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Marines return to Iwo Jima for tribute

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

IWO TO, Japan — One by one, they descended the steep incline, past the beach grass and lush vegetation that whispered in a melancholy wind. Past the destroyed pill box and rusted machine gun that still peered toward the black sand beach as it did when it fired on their fellow Marines 70 years earlier.

As they hit the volcanic powder below, they sunk up to their ankles, surrounded by rusty shrapnel from devastating Japanese mortar fire. Some faltered, their bodies stiff with age, but they were immediately propped up by the latest generation of Marines.

Nothing was going to keep them from once again hitting the beach. Nothing would keep them from honoring their fallen comrades, perhaps for the last time.

Though it seemed as if eons had passed, the battle for Iwo Jima came alive in their minds.

On Saturday, a couple of dozen survivors of the fight returned to the battlefield for a ceremony marking its 70th anniversary. Many of the attendees, now in their late 80s and early 90s, said it would be their last journey back to the “sulfur island,” now referred to as Iwo To by the Japanese, who maintain the small scrap of land between the Mariana Islands and the Japanese mainland as a military base.

“When I saw ... the carnage on that beach, and everything just torn to hell all over the place, this is when I went from boyhood to manhood,” said Norman Baker, who was 18 when he hit Red Beach 2 with the 4th Marine Division on Feb. 19, 1945.

“I’m happy to be here with the guys and what have you,” he

said, “but I can contemplate the horror of what we went through in the war and everything, and that will never leave guys like me.”

Baker recounted the pain of losing his best friend, Lincoln Clement Jr., to an exploding shell as they moved inland during the invasion. He held vigil and ate his rations next to Clement’s body until he was evacuated. His friend’s death contributed to lifelong nightmares.

“[Lincoln] was like a brother, a dedicated brother,” Baker said. “We did everything together. We got so close it was more than family. I was never that close with my brothers or sisters than I was with Linc. And that’s why I have never forgotten him, never will. I have his pictures hanging in my library.”

Baker also recalled witnessing the artillery barrage that led to the death of Lt. Col. Chandler Johnson, who ordered the flag-raising on Mount Suribachi that was captured in an iconic photo by The Associated Press’ Joe Rosenthal.

Last week’s trip was equally hard on Hershel “Woody” Williams, the last living Medal of Honor recipient from the battle.

“My emotions are like a tornado,” Williams said — his medal around his neck and great-grandson Benjamin Casey in his arms — as he surveyed the landscape he attacked with the 3rd Marine Division. “They go up, and then something happens, and they go down. So they’ve been roller-coastering all day.”

Williams was honored for clearing a series of Japanese pill boxes with a flamethrower under heavy fire, then refusing evacuation despite shrapnel wounds.

“I never planned to come back,” he said. “I never would

have if it hadn’t been for grandsons and great-grandsons that talked me into it. But now I’m glad I did, certainly for my sake. It has maybe helped a little in closure.”

Williams said it was also important to impart the knowledge and experience to the next generation, so the sacrifices of more than 6,800 U.S. service-members killed and 19,000 wounded will not be forgotten. On the Japanese side, approximately 18,000 were killed.

After months of aerial and naval bombardment, the battle for Iwo Jima began on Feb. 19, 1945, with the Marines launching an amphibious assault and the Japanese waiting in bunkers dug deep into the volcanic rock.

Some 70,000 Marines took part in the 36-day battle. Only 216 Japanese soldiers were captured. The rest were killed. The island was declared secure on March 16.

The anniversary commemoration started under an intense sun as several hundred American and Japanese civilians, veterans and government officials arrived on military and commercial flights. They were bused out to the “Reunion of Honor,” a solitary obelisk monument that overlooks the beach and is surrounded by stones.

Bands from the III Marine Expeditionary Force and Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force played, and the flags of both nations were displayed as a misty rain fell. Then a steady stream of speakers reflected on the battle and what it meant to humanity and themselves.

“I keep in my mind that the peace and prosperity we enjoy now were built upon the many noble sacrifices of the war dead,” said Japanese House of Representatives member Yoshitaka Shindo, whose grandfather, Gen. Tadamichi Kuribayashi, was garrison

commander of Iwo Jima during the battle. “And I would also like to renew my resolve to make further efforts for the peace and stability of the world through cooperation between Japan and the United States, who now form a firm alliance.”

