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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US commando slain, 4 wounded in Somalia

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — A U.S. special operations commando was killed and four other servicemembers were injured Friday in Somalia when their patrol was attacked by fighters aligned with the terrorist group al-Shabab, U.S. Africa Command said.

The U.S. forces were on a patrol with Somali and Kenyan troops when they were attacked with mortars and small arms in southern Somalia, AFRICOM said.

A large force of about 800 troops from the Somali and Kenyan defense forces took part in the operation, which was a multi-day mission about 400 miles southwest of Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia.

"The mission's objectives were to clear al-Shabab from contested areas, liberate villages from al-Shabab control, and estab-

lish a permanent combat outpost designed to increase the span of Federal Government of Somalia security and governance," AFRICOM said.

The military did not say how many U.S. troops were part of the operation.

"The U.S. provided advice, assistance and aerial surveillance during the mission," AFRICOM said.

During the past year, U.S. troops in Africa have been exposed to increased risks. In October, four soldiers were killed in an ambush in Niger that raised questions about the military's strategy on the continent.

In May 2017, a Navy SEAL also was killed in Somalia, marking the first combat casualty in the country since the infamous 1993 "Black Hawk Down" incident.

Military officials have acknowledged that none of the terrorist groups in Africa pose a direct threat to the U.S., but they could become one over time. However, crit-

ics of the military's strategy have argued U.S. forces should exercise more caution in Africa where U.S. interests are limited.

AFRICOM is withholding the name of the servicemember killed in action, pending notification of next of kin. The Associated Press reported that the four wounded Americans were in the care of the U.S. Embassy medical team in neighboring Kenya. They were awaiting transportation "for additional medical evaluation," according to an AFRICOM statement cited by AP. In addition to the Americans, one partner soldier was injured in the fighting.

For several years, U.S. special operations troops have been on the front lines in Somalia, advising local troops in a long-running campaign against the al-Qaida-aligned al-Shabab group.

vandiver.john@stripes.com
Twitter: @john_vandiver

DOD fears US losing hypersonic arms race

The Washington Post

China and Russia are surpassing the U.S. in acquiring a technology the Pentagon has tried and failed to develop for years: a maneuverable missile that could fly many times the speed of sound and strike anywhere in the world within an hour or two, senior military officials say.

The prospect of losing this arms race has quietly made the development of the hypersonic missile a top priority at the Pentagon, the officials said, as the U.S. faces rising challenges from superpowers around the world.

In speeches and at Capitol Hill hearings, Michael Griffin, the newly installed undersecretary for research and engineering, bluntly called on the defense establishment and its contractors to move much more quickly or give its adversaries a huge military advantage.

Both Russia and China have rigorous development programs that "are observably ahead of where our current state of practice is," Griffin said earlier this year. "We're playing catch-up ball."

"The United States is not yet doing all

that we need to do to respond to hypersonic missile threats," he said in a recent speech. "I did not take this job to reach parity with adversaries. I want to make them worry about catching up with us again."

The Air Force recently announced it was awarding a contract of almost \$1 billion to Lockheed Martin to design and build a hypersonic vehicle. Boeing has announced it was investing in a British company that makes advanced propulsion systems that could power a hypersonic vehicle.

Like conventional missiles, hypersonics move very fast, at least five times the speed of sound. Because they move so quickly, hypersonic missiles can stay relatively low, avoiding detection. Unlike ballistic missiles, which follow a fixed and therefore predictable trajectory, hypersonic missiles can maneuver, making them difficult to defend against.

"They're lower and they can maneuver, so it's a different kind of threat," said Todd Harrison, a defense analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The Pentagon has been pursuing the technology for more than a decade. As U.S. forces hunted Osama bin Laden after

the 9/11 attacks, military officials decided they needed a weapon that could strike quickly if, say, they received word on his whereabouts, or if intelligence showed that a rogue nation was about to launch a missile attack.

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the Pentagon's research arm, created a program known as Falcon with the goal of developing a hypersonic weapon that would fly into space and be able to carry 1,000 pounds of munitions. But after the test vehicle failed during trials in 2010 and 2011, Pentagon officials largely gave up on the program as Congress pulled funding.

Now, Pentagon officials say they regret not pushing ahead.

"We had a couple of failures, so we kind of stopped and regrouped to look at the overall structure, to make sure we understood the technology — what was working, what was not working," Air Force Gen. John Hyten, the commander of U.S. Strategic Command, told reporters recently. "From my perspective, I'd have liked to have just learned from that mistake and keep going. Don't stop."

Air Force grounds all B-1B bombers for safety probe

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force grounded all B-1B Lancer heavy bombers as of Thursday to conduct a fleetwide safety investigation in the wake of an emergency landing by a Lancer last month.

The Air Force Global Strike Command announced the stand-down of the aircraft on Friday.

On May 1, a B-1B Lancer made an emergency landing following engine failure at the Midland International Air and Space Port between Midland and Odessa, Texas.

Midland International is about 150 miles from Dyess Air Force Base, where the aircraft was based.

The four crewmembers aboard the bomber were not injured, and the aircraft was not carrying munitions.

The stand-down was deemed necessary after safety investigators found problems with ejection-seat components, the Air Force said. "As issues are resolved, aircraft will return to flight," the service branch said.

