise tower fire that killed dozens turned to outrage Friday amid reports the materials used in a recent renovation of the public housing block may have fueled the inferno.

Engineering experts have speculated outside insulation panels installed on the 24-story Grenfell Tower may have helped the fire spread rapidly from one floor to the next. The Guardian newspaper reported Friday that contractors installed a cheaper, less flame-resistant type of paneling on the building in the renovation that ended in May 2016.

London police said Friday that 30 people are known to have died in the blaze, which started just before 1 a.m. Wednesday.

Using drones and sniffer dogs, firefighters continued Friday to search the burned-out hulk that looms over Notting Dale, a low-income community next to the superaffluent Notting Hill neighborhood in west London.

Britain's Press Association reported that some 70 people are still missing after the fire.

Grenfell Tower is a public housing project owned by the local government council and managed by a nonprofit known as the Kensington and Chelsea Tenants Management Organization. The group last year completed a \$12.8 million renovation that included new outside insulating panels, double-paned windows and a communal heating system.

Flames raced up the outside of the tower Wednesday, triggering speculation the new panels contributed to the disaster.

Aluminum composite panels have been used to cover the outside of buildings for more than 40 years. They essentially consist of two thin layers of aluminum sandwiched around a lightweight insulating material. Standard versions use plastic such as polyethylene for the core, while other variants use fire-resistant material.

Woman in suicide texting case convicted

Associated Press

TAUNTON, Mass. — A woman who sent her boyfriend a barrage of text messages urging him to kill himself was convicted Friday of involuntary manslaughter.

Juvenile Court Judge Lawrence Moniz found Michelle Carter caused the death of Conrad Roy III. Carter cried as the judge explained his reasoning but remained stoic when the verdict was read.

The judge ruled that Carter, now 20, can remain free on bail but ordered her not to make any contact with Roy's family and not to leave the state. She faces up to 20 years in prison.

The trial offered a window into teen depression and suicide through text messages and Facebook communications.

Carter was 17 when she sent Roy dozens of messages urging him to take his own life in July 2014. Roy, 18, was found dead of carbon monoxide poisoning in his truck in a store parking lot in Fairhaven, Mass.

Prosecutors said that in addition to bombarding Roy with text messages, Carter also gave Roy advice when he got out of the truck as he was inhaling the gas and told her he was scared.

"Get back in," she told him, according to a friend who testified Carter described the conversation in a text to her about a month after Roy died.

Carter's lawyer, Joseph Cataldo, argued Roy had a history of depression and suicide attempts, and was determined to end his life. He said Carter initially tried to talk Roy out of

it and urged him to get professional help but eventually went along with his plan.

An involuntary manslaughter charge can be brought in Massachusetts when someone causes the death of another person when engaging in reckless or wanton conduct that creates a high degree of likelihood of substantial harm.

Dr. Peter Breggin, a psychiatrist testifying for the defense, said Carter was in the grips of a "grandiose" delusion that she alone could help Roy find his way to heaven and she would care for his family.

Prosecutors have argued the text messages support their claim that Carter caused Roy's death by recklessly helping him poison himself.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman didn't know she was pregnant

MA MALDEN — A Massachusetts woman preparing to go to the hospital for serious pain instead gave birth to an unexpected baby girl.

WCVB-TV reported Christine Harvey was waiting for a ride to the hospital when she suddenly went into labor Monday.

Neighbors called 911, but Harvey gave birth to a baby girl before first responders arrived to her Malden home. The family said it was not aware a baby was on the way.

Neighbors have donated clothes and other items.

Harvey's boyfriend, Doug Rogers, said both mother and child are doing well. He said he is "blessed."

The couple have two other children together.

Chicken sandwich to be sent to edge of space

KY LOUISVILLE — KFC plans to make a space pioneer out of a chicken sandwich next week when it sends it to the edge of the atmosphere with the help of a high-altitude balloon.

The promotional stunt for the Zinger sandwich comes two months after the fast food chain unveiled Rob Lowe playing Kentucky Fried Chicken founder Col. Harland Sanders in a space suit as part of an ad campaign. The ads promised to send the breaded chicken sandwich into space.

KFC is partnering with balloon maker World View on the project. The chain said the launch window opens June 21 for what it says is the longest controlled stratospheric balloon flight with a commercial

payload in history. The sandwich will return to Earth and will bring back telemetry data.