Japanese Minister of Defense Gen. Nakatani, U.S. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus and Marine Corps commandant Gen. Joseph Dunford Jr. also spoke.

“Today, the United States and Japan are interdependent,” Mabus said. “Through cooperation in everything from international security to free trade, we depend on one another so that each nation may live in peace and prosperity.

“As partners, we will face the challenges of the future together, but we will never forget the lessons of our past. In trying times, we will invoke the character traits demonstrated here by Japanese soldiers and United States sailors and Marines: honor, courage and sacrifice.”

The speeches were followed by wreath-layings, 30 seconds of silence and a volley of rifle fire.

While the colors were retired, many current Marines mingled and traded stories with the old breed.

“If we had never put Old Glory on Mount Suribachi, it would have been just another campaign. But the fact that we put it up on enemy territory, the flag is what energized everything that took place. Our morale was dragging, we had lost so many guys.”

Williams’ eyes then twinkled, and a smile slowly formed on his face. “When that flag went up on the 23rd (of February), we got a new spirit. We are going to win this thing! I can still see it, absolutely.”

burke.matt@stripes.com

Army to send Fort Hood MLRS troops to S. Korea

BY JON HARPER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Army is set to deploy another field artillery battalion to South Korea, the Pentagon announced Friday.

Secretary of Defense Ash Carter on Thursday approved the rotational deployment of a multiple launch rocket system, or MLRS, battalion to the Korean peninsula, where tensions remain high.

Approximately 400 soldiers from the 2nd Battalion, 20th Field Artillery, based at Fort Hood, Texas, will deploy to Camp Casey in June, Pentagon spokesman Col. Steve Warren told reporters. The unit will join the 210th Field Artillery Brigade, which is based there.

"The battalion will arrive fully manned, trained, equipped and at the highest levels of readiness," Warren

said, adding that the force will "increase theater readiness and maneuver capabilities."

When the 2nd Battalion's nine-month deployment ends next year, the troops will leave their equipment in place for follow-on rotations, Warren said.

North Korea has a massive artillery arsenal within striking distance of Seoul. The MLRS is designed to counter such threats.

"Its main function, and what it's very good at doing, is counter-battery fire," Army spokesman Lt. Col. Don Peters said. "When somebody launches artillery at you, MLRS goes in and fires back."

The deployment of an additional battalion is not due to a new threat assessment, according to defense officials.

harper.jon@stripes.com
Twitter: @JHarperStripes

Units finish training to deploy to Afghanistan

BY JENNIFER HLAD
Stars and Stripes

JOINT BASE LEWIS-MCCHORD, Wash. — Just days before President Barack Obama's expected announcement to slow the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, a team of soldiers was wrapping up a training exercise in preparation for a yearlong deployment to Kandahar.

Troops from the 7th Infantry Division and the 10th Mountain Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team have formed a "mission command node" — a kind of ad hoc headquarters that will deploy to Kandahar Air Field later this spring to advise Afghan security forces.

It will be the first combat deployment for troops wearing the 7th Infantry Division patch in more than 25 years; the unit had been deactivated but was reactivated in 2012 as a nondeployable unit. At that time, Joint Base Lewis-McChord had nine brigades and a corps headquarters, with no intermediate two-

star command for day-to-day administration and management of those brigades — and the corps headquarters was deployed, said Maj. Gen. Terry Ferrell, commander of 7th Infantry Division. A smaller-than-normal division headquarters was formed, in part to help prepare the brigades to deploy under different headquarters groups.

But in 2013, unit leaders were asked what it would take to get the troops ready to deploy.

Ferrell said they would need some additional training and equipment, but they were capable. And so, in December, the Army announced that the unit would go to Afghanistan for a year.