Taliban announce cease-fire over Eid holiday for 1st time

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Afghan Taliban announced a three-day cease-fire during the Eid al-Fitr holiday at the end of the holy month of Ramadan, a first for the group, following an earlier cease-fire announcement by the government.

A statement released Saturday by the Taliban said they would defend themselves in case of any attack. They said foreign forces are excluded from the cease-fire, and Taliban operations would continue against them.

The statement added that the leadership of the Taliban may also consider releasing prisoners of war if they promise not to return to the battlefield.

Mohammad Haroon Chakhansuri, spokesman for the Afghan president, welcomed the cease-fire announcement during a news conference in Kabul.

"We hope that [the Taliban] will be committed to implementing their announcement of the cease-fire," he said. "The Afghan government will take all steps

needed to make sure that there is no bloodshed in Afghanistan.

"The government of Afghanistan is hopeful that this process will become a long-term process and will result in a sustainable peace," Chakhansuri added.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Thursday announced a weeklong cease-fire with the Taliban to coincide with the holiday.

A statement sent from the president's office on Thursday said the government's cease-fire will begin on 27 Ramadan, or June 12 on the Western calendar, and will last through the Eid al-Fitr holiday until about June 19, adding the cease-fire does not include al-Qaida or Islamic State.

The palace statement referred to a gathering of Afghanistan's top clerics last week in which they issued a decree against suicide attacks and called for peace talks. A suicide bomber struck just outside the gathering as it was dispersing, killing at least seven people and wounding 20 in an attack claimed by ISIS.

Inquiry: Australians committed crimes in Afghanistan

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Elite Australian troops committed "unsanctioned and illegal" violence in Afghanistan with a "disregard for human life," special operations soldiers told a secret military inquiry, an Australian newspaper reported Friday.

Fairfax Media revealed details of the Australian defense department inquiry, including allegations of war crimes, command failures and a lack of accountability from the military chain of command.

A close ally of the U.S., Australia has deployed forces to Afghanistan for nearly 17 years. About 270 troops are now in the country as part of NATO's Resolute Support mission.

The inquiry found problems "deeply embedded in the culture" of Australia's elite task force in Afghanistan and conduct that went "well beyond blowing off steam."

The war crimes allegations prompted a separate inspector general's investigation into special operations activities in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2016, Fairfax reported.

That investigation began in May 2016.

Australian Defense Minister Marise Payne said in a statement posted online Friday that special operations troops operate in a "complex, chaotic and very dangerous environment" but vowed that the allegations were being taken seriously and examined independently of the chain of command. She said the government would respond to the recommendations of the IG investigation.

During the past two weeks, Maj. Gen. Paul Brereton, a judge leading the IG inquiry, questioned more than a dozen elite soldiers, some for up to five hours at a time, Fairfax reported Friday.

"I was blown away by the details he had," one Special Air Service Regiment member told the newspaper.

The inquiry report leaked to Fairfax describes a host of "serious breaches of trust," including wastefulness, loss of weapons, poor workplace safety practices and internal rivalries that led to poor coordination between key special operations units.

One informant disclosed the undermining of training events, such as the joint U.S.-Australian Talisman Saber exercise.

More serious concerns included "allusions" to domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse and allegations of illegal violence on operations.

Specifics about the suspected war crimes weren't disclosed in the media reports, but one special operations "insider" reportedly told investigators there had been "horrendous things" done in the past 15 years.

"Some just disgraceful things happened in Kabul," the insider was quoted as saying. "Very bad news, or just inappropriate behavior, but it was pretty much kept under wraps."

Some troops felt senior leaders within the special operations community and beyond "were compromised by their own participation or complicity" in past abuses, creating a "deep impediment to change," the inquiry found.

Australian media have reported on earlier claims of cover-ups related to Australia's elite troops, including an Australian Broadcasting Corp. report last summer on the suspected killing of an Afghan boy.

China hacks Navy contractor, steals data

The Washington Post

Chinese government hackers have compromised the computers of a Navy contractor, stealing massive amounts of highly sensitive data related to undersea warfare — including secret plans to develop a supersonic anti-ship missile for use on U.S. submarines by 2020, according to American officials.

The breaches occurred in January and February, the officials said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation. The hackers targeted a contractor who works for the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, a military organization headquartered in Newport, R.I., that conducts research and development for submarines and underwater weaponry.

The officials did not identify the contractor.

Taken were 614 gigabytes of material relating to a closely held project known as Sea Dragon, as well as signals and sensor data, submarine radio room information relating to cryptographic systems and the Navy submarine development unit's electronic warfare library.

The Washington Post agreed to withhold certain details about the compromised missile project at the request of the Navy, which argued that their release could harm national security.

The data stolen was of a highly sensitive nature despite being housed on the contractor's unclassified network. The officials said the material, when aggregated, would be considered classified, a fact that raises concerns about the Navy's ability to oversee contractors tasked with developing cutting-edge weapons.

The breach is part of China's long-running effort to blunt the U.S. advantage in military technology and to become the preeminent power in east Asia. The news comes as the Trump administration is seeking to secure Beijing's support in persuading North Korea to give up nuclear weapons, even as tensions persist between the U.S. and China over trade and defense matters.