Driver leads slow chase after stealing truck

AL BIRMINGHAM — Alabama authorities say a thief who couldn't figure out how to shift out of first gear led a slow-speed chase in a flatbed truck.

Jefferson County Chief Deputy Randy Christian told AL.com the 16-mile chase never topped 30 mph. It ended when the transmission seized, stopping the truck.

Authorities said Randy DeWayne Vert, 29, of Pinson, faces multiple charges, including attempting to elude and resisting arrest. His bail is set at \$5,900.

Deputies said the chase began early Wednesday when deputies checked on a car abandoned in Birmingham and were told a man had just stolen a nearby Kenworth T-300 flatbed delivery truck.

Family rebuilding after skunk ruins home

PA LATROBE — A Pennsylvania family is slowly rebuilding their life and their home seven months after a skunk sneaked into their home and ruined it.

Latrobe resident Scott Gray told WPXI-TV the family's plight is worse than if their home had been ruined by fire because their insurance won't cover the damage.

Gray said the skunk apparently sneaked into the house through a doggie door, then spent three hours inside with the family's dogs, spraying its noxious scent everywhere.

The family threw away toys, furniture and appliances and had to strip the house down to its wood framing to get rid of

the odor.

The family has been living in a small apartment down the street while they rebuild. So far, they've spent more than \$30,000.

Urine in elevator is top courthouse woe

AR JONESBORO — Officials in an Arkansas county have a plea for courthouse visitors: Please stop urinating in our elevator.

Craighead County officials hope new security cameras will deter the steady stream of culprits who have been relieving themselves in the courthouse elevator in Jonesboro, a college town about 115 miles northeast of Little Rock.

Maintenance workers said the problem has persisted for years — even though the restrooms are only about 25 feet from the elevator.

Officials told The Jonesboro Sun that the cameras, installed last fall, have caught three men in the act, one of whom has been cited for disorderly conduct and fined \$105.

Runner drowns rabid raccoon in puddle

ME HOPE — A Maine woman says a rabid raccoon attacked her while she was out for a run, so she drowned it in a puddle.

Rachel Borch, 21, of Hope, said she was running in woods near her home June 2 when she saw the raccoon charging with its teeth bared.

Borch ran to a nearby puddle with the rabid animal biting down on her thumb and held its head underwater until it drowned. Hope Animal Control Officer Heidi Blood praised Borch's composure, and said she is in the hospital for rabies exposure treatment.

Mayor sends man \$1 over parking dispute

MA NORTHAMPTON — A Massachusetts mayor has paid \$1 out of his own pocket to settle a dispute with a man who complained after unnecessarily paying for parking.

Bill Pharmer told The Daily Hampshire Gazette he paid \$1 to park in Northampton last week when he and his wife went out for dinner. He put the money into a payment kiosk at 6:15 p.m., not knowing that the city stops parking enforcement at 6 p.m.

The Hershey, Pa., man complained to the city's Parking Division, which passed the problem onto Mayor David Narkewicz.

Narkewicz sent Pharmer a dollar along with a handwritten note of apology.

Vape pipe sparked fire; dog maybe involved

MD DAMASCUS — Authorities say a vape pipe blamed for a house fire north of the nation's capital may have sparked a flame because a dog got hold of it.

WTTG-TV quoted Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service spokesman Pete Piringer as saying the dog may have been playing with the device, causing its battery to ignite.

The TV station reported the owner of the townhouse was away on a motorcycle ride. He said he found his house filled with smoke and his carpet and couch on fire when he returned. Firefighters rescued three dogs.

From wire reports

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MLB roundup

Kelly's pinch-hit double lifts Phillies over Sale, Red Sox

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Pinch-hitter Ty Kelly doubled home the only run in the eighth inning of a duel between Philadelphia's Nick Pivetta and Chris Sale to lead the Phillies to a 1-0 win over the Boston Red Sox on Thursday night.

Sale (8-3) was cruising until a one-out single by Andrew Knapp and Kelly's hit, which ended an eight-game losing streak.

Sale allowed four hits with 10 strikeouts, upping his major league-leading total to 136. It was his 44th career double-digit strikeout game and ninth this season.