The 2nd Brigade Combat Team soldiers, on the other hand, had known since the middle of last year that they would be going to Afghanistan, but they didn't know any specifics until December, said Col. Dave Doyle, 2nd BCT commander.

hlad.jennifer@stripes.com
Twitter: @jhlad

CIA chief: Iranian general 'destabilizing' Iraq efforts

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Having the leader of Iran's elite Quds Force direct Iraqi forces battling the Islamic State group is complicating the U.S. mission against terrorism and is contributing to the destabilization in Iraq, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency said Sunday.

The comments by John Brennan on "Fox News Sunday" are among the strongest yet voiced by American officials about the involvement of shadowy Gen. Qassem Soleimani in the war against the extremist group.

Brennan described Soleimani as being "very aggressive and active" as he advises Shiite militias battling the extremists, most recently in the ongoing offensive targeting Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's hometown.

Nonetheless, Brennan said

he "wouldn't consider Iran an ally right now inside Iraq."

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey, testifying at a congressional hearing last week, said the U.S. worries that Shiite militiamen eventually might turn against Sunni and Kurdish Iraqis, further destabilizing the country.

Brennan said he didn't believe the presence of Soleimani and his advisers pointed to Iran having a larger role in Iraq and its future. However, he said it's not for lack of trying. Baghdad's Shiite-led government has forged closer ties with Iran, its onetime adversary in a bitter 1980s war.

"We're not letting them play that role. I think they're working with the Iraqis to play that role," the CIA head said. "We're working with the Iraqis, as well."

Cash-strapped Americans turning to refund advances

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Cash-strapped Americans anxious for tax refunds are increasingly turning to payment advances, prepaid cards or other costly services when getting tax preparation help, according to new federal data raising concerns among regulators about whether consumers are fully informed about the fees.

Regulators are looking to increase oversight of preparers amid the rise in "refund anticipation checks," a type of cash advance especially popular among low-income families who receive the Earned Income Tax Credit, the government's

\$65 billion cash benefit program. The advances are being marketed as a way to get fast refunds or to defer payment of tax preparation costs.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau says some consumers have complaints about refund anticipation checks centered on advertising, quality of service or fees.

Refund anticipation checks rose to roughly 21.6 million in 2014, up 17 percent from 2011, according to IRS data provided to The Associated Press. About half the purchasers are EITC recipients; roughly 84 percent are low-income, according to the data.

East regional

NC State stuns No. 1 Villanova

The Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The rims seemed tight. So did Villanova.

The Wildcats missed so many shots — gimme layups, uncontested jumpers, airballed threes — that it was no surprise the first thing to fall was their Final Four target.

No wonder it came to this: The 'Cats were the first to go from a top seed to No. 1-and-done.

North Carolina State, a program that authored one of the early chapters on March shockers, can add another stunner to the list: The Wolfpack are back in the Sweet 16.

"We came out today with the feeling that everybody expected us to lose to a one seed," said forward BeeJay Anya, "but we

believe in ourselves and that we're good enough to beat anybody in the country and we went down and did it."

N.C. State attacked one of the top teams in the nation for 40 minutes, playing with a chest-thumping swagger en route to a stunning 71-68 victory over Villanova on Saturday night.

N.C. State guards Cat Barber and Desmond Lee shared a long embrace after the buzzer as their teammates danced around the court in celebration.

Barber turned to Lee, pounded his chest and yelled, "all heart!"

No, this wasn't quite as meaningful as Jim Valvano's mad dash looking for somebody — anybody — to hug after the Wolfpack won the 1983 national championship. But the Wolfpack (22-13) have designs on their own big March run and will move on to

Syracuse, New York to play the winner of the Louisville-Northern Iowa game.

Lacey led them with 17 points, Barber had 13 and Malik-Adbul Abu had 13 points, 12 rebounds and absolutely destroyed the Wildcats inside.

The Wildcats (33-3) saw a 16-game winning streak end and have not reached the second weekend since 2009.

The Wildcats come up empty after storming their way to pair of Big East titles and a 41-point victory in the NCAA Tournament opener.

"I know we have to answer to the fact that we did not get to the second weekend again," coach Jay Wright said. "We have to own that. But it's not going to define us within our program. It's going to define us outside of our program and we accept that."

South regional

No. 5 Utah gets past Georgetown

The Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Brandon Taylor envisioned Utah finding success in this season's NCAA Tournament. He just didn't know how good it would feel.