The Navy is leading the investigation into the breach with the assistance of the FBI, officials said.

Navy spokesman Cmdr. Bill Speaks said, "There are measures in place that require companies to notify the government when a 'cyber incident' has occurred that has actual or potential adverse effects on their networks that contain controlled, unclassified information."

Speaks said, "It would be inappropriate to discuss further details at this time."

Altogether, details on hundreds of mechanical and software systems were compromised — a significant breach in

a critical area of warfare that China has identified as a priority, both for building its own capabilities and for challenging those of the U.S.

"The United States consistently has been able to use highly compartmented security systems to protect its most innovative and dynamic defense advancements, and any time one of those is penetrated, you give up an enormous advantage in surprise," said James Stavridis, dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and a retired admiral who served as supreme allied commander at NATO.

"So if it is true that this was a penetration of one of those very compartmented systems, that is a significant reversal for the United States," he said. Stavridis had no independent knowledge of the breach.

Sea Dragon

The Sea Dragon project is an initiative of a special Pentagon office stood up in 2012 to adapt existing U.S. military technologies to new applications. The Defense Department, citing classification levels, has released little information about Sea Dragon other than to say that it will introduce a "disruptive offensive capability" by "integrating an existing weapon system with an existing Navy platform." The Pentagon has requested or used more than \$300 million for the project since late 2015 and has said it plans to start underwater testing by September.

Military experts fear that China has developed capabilities that could complicate the Navy's ability to defend U.S. allies in Asia in the event of a conflict with China.

The Chinese are investing in a range of platforms, including quieter submarines armed with increasingly sophisticated weapons and new sensors, Adm. Philip Davidson said during his April nomination hearing to lead U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. And what they cannot develop on their own, they steal — often through cyberspace, he said.

"One of the main concerns that we have," he told the Senate Armed Services Committee, "is cyber and penetration of the dot-com networks, exploiting technology from our defense contractors, in some instances."

In February, Director of National Intelligence Daniel Coats testified that most of the detected Chinese cyberoperations against U.S. industry focus on defense contractors or tech firms supporting government networks.

In recent years, the U.S. has been scrambling to develop new weapons or systems that can counter a Chinese naval buildup that has targeted perceived weaknesses in the U.S. fleet. Key to the American advan-

tage in any face-off with China on the high seas in Asia will be its submarine fleet.

"U.S. naval forces are going to have a really hard time operating in that area, except for submarines, because the Chinese don't have a lot of anti-submarine warfare capability," said Bryan Clark, a naval analyst at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. "The idea is that we are going to rely heavily on submarines in the early effort of any conflict with the Chinese."

China has made closing the gap in undersea warfare one of its three top military priorities, and although the U.S. still leads the field, China is making a concerted effort to diminish U.S. superiority.

"So anything that degrades our comparative advantage in undersea warfare is of extreme significance if we ever had to execute our war plans for dealing with China," Stavridis said.

The U.S. military let its anti-ship weaponry languish after the Cold War ended because with the Soviet Union's collapse, the Navy no longer faced a peer competitor on the seas. But the rapid modernization and buildup of the Chinese navy in recent years, as well as Russia's resurgent forces at sea, have prompted the Pentagon to renew heavy investment in technologies to sink enemy warships.

The introduction of a supersonic anti-ship missile on U.S. Navy submarines would make it more difficult for Chinese warships to maneuver. It also would augment a suite of other anti-ship weapons that the U.S. military has been developing in recent years.

Chinese breaches

For years, Chinese government hackers have siphoned information on the U.S. military, underscoring the challenge the Pentagon faces in safeguarding details of its technological advances. Over the years, the Chinese have snatched designs for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter; the advanced Patriot PAC-3 missile system; the Army system for shooting down ballistic missiles known as Terminal High Altitude Area Defense; and the Navy's new littoral combat ship, a small surface vessel designed for near-shore operations, according to previous reports prepared for the Pentagon.

In some cases, suspected Chinese breaches appear to have resulted in copy-cat technologies, such as the drones China has produced that mimic U.S. unmanned aircraft.

The Pentagon's Damage Assessment Management Office has assessed the situation, according to the U.S. officials. The Office of the Secretary of Defense declined to comment.

President makes most defiant threat yet on trade at summit

The Washington Post

QUEBEC CITY — President Donald Trump told foreign leaders at the Group of Seven summit that they must dramatically reduce trade barriers with the United States or they would risk losing access to the world's largest economy, delivering his most defiant trade threat yet to his counterparts from around the globe.

Trump, in a news conference before leaving for Singapore, described private conversations he held over two days with the leaders of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada. He said he pushed them to consider removing every single tariff or trade barrier on American goods, and in return he would do the same. But if steps aren't taken, he said, the penalties would be severe.

"We're the piggy bank that everybody is robbing," Trump

said. "And that ends."

The U.S. leader said his dealings with others leaders were cordial, and he repeatedly blamed past U.S. leaders for the current trade imbalance rather than other nations he said were savvy to take a good deal when they found one.

Trump repeated his view that Russia should be readmitted despite its annexation of Ukraine's Crimea four years ago.