Pat Neshek (2-1) pitched a scoreless inning, and Hector Neris earned his sixth save with a hitless ninth.

Nationals 8, Mets 3: At New York, Bryce Harper hit a solo homer that sailed over right fielder Jay Bruce and landed about a dozen rows deep. Harper's 17th home run left the bat at 116.3 mph, his hardest-hit ball since Statcast began tracking in 2015.

Daniel Murphy added three more hits against his former team and Michael A. Taylor hit the Nationals' league-leading 100th home run to cap a five-run fifth. Manager Dusty Baker won on his 68th birthday, while Gio Gonzalez (6-1) improved to 10-1 at Citi Field, giving up two runs and five hits in seven innings.

Athletics 8, Yankees 7 (10): Khris Davis blooped a two-run single in the 10th inning that glanced off second baseman Starlin Castro's glove in shallow center and host Oakland beat New York in a seesawing game.

It was Davis' third career game-ending hit and came after Castro had put the Yankees ahead in the top half on a sacrifice fly.

Davis' game-winner came off Giovanny Gallegos (0-1) to finally close out the 4-hour, 29-minute game. Rajai Davis singled with two outs and Chad Pinder's double put runners on second and third.

Brewers 6, Cardinals 4: At St. Louis, Eric Thames hit a tiebreaking, two-run homer in the ninth off Seung Hwan Oh (1-3), Thames' 18th home run this season.

Keon Broxton tied the score 2-2 in the second with a 489-foot drive to left, the longest home run in Busch Stadium III's history and the second-longest this season in the major leagues behind the Yankees' Aaron Judge at 495 feet.

Tigers 5, Rays 3: Miguel Cabrera hit

a two-run homer in the ninth off Tommy Hunter (0-2) for host Detroit.

Justin Wilson (3-2) won with a scoreless inning. Justin Verlander pitched seven innings, allowing two runs, six hits and five walks.

Indians 12, Dodgers 5: Pinch-hitter Lonnie Chisenhall connected for a three-run homer and had five RBIs, stopping visiting Los Angeles' six-game winning streak.

Chisenhall's 415-foot drive in the fifth inning on the second pitch from Ross Stripling opened up a four-run lead for Josh Tomlin (4-8), who struggled after being staked to a 5-0 lead. Chisenhall added a two-run single in the sixth.

Twins 6, Mariners 2: Chris Gimenez homered twice for the first time in his big league career, and Eduardo Escobar sparked a five-run first inning for host Minnesota with a two-run shot.

Jose Berrios (6-1) allowed five hits in a career-best eight innings to win his third straight start.

Gimenez hit a three-run homer in the first off Ariel Miranda (6-3), who lost for the first time in 10 starts for the Mariners and lasted only four innings with 10 hits and six runs allowed.

White Sox 5, Orioles 2: Rookie Matt Davidson homered for the fourth straight game, then doubled and scored in a four-run sixth to send visiting Baltimore to its seventh loss in eight games.

Davidson hit a solo homer in the fourth, his 14th home run this season.

Rockies 10, Giants 9: Raimel Tapia hit a run-scoring single in the bottom of the ninth inning and Colorado recovered from blowing a late lead to beat visiting San Francisco.

Nolan Arenado doubled three times and drove in four runs, while D.J. LeMahieu added four hits and an RBI for the Rockies. They won for the 10th time in 14 games this month despite allowing the Giants to come back from an eight-run deficit earlier in the game.

Royals 7, Angels 2: Lorenzo Cain and Alex Gordon hit solo home runs and visiting Kansas City picked up its fifth consecutive victory.

Matt Strahm (2-3) won his first career start after making 41 appearances as a reliever over the past two seasons. Strahm went five innings, striking out three while giving up three hits and one walk.

Marlins' Ozuna making strong All-Star case

Associated Press

MIAMI — Marlins left fielder Marcell Ozuna is once again hitting like an All-Star, and this year he hopes to keep it going.

Ozuna tailed off badly in the second half last season after making the All-Star team for the first time. He's off to another torrid start, ranking among the NL leaders with a .333 average, 17 homers, 47 RBIs, 83 hits and a .983 OPS.

Over the past 18 games, Ozuna has hit .408 with six homers to help Miami go 12-6 and revive its season after a dismal start.