Taylor scored 14 points and Delon Wright added 12 and the fifth-seeded Utes beat No. 4 Georgetown 75-64 on Saturday night to earn the team's first Sweet 16 berth in a decade.

Utah (26-8) will travel to Houston to play the winner of Sunday's game in Charlotte, N.C., between top-seeded Duke (30-4) and No. 8 San Diego State (27-8).

"I knew we were due at the beginning of the season, I just didn't know how the feeling would be. I saw it: We have the personnel, we put the work in during the summer," Taylor said. "But I just didn't imagine what the feeling would be like. To experience it now, I'm lost for words."

The Utes haven't advanced to the Sweet 16 since 2005, when they fell as the No. 6 seed to No. 2 Kentucky. The team is making its first tournament appearance since 2009.

L.J. Peak led Georgetown (22-11) with 18 points.

"I'm disappointed, but I still have my head high," said Georgetown's Jabril Trawick, who had 10 points. "Surprisingly, I didn't cry or anything. I had a great time. It's been a great experience. The group they have coming back is going to be a special team."

No. 11 UCLA 92, No. 14 UAB 75: A week after anxiously waiting and praying for an at-large berth, the Bruins certainly have done their best to quiet their doubters.

They were the first team to advance to a regional semifinal.

Tony Parker led five Bruins in double figures with a career-high 28 points and grabbed 12 rebounds.

"The selection committee thought we were good enough to play in this tournament, and I think we proved it," Parker said.

Many thought the Bruins shouldn't have even been in the field of 68 after scoring only seven points in a half against Kentucky in December and an inability to win consecutive games away from home all season.

Now they have won two straight in Louisville — and six of their last seven — to earn their first consecutive Sweet 16 berths since reaching the Final Four three straight seasons between 2006 and 2008. They will play either Gonzaga or Iowa on Friday in the South Regional semifinal in Houston.

"There's no better time to do that than March," UCLA coach Steve Alford said.

The Bruins dominated inside and shot the ball as well as they have all season. Kevon Looney had 10 points and 11 rebounds for UCLA. Bryce Alford had 22 points, Norman Powell 15 and Isaac Hamilton 13.

With the Blazers worried first about Alford, who hit 9 of 11 from three to beat SMU in the last game, Parker had room to roam helping UCLA rebound UAB 41-26 with a 52-22 scoring edge in the paint.

Midwest regional

Emotional Irish edge out Bulldogs

The Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Notre Dame coach Mike Brey's calls to his mother Betty during the season focused little on her son's well-being and more on the state of his team.

"Very rarely did I get 'Hey, Mike, how you doing?'" Brey said. "It's like 'Have you got them ready? Are they ready? I think we can beat Duke, Mike.' It's unbelievable. She was intense."

It came with the territory for Betty Brey Mullen, an Olympic swimmer who briefly held a butterfly world record and instilled in her three children the tenacity they carry with them. Brey relied on it heav-

ily on Saturday night, guiding the Irish to a thrilling 67-64 win over in-state rival Butler in the NCAA tournament and a spot in the Sweet 16.

Brey took the floor just hours after Betty died in Florida at age 84 following a heart attack.

"It was kind of a tribute to her," Brey said. "It was really a special night."

One that ended with the surging Irish (31-5) in the regional semifinals for the first time since 2003.

Jerian Grant scored 16 points for Notre Dame, including the clinching layup with 18 seconds left to put an abrupt end to Butler's latest NCAA tournament run.

No. 1 Kentucky 64, No. 8 Cincinnati 51: At Louisville, Ky., nothing came easy for top-ranked Kentucky against Cincinnati, which mixed it up with the Wildcats on almost every play.

They didn't flinch and eventually built a double-digit lead by physically imposing their will on the Bearcats. Kentucky's reward was college basketball's first 36-0 start and a return visit to the Sweet 16 in its quest to become the first unbeaten champion since Indiana in 1976.

Aaron Harrison scored 13 points, Trey Lyles added 11 with 11 rebounds as the Wildcats outworked Cincinnati.