The leaders discussed the question of Russia's inclusion in the group but reached no conclusion, Trump said.

"We didn't do votes or anything, but it has been discussed," he said.

Trump first referred to the Crimean annexation, which led to the G-7 disinviting Russia, only obliquely.

"Something happened a while ago where Russia is no longer in," he said. "I think it

would be good to have Russia back in.

"We're looking for peace in the world. We're not looking to play games," Trump added.

Trump's pitch that world leaders eliminate all tariffs — or else — was his latest attempt to reorder the global trading system, which he says is stacked unfairly against the United States. The two-day summit here was intended to cool tensions between Trump and other world leaders, but as they departed Saturday, it became clear that many are still searching for answers and also searching for ways to deal with the unpredictable U.S. leader.

As for Trump's proposal to eliminate all tariffs, Trump said it wasn't clear how other countries would respond.

"I did suggest it," Trump said. "I guess they are going to go back to the drawing board and check it out."

Trump eases off on federal pot ban

Tribune Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said he likely will support a congressional effort to end the federal ban on marijuana, a major step that would reshape the pot industry and end the threat of a Justice Department crackdown.

Trump's remarks put him sharply at odds with Attorney General Jeff Sessions on the issue. The bill in question, pushed by a bipartisan coalition, would allow states to go forward with legalization unencumbered by threats of federal prosecution.

Sessions, by contrast, has ramped up those threats and has also lobbied Congress to reduce current protections for medical marijuana.

Trump made his comments to a gaggle of reporters Friday morning just before he boarded a helicopter on his way to the G-7 summit in Canada. His remarks came the day after the bipartisan group of lawmakers proposed their measure.

One of the lead sponsors is Sen. Cory Gardner, R-Colo., who is aligned with Trump on several issues but recently has tangled with the administration over the Justice Department's threats to restart prosecutions in states that have legalized marijuana.

"I support Senator Gardner," Trump said when asked about the bill. "I know exactly what he's doing. We're looking at it. But I probably will end up supporting that, yes."

The legislative proposal, which is also championed by Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., would reshape the legal landscape for marijuana if it becomes law.

Nine states, as well as Washington, D.C., have legalized all adult use of marijuana. An additional 20 states permit marijuana for medical use.

Spike in illegal crossings increases population at US detention centers

Associated Press

SEATTLE — President Donald Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration has already led to overrun detention facilities, long lines of asylum seekers camping out at the U.S.-Mexico border and a decision to separate young children from their parents indefinitely.

Now, the administration is sending more than 1,600 immigrants — including some of those parents — to federal prisons amid a lack of space in other jails. The decision brought immediate denunciation from immigrant rights activists who were already enraged over the policy of separating parents from children.

The move comes as an increasing number of families

and children have been coming to the border, further straining an immigration system that's already at capacity. Despite hard-line rhetoric from the White House, more than 50,000 people were apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border in May alone — many of them families and children — and courts, asylum officers and jails are struggling to keep up with the influx.

Historically, immigrants without serious criminal records were released from custody while they pursued asylum or refugee status. The Trump administration has moved to detain more people, including asylum seekers.

Under a new zero tolerance policy, parents who are criminally charged with ille-

gally entering the country are separated from their children while in custody. The children are usually released to another family.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions insists the policy of separating families is necessary to deter illegal border-crossings, and authorities say the decision to send people to prisons is a temporary one amid a shortage of beds.

In a statement Thursday, Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokeswoman Carrissa Cutrell said the agency needed to acquire more than 1,600 beds in Bureau of Prisons facilities. Those include 1,000 beds in Victorville, Calif., and 600 more in the Seattle area, Texas, Oregon and Phoenix.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Class ring returned to owner 42 years later

MS HATTIESBURG — A Mississippi woman lost her high school class ring 42 years ago, and a kind stranger returned it to her recently.

Cherri Fowler told the Hattiesburg American she was 18 when she lost her 1976 Oak Grove High School ring at a Hattiesburg bar called the Library Lounge.

R.T. Thomas, who owned the bar, said he found the ring while cleaning up one night and tossed it into a box, where it remained unclaimed.

Thomas recently rediscovered the box and decided to find the owner of the ring, engraved with the initials "C.A.L."

The only girl with those initials for the Oak Grove Class of '76 was Cherri Ann Linton, now Fowler. He found her through Facebook.

1 killed when tire flies off truck, hits SUV

FL FORTLAUDERDALE — The Florida Highway Patrol said a New York man was killed by a tire that flew off a box truck, bounced over a dividing wall on Interstate 95 and crashed onto the roof of his sports utility vehicle.

The incident happened near Fort Lauderdale on Tuesday evening.

Lt. Alvaro A. Feola told news outlets the truck was heading south when it "lost its left front tire." The SUV was in the northbound lanes.

Feola said Joseu Alfonso Cala, 25, of Tuxedo Park, N.Y., died at the scene. His passenger, Julianna Maria Charles, 24, of Winter Garden, was taken to the hospital. Her injuries weren't considered life-threatening.

College student catches record-breaking bass

WY CODY — A Wyoming record-sized largemouth bass was hooked by a Sheridan College student.