"He has been unreal," teammate Christian Yelich said. "He's definitely one of the best players in baseball right now."

The Marlins have seen this before. Ozuna batted .307 with 17 homers before the All-Star break last year, and then hit just .209 with six homers in the second half.

But manager Don Mattingly said the 26-year-old Dominican is better now than at this time a year ago — more disciplined in his approach, making him less prone to long slumps.

"I think it's another step forward," Mattingly said. "There are just less giveaway at-bats, where he gets a couple of hits and gets happy and just starts swinging. I see more and more the quality at-bats. That's how you pile up numbers."

Ozuna's conditioning may have been a factor in his second-half slump in 2016, and he has attributed his start this season to a rigorous training regimen.

"When you work hard in the offseason, it makes you feel better," he said.

The right-handed slugger is also hitting the ball to all fields, which is when he tends to enjoy the most success. On Wednesday against Oakland, he homered into the Marlins Park home-run sculpture in center field. On Tuesday, he homered off the second-deck facade in right.

Ozuna's not the only Miami hitter piling up numbers. Giancarlo Stanton (17 homers) and Justin Bour (16) are also on pace for 40-homer seasons, especially impressive considering Marlins Park is notoriously pitcher-friendly.

Ozuna doesn't mind the spacious dimensions. He's batting .389 at home with a 1.187 OPS.

"It's important to have your family watching," he said. "All of the fans love me, and I try to give them my best."

Ozuna would relish a chance to do that when the All-Star game is played in Miami for the first time on July 11.

He's lobbying for votes with every swing. "I have to fight for that spot and earn it," he said.

Fowler matches US Open scoring mark

Associated Press

ERIN, Wis. — Erin Hills played like a pushover for a U.S. Open.

Check out the score of Rickie Fowler, who matched the U.S. Open scoring record to par for the opening round with a 7-under 65. Right behind him were 43 other players who broke par, breaking a championship record that had stood for 27 years. Adam Hadwin tied a U.S. Open record with six straight birdies.

Erin Hills also played like a beast.

Look no further than Rory McIlroy, the No. 2 player in the world, who didn't hit a fairway after the 10th hole, shot 42 on the back nine and posted a 78, his worst score in 27 rounds at the U.S. Open. Jason Day made two triple bogeys and closed with a birdie to avoid the indignity of shooting 80. He still had his worst score in a U.S. Open.

There were as many amateurs who broke par as players ranked in the top 10 — two each.

On a wild day of highs and lows — and even a commercial

blimp that crashed and caught fire outside the golf course during the round — Fowler emerged with a one-shot lead over Paul Casey and U.S. Open rookie Xander Schauffele in a most peculiar debut for the 11-year-old golf course.

“Definitely not U.S. Open-like,” Marc Leishman said.

Defending champion Dustin Johnson made only one birdie in his round of 75. Taking the long walk to sign his card, he looked back at the rain-softened course and mild breeze and said wistfully, “You won't get a better day for scoring.”

No one took advantage like Fowler.

Fowler, who shared the 36-hole lead at the Masters in April, never came seriously close to bogey because he was never in trouble. He kept it in the short grass, the secret to Erin Hills that wouldn't appear to be that difficult with some of the widest fairways for this major.

“You don't get many rounds at the U.S. Open that are stress-free,” Fowler said.

Fowler's seven birdies were from no more than 12 feet, in-

cluding three in a row around the turn. His 7-under par tied the record to par for the first round of a U.S. Open held by Jack Nicklaus and Tom Weiskopf, who each shot 7-under 63 at Baltusrol in 1980. He also joined McIlroy (2011 at Congressional) and Tiger Woods (2000 at Pebble Beach) as the only players to shoot 66 or better in the opening round without a bogey.

“It is always cool to be part of some sort of history in golf,” Fowler said. “But I'd rather be remembered for something that's done on Sunday.”

The 44 sub-par rounds broke the first-round mark of 39 at Medinah in 1990.

Day fell back when it took him three chips from behind the green at No. 4 to get it on the putting surface, leading to the first of his two triple bogeys.

“I just played bad golf, man,” Day said.

McIlroy joked earlier in the week that anyone who couldn't hit such wide fairways “might as well pack your bags and go home.” He spent all day in the knee-high fescue.