West regional

No. 2 Arizona holds off Ohio State

The Associated Press

PORTLAND, Oregon — Gabe York made five three-pointers and finished with 19 points and T.J. McConnell also scored 19 points as second-seeded Arizona advanced to the Sweet 16 for the third straight year with a 73-58 win over Ohio State.

The Wildcats (33-3) overcame a sluggish start until their outside shooting busted the Buckeyes' zone defense, which they rarely used during the regular season but broke out for the NCAA tournament. The Pac-12 champions went ahead by 15 points with 6:34 remaining and held off 10th-seeded Ohio State (24-11) in the clos-

ing minutes.

Sam Thompson scored 18 points and Shannon Scott had 10 for the Buckeyes, who led by six points in the first half but never could match Arizona's size.

No. 6 Xavier 75, Georgia State 67: At Jacksonville, Fla., Jalen Reynolds and Myles Davis came off the bench for a combined 38 points as Xavier ended the biggest feel-good story of the NCAA tournament with a victory over Georgia State on Saturday night.

The Musketeers (23-13) advanced to the Sweet 16 for the third time in six years under coach Chris Mack. They'll face No. 2 seed Arizona on Thursday in Los Angeles.

No. 14 seed Georgia State (25-10), whose injured coach Ron Hunter worked the sideline in a rolling chair, upset No. 3 seed Baylor on Thursday. Hunter, who tore his Achilles tendon celebrating his team winning the Sun Belt Conference title, and his son and star player, RJ, became the darlings of the tournament.

No. 4 North Carolina 87, No. 5 Arkansas 76: At Jacksonville, Fla., Marcus Paige scored 22 points, including 20 in the second half, as North Carolina beat Arkansas and advanced to the Sweet 16 for the first time in three years.

Michael Qualls led Arkansas with 27 points and 10 rebounds.



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Green lifts Grizzlies

The Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tennessee — Jeff Green had 23 points and Mike Conley scored 21 with nine assists to lead the Memphis Grizzlies to a 97-86 victory over the struggling Portland Trail Blazers on Saturday night.

Zach Randolph added 17 points for Memphis, which won its second straight. Marc Gasol had 13 points, and Tony Allen finished with 10 points and 11 rebounds.

Damian Lillard led the Trail Blazers with 27 points and seven assists. LaMarcus Aldridge had 16 points, but didn't play in the second half because of an injury to his left hand. C.J. McCollum finished with 13 points, and Dorell Wright scored 10.

The Trail Blazers also played the second half without starting forward Nicolas Batum, sidelined with lower back pain. The team said X-rays on Aldridge's hand were negative.

Suns 117, Rockets 102: Eric Bledsoe had a career-high 34 points and visiting Phoenix withstood a fourth-quarter charge by Houston.

Bledsoe scored 23 by halftime and surpassed his previous career best of 33 points, set earlier this season, on a free throw with about a minute remaining.

Nets 123, Pacers 111: Brook Lopez had 26 points and four blocked shots to lead Brooklyn over slumping host Indiana.

Bojan Bogdanovic added 21 points and five rebounds off the bench.

George Hill had 18 points and nine assists for the Pacers (30-39), who lost their fifth straight.

Pistons 107, Bulls 91: Reggie Jackson had 22 points, including 17 in the third quarter as Detroit came back from a 19-point deficit to beat visiting Chicago.

The Pistons trailed 72-53 with 7 minutes left in the third quarter, but got a combined 27 points and 13 assists from Jackson and fellow point guard Spencer Dinwiddie in the second half.

Warriors 106, Jazz 91: Stephen Curry bounced back from his worst shooting performance of the season to score 24 points, and Leandro Barbosa added a season-high 19 off the bench as Golden State pulled away late to beat visiting Utah.

Former MVP Nash retiring

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles Lakers guard Steve Nash announced his retirement after a 19-year NBA career that included two MVP awards.

The 41-year-old Canadian made the announcement Saturday in a letter on The Players' Tribune, a website where he is a senior producer.

Nash played in just 65 games over the last three seasons

with the Lakers due to injuries.

A persistent back problem prevented him from playing this season. His announcement was a long-expected formality.

Nash won MVP awards in 2005 and 2006 in Phoenix during a dominant stretch as the catalyst for the Suns' up-tempo offense.