The fish, caught last month in Sheridan County by Caleb Salzman, 18, of Meeteetse, weighed 11.51 pounds and measured 24.5 inches long.

The Cody Enterprise reported that the old state record of 7 pounds, 14 ounces was set in 1992 in the same area. The size of Salzman's largemouth shocked local state Game and Fish folks.

As of the summer of 2016, his fish was large enough to be a state record in 18 other states. The world record is 22 pounds, 4 ounces.

Missing beans turned out to be vanilla theft

MI ROCKFORD — There's a lot of green in vanilla.

A Michigan spice importer said he solved the case of missing vanilla beans by installing a camera at his Rockford warehouse. Authorities have charged an employee, Teresa Collins, with stealing 50-pound boxes of beans worth more than \$100,000.

WOOD-TV reported that Spice Jungle and Beanilla are fast-growing businesses in the Grand Rapids area. Owner Brent Reame said vanilla is one of the most expensive spices in the world.

Reame said he forgives Collins but will be "fighting hard" to be repaid.

Man accused of revenge stabbing death of dog

MO CAPE GIRARDEAU — A southeast Missouri man is

charged with stabbing a dog out of revenge and leaving the slain dog's remains on the owner's doorstep.

KFVS-TV reported that Andrew Nipper, 18, of Cape Girardeau, was charged Wednesday with animal abuse, receiving stolen property and harassment.

The police report says he fatally stabbed the dog, named Pepper, last month. The dog's owner told police that Nipper and her friend had dated. She said she believed the stabbing was in retaliation for calling police after Nipper stalked her friend.

Bond is set at \$25,000.

Pink 'watermelon' snow appearing in mountains

WA SEATTLE — A strange phenomenon is appearing in the mountains of the Pacific Northwest.

KING-TV reported that big, pink ponds are dotting the higher elevations — a result of something called "watermelon snow."

Dr. Robin Kodner, a professor at Western Washington University, said it stems from an algae that turns snow pink at seemingly random times and places.

She said they have a lot of basic questions about the algae.

Stolen rice leads police to mugging suspects

ME LEWISTON — Police in Maine said they were able to track down a suspected mugger because he had rice in the treads of his shoes from stolen Chinese takeout.

A delivery driver for the restaurant said he was called April 9 to deliver in Lewiston,

where he was confronted by three men and attacked for the food. The Sun-Journal reported the suspects then fled with the food.

Police said surveillance video identified that one of the suspects was wearing red sneakers. When confronted by police at his apartment, officers noticed rice stuck to the 23-year-old suspect's shoes and Chinese takeout containers in the trash.

Two of the adult suspects were charged with robbery and theft; the third suspect is a juvenile.

Man bitten by severed head of rattlesnake

TX CORPUS CHRISTI — A South Texas man almost died after he was bitten by the head of a rattlesnake he'd just decapitated.

The incident happened May 27 as Milo and Jennifer Sutcliffe were doing yard work at their home near Lake Corpus Christi. Jennifer Sutcliffe told KIII-TV in Corpus Christi that her husband found a 4-foot rattlesnake, took his shovel and hacked off its head. She said he bent down to pick up the remains to discard them and was bitten by the severed head, injecting a superdose of venom with its dying twitch.

Sutcliffe said she called 911 and began driving her husband the 45 miles to Spohn Memorial Hospital in Corpus Christi.

But she said he began having seizures, losing his vision and bleeding internally, so he was airlifted the rest of the way.

Sutcliffe said her husband needed 26 doses of antivenom, where a normal patient gets two to four doses. He's now in stable condition at Spohn.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Still Golden: Warriors sweep Cavaliers

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — There were still a few seconds left on the clock when the Golden State Warriors stormed off their bench to begin a celebration that wasn't guaranteed.

They couldn't wait any longer.

They had reached their destination: dynasty.

Stephen Curry scored 37 points, Kevin Durant added a triple-double and another NBA Finals MVP trophy and the Warriors won their second straight title and third in four years Friday night, 108-85 over the Cleveland Cavaliers to complete a sweep and perhaps drive LeBron James from his home again to chase championships.

Love 'em or hate 'em, there is no denying them.

"That's how you know we're a great team, is when everybody's coming after us," Durant said. "Whether it's opponents, whether it's different coaches panning for us, whether it's the fans, the media that hate us, it feels good when you're the team that everybody's gunning for. It makes us better."

No team is better.

Golden State. Golden standard.

Overcoming obstacles all season long, the Warriors won their fourth straight Finals matchup against James and Cleveland with ease.

"Looking at this playoff journey, we knew it wasn't going to be as easy as last year," Curry said. "Then the challenges that faced us. In October we wanted to be back in this moment, and a lot went into it. It's a great feeling to be back here."

It was the first sweep in the NBA Finals

since 2007, when James was dismissed by a powerful San Antonio team in his first one. His eighth straight appearance didn't go well, either, and now there's uncertainty where the superstar will play next.

James, who said he "pretty much played the last three games with a broken hand" after injuring himself in frustration following Game 1, finished with 23 points and spent the final minutes on the bench, contemplating what went wrong and maybe his next move.