“You cannot play this golf course if you're not in position off the tee, and I wasn't in position,” McIlroy said. “Obviously, I paid the price for it today.”

Casey started eagle-birdie and finished with two birdies over the final four holes for his 66.

“I was just trying to have half as good a round as Rickie had,” said Casey, who played in the afternoon. “The scoring was so good this morning. I was happy it stayed benign for us, and I capitalized on it.”

Schauffele had a chance to tie Fowler for the lead until his 12-foot birdie putt on the par-3 ninth slid by on the right.

The course was set up at 7,845 yards, the longest of any major. Length wasn't the issue. It was sporadic storms earlier in the week that has softened the greens. One example of that was Fowler hitting 3-wood into the green on the 632-yard 18th hole, with a breeze at his back. His ball landed on the green and only rolled out about 10 feet. On typical U.S. Open greens, that would have run all the way off the back of the green.

More than a few golfers find themselves in the fescue

Associated Press

ERIN, Wis. — Rory McIlroy sprayed the ball all over the place. Casting aside his own advice, he decided to stay for another day at the U.S. Open.

McIlroy hit just five of 14 fairways on his way to a 6-over 78 in the first round. He got a close look at some of Erin Hills' notoriously thick fescue, but he wasn't alone.

“You cannot play this golf course if you're not in position off the tee, and I wasn't in position,” McIlroy said. “Obviously, I paid the price for it today.”

He had plenty of company. Jason Day also tangled with fierce fescue and had two triple bogeys in his round of 79. Dustin Johnson hit nine of 14 fairways and was 3 over Thurs-

day. Pat Perez swung and missed completely in the tall grass behind the 15th green.

“I just played bad golf, man,” Day said with a chuckle.

The USGA said Tuesday that overnight storms and more rain in the forecast were making some of the native grasses lay down, which would create such dense rough that it would be virtually unplayable. So it decided to trim the thickest rough on the fourth, 12th, 14th and 18th holes.

The plan drew an indignant response from McIlroy, who usually is quite good off the tee.

“Really? We have 60 yards from left line to right line,” he said. “You've got 156 of the best players in the world here, if we can't hit it within that av-

enue, you might as well pack your bags and go home.”

Fast forward to Thursday, and it sounded as if McIlroy had decided to try again.

“I know if I hit fairways around here, the course is still soft enough you can get it close and give yourself a lot of looks for birdies,” he said.

McIlroy got off to a nice start with an eagle on the par-4 No. 2, but that was his biggest highlight. He was 6 over on the back nine, including double bogeys on 15 and 17.

The 2011 U.S. Open champion didn't hit another fairway after No. 10.

“They should be wide enough for me to hit it into,” he said. “I just didn't hit it into them. Yeah, it was just one of those days. I was just a little bit off.”

While McIlroy brushed

aside concerns about the long fescue in the days before the Open, Kevin Na caused a bit of a stir when he posted a video to his Instagram account complaining about the long stuff at Erin Hills.

But Na had little trouble in the first round, shooting a 4-under 68.

“I think people — some of the guys took my social media post kind of the wrong way,” Na said. “If you read my post, it says I love the design. I was just trying to show what we have in some spots. And fairways are generous. I said all that. But I guess people don't like to read.”

“But I just tried to show what it is. And there are some spots where they're really brutal. And I was just trying to show that.”

FSU's Martin still chasing first title

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Mike Martin's first trip to the College World Series was 52 years ago when he played for Florida State. He is hoping by the time he leaves Omaha, Neb., this time it will be with his first national championship.

After struggling for most of the season, Florida State won 12 of its final 13 games to get to the College World Series for the 22nd time in school history. Martin has been a part of all but four, including 16 as the head coach. Only Wichita State's Gene Stephenson has led a team to the CWS more times (17).

"It's special seeing players' eyes the first time they get to the ballpark. They're treated like they've never been treated before," Martin said. "These are memories they will cherish forever."

Martin and his former players have savored the journey to Omaha, but most of the memories when it comes to the actual games have been less pleasant. Going into Saturday's

first game against LSU, Martin — who has 1,943 wins and needs 33 more to become the winningest coach in college baseball history — is 20-30 in the CWS. He has only twice led the Seminoles to the finals (1986 and 1999).

In six of their last seven appearances, the Seminoles have dropped the first game and quickly found themselves in the loser's bracket. They have won the first two games in the CWS just twice.