The eight-time All-Star is third in NBA history with 10,335 assists, trailing only John Stockton and Jason Kidd. Nash also is the best free-throw shooter in NBA history at 90.4 percent.

Princeton women on to next round

The Associated Press

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Princeton remained undefeated with President Barack Obama looking on, giving the Ivy League its second win in the NCAA tournament history. Sylvia Hatchell earned a victory coaching in her return to the NCAA tournament after missing last season while battling leukemia.

Tennessee and Florida State handed more losses to 15 seeds. That's 0-88 since the field expanded in 1994 for the 15s. While those seeds haven't fared well, Arkansas-Little Rock became the third 11-seed to win this round. That matches the total set in 2006 for most ever in the women's tournament.

Spokane Regional

Princeton 80, Wisconsin-Green Bay 70: With the president supporting his niece and Princeton's basketball team a few rows from courtside, the Tigers managed to stay unbeaten at College Park, Md.

After trailing at halftime Saturday, eighth-seeded Princeton came back to improve to 31-0 this season and win a women's NCAA tournament game for the first time in school history behind Michelle Miller's 20 points.

Maryland 75, New Mexico State 57: Brionna Jones dominated the inside on both ends of the court, getting 22 points and 12 rebounds to carry Maryland.

Pittsburgh 51, Chattanooga 40: At Knoxville, Tenn., Stasha Carey scored 16 points and pulled down 13 rebounds as the Panthers (20-11) won.

Tennessee 72, Boise State 61: Bashaara Graves scored a career-high 24 points.

Greensboro Regional

North Carolina 71, Liberty 65: Allisha Gray scored 17 points for the host Tar Heels (25-8).

Ohio State 90, James Madison 80: Ameryst Alston scored 28 points for Ohio State.

Florida Gulf Coast 75, Oklahoma State 67: At Tallahassee, Fla., Kaneisha Atwater scored 26 points and Whitney Knight added 19 points and 10 rebounds to help Florida Gulf Coast.

Florida State 91, Alabama State 49: Freshman Shakayla Thomas scored 17 points and three teammates joined her in double figures.

Arkansas-Little Rock 69, Texas A&M 60: Taylor Gault scored a season-high 25 points and the 11th seed won.

Arizona State 74, Ohio 55: Katie Hempen scored a career-high 23 points and hit five three-pointers.

Albany Regional

UConn 89, St. Francis, Brooklyn 33: Morgan Tuck had 26 points and eight assists as the No. 1 Huskies began their drive toward a 10th national title and third in a row with a rout at home.

Rutgers 79, Seton Hall 66: Kahleah Copper and Tyler Scaife each scored 21 points and eighth-seed Rutgers used a season high seven three-pointers to beat their in-state rival.

Louisville 86, BYU 53: Myisha Hines-Allen scored 19 points, leading the third-seeded Cardinals at Tampa, Fla.

South Florida 73, LSU 64: Courtney Williams had 17 points and 12 rebounds, Alisia Jenkins added 15 points and South Florida beat the 11th seed.

Oklahoma City Regional

Oklahoma 111, Quinnipiac 84: Freshman Gabbi Ortiz scored 16 points and Vionise Pierre-Louis added 15.

Stanford 73, Cal State Northridge 60: Taylor Greenfield and Lili Thompson each scored seven points in a game-changing, second-half run.

Senators beat Leafs to extend unbeaten streak to 6

The Associated Press

OTTAWA, Ontario — A victory over the struggling Toronto Maple Leafs might not seem that impressive these days, but for the Ottawa Senators it was satisfying.

Kyle Turris had the winning goal and the Senators extended their unbeaten streak to six games, beating the Leafs 5-3 on Saturday night. More importantly, Ottawa is just one point behind the Boston Bruins for the final spot in the Eastern Conference playoffs.

"We just want to keep winning games," said Turris, who had his second straight two-goal game, adding an empty-netter to seal the win. "We're confident if we play well and just keep winning it puts a lot of pressure on Boston and Washington and hopefully we're able to catch them."