Following the game, he sat quietly in his corner locker with a towel draped over his head. He arrived at his postgame news conference with a large black brace on his right hand and explained the injury was "self-inflicted" following an overtime loss in Game 1, which included a reversed official's call and teammate J.R. Smith dribbling out the clock to end regulation.

"I had emotions of you just don't get an opportunity like this on the road versus Golden State to be able to get a Game 1, and I let the emotions get the best of me," James said. "Pretty much played the last three games with a broken hand, so that's what it is."

Act IV between the Warriors and Cavs featured a drama-filled Game 1. But from there on, Durant, Curry, Thompson, Draymond Green and the rest of this California crew showed why they're the game's gold standard.

And they may stay that way.

Not wanting to give the Cavs or their fans any hope despite the fact that no team has ever overcome a 3-0 deficit in the NBA playoffs, the Warriors built a nine-point halftime lead when Curry ignored a close-out by James and dropped a three-pointer.

Then the league's best team tightened the screws on Cleveland in the third quarter, outscoring the Cavs 25-13 and prompting Golden State fans to begin those drawn-out "War-eee-orrrs" chants that provide a perfect musical accompaniment to their three-point barrages.

By the start of the fourth, the only question was whether Curry would win his first NBA Finals MVP or if it would go to Durant for the second year in a row.

And again, it was Durant, who added 12 rebounds and 10 assists — more satisfaction and validation for a player who couldn't beat the Warriors so he joined them.

After surviving a rougher-than-usual regular season and beating top-seeded Houston in Game 7 on the road in the West finals, the Warriors pushed aside James and joined an elite group of teams to win multiple championships in a four-year span.

Only Bill Russell's Boston Celtics, the "Showtime" Lakers and the Los Angeles squad led by Kobe and Shaq, and Michael Jordan's Chicago Bulls have been as dominant in such a short period of time.

The Dub Dynasty.

The path to this title was more precarious than the first two for coach Steve Kerr and the Warriors, who overcame injuries, expectations, a built-to-dethrone-them Rockets team and the brilliance of James, who may have played his final game in Cleveland.

The 33-year-old, who came back to the Cavs and ended the city's 52-year championship drought in 2016, is expected to opt out of his \$35.6 million contract and become a free agent.

Halep defeats Stephens to claim first major

Associated Press

PARIS — Simona Halep kept telling everybody who would listen: She was a different player. She was stronger mentally. She wanted so much to finally win a Grand Slam title and was sure that, one day, she would.

After three losses in major finals, maybe Halep was trying to convince herself as much as anyone else she actually could do it. Either way, she was right.

Halep added Grand Slam trophy No. 1 to her No. 1 ranking, coming back from a set and a break down to beat Sloane

Stephens 3-6, 6-4, 6-1 Saturday and win the French Open championship in a match made up of lengthy points and key momentum swings.

"When I was down a break in the second set," Halep told the crowd afterward, "I thought, 'Everything is gone. I'm going to start to relax and enjoy the match.'"

The 26-year-old Halep began the muggy afternoon having been to this stage before but never able to display her best. She lost in two previous appearances in a final at Roland Garros, against Maria Sharapova

in 2014 and Jelena Ostapenko in 2017. Halep then fell to 0-3 with a trophy on the line at the Australian Open in January, beaten by Caroline Wozniacki.

"I just tried not to repeat the same as last year," Halep said. "I did everything I could."

And when Saturday's fourth chance arrived, Halep began slowly, unable to solve Stephens, the 10th-seeded American who won her first Grand Slam title at last year's U.S. Open.

And then, suddenly, everything changed. Stephens started missing. A double-fault here.

A forehand into the net there. A backhand wide. Another long. The player who was up a set and 3-0 in the second in last year's final at the clay-court Grand Slam tournament was now the one able to dismiss a deficit.

"Not the trophy I wanted," Stephens said, looking at her runner-up plate, "but it's still beautiful."

Halep became the first woman from Romania to claim a Grand Slam title since her current manager, Virginia Ruzici, won the French Open 40 years ago.

Keeping Trotz is top priority for Caps

Associated Press

DULLES, Va. — Barry Trotz thought of mentors and friends Jack Button, Tommy Ebright, David Poile and Wayne Fleming when he lifted the Stanley Cup over his head.

The Washington coach didn't think about his future, the same approach he has taken all season and playoffs.

"I wasn't getting consumed with what was said, what my future holds, whatever," Trotz said. "I'm in a pretty good spot."

Trotz was in as good a spot as imaginable Friday as he and the Capitals landed back home in the Washington area with the Stanley Cup in tow. The celebration will last through the parade Tuesday, but once that's done, the work begins for Brian MacLellan to try to re-sign Trotz, top defenseman John Carlson and other free agents.

After not extending Trotz's contract last summer, ownership and general manager Brian MacLellan now hope to keep him around. MacLellan said after winning the Cup that

Trotz will be back if he wants to be.

Trotz and Carlson, who set a franchise record for playoff points by a defenseman, can be free agents July 1 along with unlikely postseason hero Devante Smith-Pelly, trade-deadline acquisition Michal Kempny and longtime glue guy Jay Beagle. Washington will have to do some salary-cap maneuvering to keep Carlson, Smith-Pelly and Kempny in the fold but can break the bank for Trotz.