This might be Martin's best team to reverse past trends.

Going into the final week of the regular season, Florida State needed to sweep then-No. 2 Louisville on the road in order to prevent its first losing record in conference play. The Seminoles (45-21) won both games, which started a run where they would win the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament, win four straight in the Tallahassee Regional after dropping the first game and then sweeping Sam Houston State in last weekend's super regional.

Three wins over the past

three weeks have come in the final at-bat.

"I would say up to this point it is one of the most special years that I've had in the 38 years I've made out a lineup," Martin said. "It makes me as one of the coaches feel good because a team believed in themselves. They didn't point fingers or said they couldn't get a break. They said they had to get it done."

Martin's chase of a title will make him the sentimental favorite among fans this week. Jim Costello, who is with the Omaha Kiwanis Club, has known Martin for 37 years and will be the team's host this year.

"I have a lot of friends who are Florida State baseball fans this week because they are hoping his team can win a couple games and be clicking at the right time," Costello said.

There hasn't always been a love affair with Martin from the fans in Omaha. Local fans in the early 1990s booed Florida State often as frustration for its football team beating Nebraska in New Year's Day bowl

games.

That caused Martin in 1994 during a news conference to try and make a peace offering by saying: "This is for all the Nebraska people: Unless we meet on New Year's Night, go Big Red!"

Since the two schools haven't met on the gridiron since 1993, the hostilities are a faded memory.

"I hope they do latch on to us and treat us like a home team. That would be great if they did. I know we are going to be outnumbered by LSU fans the first game," Martin said about how his team might be treated this year.

Florida State is the only team on its side of the bracket that doesn't have a national title — LSU has six, Cal State-Fullerton four and Oregon State two. Junior Taylor Walls is hoping that changes by the end of this tournament.

"There are so many reasons why I would want to win it but it would mean a lot to all the people who played here and what he has done," Walls said.

Cowboys' Elliott wants to build on stellar rookie year

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Ezekiel Elliott plopped a cowboy hat on his head and flashed a wide smile that made him look like someone closing in on a few weeks of vacation.

"Feel like a real cowboy," the star Dallas running back said after the second-to-last offseason practice Wednesday. "Do I look the part?"

He certainly looked the part in what mattered last year: NFL rushing champion as a rookie fourth overall draft pick. Now the question is the encore, and the offseason handling of a known commodity at a position predisposed to short careers.

"We're pushing forward with him," offensive coordinator Scott Linehan said. "We've got to still manage that for him. But certainly we'll want to amp

it up this year as far as his ability to affect the game in the run game and the pass game."

Elliott missed the first week of offseason practices after hitting his head as a passenger in a car accident, the second straight year he was involved in a car wreck during the offseason program.

Still not cleared by the NFL despite authorities dropping a domestic case in Ohio last year, Elliott made headlines again in March when he pulled down a woman's shirt during a St. Patrick's Day parade. As a result, questions about his off-field activities persist.

Running backs coach Gary Brown says he sees a more disciplined Elliott, and the former Ohio State star acknowledged easing up on his nightlife in recent weeks as the team's off-

season program accelerated.

"You learn from your mistakes," Elliott said. "And if you don't, it could be brutal."

When Elliott reports to training camp after a five-week break, he'll be preparing for what figures to be a similar workload after he led the NFL with 322 carries for his league-best 1,631 yards.

Because Elliott is a good blocker and pass-catcher, the Cowboys really don't have a reason to take their All-Pro off the field, except they know they must.

And that's why the question comes up even though Elliott turns just 22 the day the team is scheduled to arrive in California.

"You have to learn how much your body can take," said Elliott, the fifth rookie to lead the

NFL in rushing since the 1970 merger.

"That's really important, so developing a routine, week in, week out, that will keep you fresh, that will keep you from having those nagging injuries."

Quarterback Dak Prescott was the fellow rookie sensation who helped the Cowboys to a 13-3 record and top seed in the NFC before losing to Green Bay in a divisional playoff. The NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year faces the same encore question.

"We're going to get better together," said Prescott, who set rookie records in passer rating (104.9) and completion rate (67.8 percent). "He's kind of my partner in crime. If I need something, he's going to make sure on the field and off the field it happens."