Mike Hoffman, Erik Karlsson and Curtis Lazar also scored for the Senators (36-24-11). Andrew Hammond, making his sixth straight start, improved to 13-0-1 in his first 14 NHL starts as he faced 24 shots.

The 27-year-old also picked up an assist on Turris' empty-net goal with 46 seconds left.

"We've been playing well and I'm just trying to be a part of that," said Hammond. "I don't think the streak is something that's on my shoulders, I think it's kind of a team thing right now for us and right now we're fortunately getting rewarded for playing

good hockey right now and that's something that doesn't always happen."

Joakim Lindstrom, Leo Komarov and Tim Erixon scored for the Leafs (27-40-6), who are on a five-game slide. James Reimer allowed three goals on 18 shots before being replaced by Jonathan Bernier, who allowed one goal on 23 shots.

This was the first of three meetings between the teams over the next two weeks.

The win was costly for the Senators as they lost Milan Michalek late in the first period after he took a shot to the head. Then Matt Puempel left in the second after blocking a shot.

Wild 6, Blues 3: Justin Fontaine had a goal and two assists, linemate Thomas Vanek also scored and host Minnesota breezed by St. Louis.

Chris Stewart, Zach Parise, Jonas Brodin and Mikko Koivu contributed goals, too, and Charlie Coyle and Ryan Suter each had two assists for the Wild, who improved to an NHL-best 22-6-2 since trading for goalie Devan Dubnyk on Jan. 14.

Canucks 4, Kings 1: Radim Vrbata set up the tying goal by Nick Bonino in the second period and scored the go-ahead goal during a 5-on-3 power play in the third, leading visiting Vancouver.

Eddie Lack made 25 saves for Vancouver. The Kings, who have 11 games left, could

have tied Vancouver for second place in the Pacific Division with a regulation win.

Blue Jackets 3, Flames 2 (OT): Rene Bourque scored his second of the game at 4:01 of overtime to lift visiting Columbus.

With prolonged pressure in the Flames end, Kevin Connauton's shot was stopped but Bourque slipped the rebound past Karri Ramo's outstretched pad.

Rangers 3, Hurricanes 2 (SO): Jesper Fast and J.T. Miller scored, and Mats Zuccarello had the lone goal in the shootout as host New York Rangers edged Carolina.

Cam Talbot shook off a 1-0 home loss to Chicago and made 28 saves to lift the Rangers to their NHL best 23rd road victory this season. Talbot made two saves in the shootout, and Carolina's other attempt went high.

Panthers 2, Bruins 1 (SO): Brandon Pirri scored the winning shootout goal to lead host Florida past Boston.

Pirri beat Tuukka Rask in the second round of the shootout.

Canadiens 2, Sharks 0: Tomas Plekanec scored in the first period and Carey Price made 29 saves for his second shutout in a row and ninth of the season as host Montreal beat San Jose.

Islanders 3, Devils 0: Jaroslav Halak made 26 saves in his return to the lineup, and the New York Islanders snapped a

season-high, four-game losing streak with a victory over host New Jersey.

Jets 3, Capitals 0: Ondrej Pavelec made 27 saves, and host Winnipeg earned its fourth consecutive win.

Predators 3, Sabres 0: Pekka Rinne made 24 saves to lead host Nashville over Buffalo.

Taylor Beck, Craig Smith, and Mike Fisher scored for Nashville, which snapped a two-game losing streak. Rinne earned his third shutout of the season and 36th of his NHL career.

Stars 4, Blackhawks 0: Kari Lehtonen stopped 33 shots, including a penalty shot, for his fifth shutout this season and 32nd of his NHL career, and host Dallas routed Chicago.

Penguins 3, Coyotes 1: Arizona goalie Mike Smith inadvertently banked a clearance pass off Pittsburgh's Brandon Sutter's backside and into his own net, sparking the visiting Penguins from a dreadful start to a victory that snapped a four-game losing streak.

Oilers 5, Flyers 4 (OT): Ryan Nugent-Hopkins scored two goals, including the winner 2:46 into overtime as host Edmonton beat Philadelphia.

Teddy Purcell, Matt Hendricks and Jordan Eberle scored in regulation for the Oilers (20-39-13), who have won two of three.