Following a roller-coaster, lame-duck season with presumed coach-in-waiting Todd Reirden still on staff, Trotz was asked if he saw a future for himself with the Capitals. He said: "Oh, absolutely. Absolutely."

"I love what I do in Washington," Trotz said. "I love the guys. I'm just in a good spot, a good place."

Offseason priority No. 1 for owner Ted Leonsis and MacLellan is signing Trotz to a new deal — if he wants to stay.

It'll cost them.

Toronto's Mike Babcock is the highest-paid coach in the

NHL at \$6.25 million a year, Chicago's Joel Quenneville is next at \$6 million and Montreal's Claude Julien third at \$5 million. Trotz will soon have his name on the Stanley Cup like them and should approach that price.

Carlson will exceed it after leading all defensemen with 68 points in the regular season and then 20 in the playoffs. The 28-year-old right-shot defenseman trails only elite New York Islanders center John Tavares in free-agent interest and is likely to command \$8 million-plus on a long-term deal after how well he played this season.

"Typically a big dog on the back end takes most of the responsibility. John's definitely one of the big dogs," said Capitals winger T.J. Oshie, who just completed the first season of a \$46 million, eight-year deal. "But it seems like that's shared a little bit with (Matt) Niskanen and (Dmitry) Orlov being able to play against other teams' top lines as well. We've got a 1, 1A and 1B, I think. We're sitting pretty good back there."

The Capitals would be sitting

pretty if the salary cap goes up to as high as \$82 million because it gives them more room to keep the top four of Carlson, Orlov, Niskanen and Kempny together. If it stays closer to this year's \$75 million, they could have trouble keeping this championship roster together.

Smith-Pelly will no doubt earn a raise from the \$650,000 league-minimum deal he signed last summer after matching his regular-season goal output with seven goals in the playoffs. Kempny will also cost more than \$900,000 — a bargain salary that allowed the cap-strapped Capitals to afford to add him at the deadline.

Even if Trotz is back and Carlson signs an eight-year deal, changes of course will happen.

Coming off goaltender Braden Holtby's resurgence to help lead the Capitals to the Cup, backup Philipp Grubauer will likely be traded to a team that wants to give him the chance to start. If Trotz stays, Reirden would likely be allowed to pursue a head or associate coaching job elsewhere.

Solo trying to sway vote against US World Cup bid

Associated Press

LONDON — A World Cup winner and Olympic champion with the U.S., Hope Solo now wants her country to lose one of its biggest soccer contests: FIFA's vote on the 2026 World Cup host.

"I can't say it should be awarded to Morocco," Solo told The Associated Press. "But I don't think it should go to the United States, and that's hard to say."

By choosing to actively campaign against the U.S.-led North America bid, Solo risks alienating herself further from the soccer community in her homeland.

The bid leadership was exasperated when informed Solo was undermining their efforts heading into Wednesday's vote,

dismissing her criticism of the governance of soccer but declining to go on the record in detail.

This is not an isolated eruption against U.S. Soccer. Solo has reason to be disgruntled. After 202 international appearances — a record for an American goalkeeper — Solo was fired over an outburst at the 2016 Olympics against the opposition and a series of off-the-field controversies.

In an attempt to take control of the organization that ostracized her, Solo ran for the U.S. Soccer Federation (USSF) presidency in February. There was a resounding verdict: Solo garnered only 1.4 percent of the vote to finish last out of five candidates.

Solo still wants to be heard to try to secure equal pay and

equal treatment for the U.S. women's team, and force Major League Soccer to open up the closed competition. Her gripes provide a counterpoint to the loyal championing of the American World Cup bid by David Beckham in a video released by MLS, where the former England captain is launching a team in Miami. That is only possible because Beckham secured a cut-price deal for an expansion franchise as part of his contract to play for the Los Angeles Galaxy.

"That is not helping the sport in America," Solo said. "I want to see promotion-relegation in the NASL and the MLS. Right now it's true, you have rich ownership groups owning MLS teams and they're only getting richer and they're alienating everybody else."

"A new ownership group can't just come in and purchase a team even though they have the financial security, even though they have the commitment. It's controlled by those single individuals at Soccer United Marketing, MLS in particular, (Commissioner) Don Garber."

FIFA's statutes enshrine the principle of a system of promotion and relegation in domestic competitions to ensure participation "shall depend principally on sporting merit." The regulations then say that qualification can be subject to other criteria including "financial considerations."

MLS stridently defended itself against Solo's criticism, saying team owners have invested more than \$3 billion in stadium and training facilities.

Cards beat Reds for 12th straight time

Associated Press

CINCINNATI—A downpour in the bottom of the ninth delayed the finish. When the skies cleared, closer Bud Norris blew a two-run lead that sent it to an extra inning.

No matter. The St. Louis Cardinals always find a way to beat the Cincinnati Reds.

Jose Martinez homered twice off Matt Harvey, and Jedd Gyorko singled home the tie-breaking run in the 10th inning Friday night as the Cardinals rallied to a 7-6 victory, their 12th in a row over the Reds.

“We’ve got to take care of whatever situation we’re in right now,” Martinez said.

They’re taking care of the Reds, whom they haven’t dominated so completely since the Great Depression. They also

beat them 12 straight from 1931-32. St. Louis has won its last 10 games at Great American Ball Park.

They overcame a downpour to pull this one out.

Norris (3-1) was warming up to pitch the ninth when heavy rain prompted a 36-minute delay. Norris then gave up four hits, including RBI singles by Joey Votto and Jesse Winker, for his second blown save in 14 chances.

Gyorko’s RBI single off Raisel Iglesias (1-1) decided a game that included bursts of rain from the first inning on. John Brebbia gave up a double and an intentional walk before fanning Brandon Dixon for his second save.

It was the second day in a row that Cincinnati tied it in the ninth. On Thursday, Wink-

er’s two-run homer in the 13th sent the Reds to a 7-5 win over the Rockies.

“Sure, right now you feel bad, but I feel like if we can keep grinding like we have been, we can carry this into some kind of streak,” said Scott Schebler, who had a career-high four hits.

Martinez had a solo shot off Harvey in the first inning and a three-run homer in the third that made it 5-1. His first multihomer game of the season left him 11-for-22 during a six-game hitting streak.

“He’s special when he’s right and feels good,” manager Mike Matheny said. “You can tell he’s in a good place.”

Harvey is 1-2 in six starts for Cincinnati, which got him in a trade with the Mets on May 8. He also allowed Yairo Munoz’s

solo homer, the fifth time in his career that he’s given up three in a game.

In his last three starts, Harvey allowed 14 earned runs and five homers in 16 1/3 innings.

Luke Weaver struggled with his control while pitching into the sixth inning. He gave up four runs and walked five, including Winker with the bases loaded.

Honoring Red

The Reds held a moment of silence pregame for Cardinals Hall of Famer Red Schoendienst, who died Wednesday at age 95.

“Just an icon in St. Louis,” Matheny said. “He set a real high standard for what it looks like to go about your business and wear this uniform well.”

MLB roundup

Gardner helps Yankees win opener of Subway Series

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Brett Gardner hit a tiebreaking, two-run homer off Jacob deGrom on an eighth-inning changeup, and the New York Yankees beat the reeling Mets 4-1 Friday night in the Subway Series opener after losing Masahiro Tanaka to hamstring problems when the pitcher sprinted home to score his first major league run.

Tanaka allowed one hit, a home run into the second deck in right by Brandon Nimmo on his second pitch. The 29-year-old right-hander scored standing up on Aaron Judge’s sacrifice fly, then was replaced before the bottom of the sixth. The Yankees said Tanaka had tightness in both hamstrings, and the team expects to know more Saturday.

Gardner’s home run, his fifth this season and fourth in his last 21 games, went just over the wall in right-center and followed Gleyber Torres’ second single off deGrom (4-1). Giancarlo Stanton added a

ninth-inning homer off Paul Sewald, his 22nd at Citi Field — the most among visiting players.

Jonathan Holder, Chad Green (4-0) and Dellin Betances each pitched an inning, and Aroldis Chapman finished the four-hitter for his 16th save in 17 chances.

Giants 9, Nationals 5: Washington pitcher Stephen Strasburg exited after two innings because of tightness in his right shoulder, and visiting San Francisco had eight extra-base hits.

Strasburg (6-6) gave up three runs and five hits. He was scheduled for an MRI on Saturday.

Indians 4, Tigers 1: Jason Kipnis hit a tiebreaking, three-run homer in the ninth inning to lead Cleveland past host Detroit.

Cubs 3, Pirates 1: Kris Bryant had three hits and scored a run while batting leadoff for the first time in his career, Ian Happ made a spectacular div-

ing catch near the left-field corner to end the game and surging Chicago beat visiting Pittsburgh.

White Sox 1, Red Sox 0: Trayce Thompson had an RBI single in the seventh inning off Chris Sale, Dylan Covey pitched six innings as part of a three-hitter and Chicago beat host Boston.

Blue Jays 5, Orioles 1: J.A. Happ allowed two hits in seven innings to earn his 100th career victory as Toronto beat visiting Baltimore to win consecutive games for the first time in more than a month.

Mariners 4, Rays 3: Marco Gonzales won his fourth straight start and Seattle beat host Tampa Bay for the team’s 16th win in 20 games.

Brewers 12, Phillies: Ryan Braun homered twice and drove in five runs, and visiting Milwaukee busted out of an offensive funk to beat Philadelphia and snap a three-game losing streak.

Marlins 4, Padres 0: Caleb

Smith pitched into the sixth inning and had an RBI single for his first career hit to help host Miami beat San Diego.

Diamondbacks 9, Rockies 4: Paul Goldschmidt continued his sizzling June with two long home runs and a double, leading visiting Arizona over Colorado.

Angels 4, Twins 2: Ian Kinsler hit a two-run homer in the seventh inning and Justin Upton went deep in the eighth, powering Los Angeles past host Minnesota.

Dodgers 7, Braves 3: Walker Buehler dominated before being pulled with rib soreness, and host Los Angeles overcame another blow to their injury-depleted pitching staff by hitting five home runs.

Athletics 7, Royals 2: Frankie Montas pitched shut-out ball into the eighth inning to win his third straight start since being called up from the minors and Khris Davis homered twice to lead host Oakland.